Caesar and Cleopatra

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright, critic, and political activist. He was born in Dublin in 1856, the youngest of three children. Shaw's mother left Shaw's father and moved with her daughters, Shaw's two sisters, to London in 1872. Shaw joined them there in 1876, determined to establish himself as a writer. Shaw's early years in London were characterized by failure and frustration. Publishers rejected his attempts at fiction, and he relied on his mother's financial support to make ends meet. Despite these initial career failures, Shaw's early years in London were also a period of immense personal and philosophical growth for the struggling writer: he became a socialist and joined the Fabian Society, a new socialist organization that sought to reform English society through a transformation of its intellectual and political culture. In 1885, Shaw found work as a journalist and music critic, enabling him, at long last, to write for a living. His first plays were performed in the early 1890s. Shaw considered these plays "unpleasant," due to their critical gaze at "unpleasant facts" about British society. He followed these "unpleasant" plays with four "pleasant" plays, such as *Arms and the Man* (1894), that were more lighthearted and geared toward audience approval than the first set of plays. *Caesar and Cleopatra* is considered Shaw's first great play. It belongs to a grouping of plays called *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901), which focused on the politically relevant issues of empire and imperialism. Shaw went on to write more than 60 plays over the course of his career. Aside from *Caesar and Cleopatra*, some of his other notable works include *Pygmalion* (1913) and *Saint Joan* (1923). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. Shaw retired from public life following the death of his wife in 1943. He moved from London to his country home at Ayot St. Lawrence, where he would die, in 1950, at the age of 94.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Caesar and Cleopatra is Shaw's fictionalized account of the relationship between Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. The play takes place in Ptolemaic Egypt, an Ancient Greek state founded around 304 or 305 B.C.E., when Ptolemy I, an Ancient Macedonian general in Alexander the Great's army, became pharaoh of Egypt. The Ptolemaic dynasty transformed Egypt into a Hellenistic kingdom, and the Egyptian port city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.E., functioned as the kingdom's cultural hub. Ptolemaic rule of Egypt lasted until the death of Cleopatra VII (the Cleopatra of Shaw's play) in 30 B.C.E. By 48 B.C.E., when Shaw's play begins, Ptolemaic Egypt had long suffered from political instability and violence, much of which stemmed from Alexandrian resentment of Roman interference in Alexandrian affairs. Rome's sporadic interference in Egyptian politics began as early as Ptolemy VI's reign in the 2nd-century B.C.E., but it increased over the years as Ptolemaic rulers formed alliances with the Romans. Following the death of Ptolemy XII (Cleopatra's father) in 51 B.C.E., Pompey was appointed the guardian of the deceased leader's surviving children, including Cleopatra's younger brother, Ptolemy XIII (Ptolemy XIV in Shaw's play). Pompey's appointment opened the door for further interference from Rome, particularly once Pompey became involved in a civil war with Julius Caesar. Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* presents a society inexorably shaped by foreign interventionism. Such a setting is an ideal backdrop for Shaw to explore issues that plagued his contemporary (the late 1800s) Great Britain, which, at the time, was well on its way to becoming the largest empire in the world.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* is a satirical twist on Shakespeare's history plays. One such play is *Antony and Cleopatra*, which was first performed around 1607. Shakespeare based the play's plot on Plutarch's Lives. It follows Mark Antony and Cleopatra's relationship from the Sicilian revolt, a Roman civil war waged between 42 B.C.E. and 36 B.C.E., to Cleopatra's suicide, which occurred around 30 B.C.E. *Antony and Cleopatra* takes place later than Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* and depicts Cleopatra as a tragic, seductive temptress rather than the naive, impulsive child of Shaw's play. *Caesar and Cleopatra* was first published in a collection of Shaw's plays entitled *Three Plays for Pilgrims* (1901). These plays are characterized by their inclusion of a Shavian preface, or an introductory essay that Shaw composed to situate the play within its central thematic and philosophical concerns. The plays in *Three Plays for Pilgrims* are also alike in their critical examination of empire and imperialism, which were politically relevant issues in Great Britain at the turn of the century. The other plays in this collection include *The Devil's Disciple* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. *The Devil's Disciple* takes place in New Hampshire during the American Revolution. The play follows Richard Dudgeon, a colonial outcast and "Devil's disciple" who ultimately sacrifices himself for his beliefs. *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* explores the relationship between law and justice, and the institutions that enforce and represent them. The play is set in Morocco and follows a smuggler named Captain Brassbound as he tries to exact vengeance on those who have wronged him.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Caesar and Cleopatra
- **When Written:** 1898
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** Premiered March 15, 1899; first published in Shaw's 1901 collection *Three Plays for Puritans*
- **Literary Period:** Shaw's works contain elements of Victorianism and Literary Modernism.
- **Genre:** Drama, History Play
- **Setting:** Ancient Egypt
- **Climax:** Ftatateeta follows through with Cleopatra's order to assassinate Caesar, leading to civic unrest that destroys the peace that Caesar has established between the Egyptian people and the occupying Roman army.
- **Antagonist:** Pothinus

EXTRA CREDIT

Wordplay. A popular myth exists that states that the cesarean section procedure (or *caesar*ian section, as it's called in many English-speaking places) is named after Julius Caesar. This myth is based on a misconception put forth in the 10th-century Byzantine encyclopedia *The Suda*, which describes how Caesar had to be cut from the womb when his mother, Aurelia, died in her ninth month of pregnancy. This can't be true, however, since Aurelia not only survived Caesar's birth but went on to serve as his unofficial political advisor. It's more likely that the medical procedure's name comes from the Latin word *caedere*, meaning "to cut."

Film Cred. Gabriel Pascal's 1945 film *Caesar and Cleopatra* is an adaptation of Shaw's play. The film stars Claude Rains as Caesar and Vivian Leigh as Cleopatra. Shaw was heavily involved in the film's production.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Egyptian god Ra addresses the play's audience directly, belittling them for their ignorance and insulting contemporary (mid-Victorian) British society. He also establishes the origins of Julius Caesar's rivalry with Pompey, explaining that the gods favored Caesar, who lived boldly and had an affinity for progress and exploration. Ra recounts how Julius Caesar defeated Pompey at the Battle of Pharsalus and chased him to Egypt, where he was ultimately assassinated by Lucius Septimius in 48 B.C.E.

The action shifts to Cleopatra's palace in Syria, where she has been banished by her brother Ptolemy, with whom she is fighting for control of Egypt. A wounded Egyptian soldier named Bel Affris staggers through the gate to warn the Egyptians that Julius Caesar's powerful Roman army is on its way to conquer Egypt and will reach them soon. A Nubian sentinel runs inside the palace to warn everyone of the advancing army. Cleopatra's chief nurse, Ftatateeta, emerges from the palace and informs the guards that Cleopatra, who is terrified of the Romans, has run away.

Cleopatra is sound asleep between the paws of a **Sphinx**. Julius Caesar approaches and praises the sphinx, failing to notice the young girl sleeping between its paws. Caesar's voice awakens Cleopatra. When she calls out to him, Caesar initially believes the sphinx is talking to him. He believes he's either dreaming or gone mad, but realizes his error once Cleopatra emerges from her hiding place and introduces herself. Cleopatra informs Caesar that she's run away. Unaware of her new acquaintance's identity, Cleopatra shares with Caesar her childish fears about the Romans and their ruthless leader, Julius Caesar. Caesar convinces Cleopatra to return to the palace at Alexandria and face her Roman conquerors. He promises to teach her how to be brave and act like a Queen. Cleopatra reluctantly agrees and escorts Caesar to the palace at Alexandria. The Roman guards arrive and hail Caesar, prompting Cleopatra to realize that she's been with the supposedly ruthless Caesar all along. She sobs with relief and collapses into Caesar's arms.

The scene shifts to the royal palace in Alexandria, where King Ptolemy's court is in session. Pothinus, Ptolemy's guardian, impatiently guides Ptolemy through a speech about resisting the attempts of Caesar—a foreigner—to meddle in Egypt's affairs. Caesar arrives and demands repayment for funds Ptolemy's father borrowed from Rome. If Egypt cannot produce the funds, Caesar will settle Ptolemy and Cleopatra's feud over the Egyptian **throne** by letting them rule jointly. Caesar's offer enrages Cleopatra, who hates her brother. Pothinus and the other adults in Ptolemy's close circle also reject Caesar's proposition. The Egyptians threaten to retaliate with military intervention.. Although the combined forces loyal to Egypt outnumber Caesar's army, Caesar remains unconcerned.

Caesar orders Rufio, one of his lead officers, to take control of the palace and the lighthouse on Pharos, an island in Alexandria's harbor. Rufio departs to put Caesar's plans into action. Caesar remains behind to strategize further, though he's distracted by Cleopatra's childish vies for attention. Theodotus, Ptolemy's tutor, enters the hall in a panic to announce that the Library of Alexandria is on fire.

Ftatateeta and a Sicilian patrician named Apollodorus smuggle Cleopatra, whom the Romans are holding captive, out of the palace in a rolled up Persian carpet. Apollodorus boards a ship and delivers the carpet to the lighthouse on Pharos, where Caesar, Rufio, and Caesar's treasurer, Britannus, are resting after the day's battle. Cleopatra emerges from the carpet, surprising Caesar. Cleopatra is upset when she realizes that Caesar is too preoccupied with military strategizing to pay attention to her. Britannus announces that the Egyptians are

headed toward the island. By now Apollodorus's ship has sunk, leaving the group with no other option but to swim across the harbor to procure another ship.

Six months later, the Roman army has defeated the Egyptian army. Pothinus, now a prisoner of war, meets with Cleopatra. They argue over whether Ptolemy or Cleopatra will rule Egypt when Caesar returns to Rome. Pothinus realizes that he underestimated Cleopatra, who has matured considerably under Caesar's guidance, and he resolves to turn Caesar against her. Later, Pothinus arrives on the palace rooftop, where Cleopatra is hosting a feast for Caesar and his men. He accuses Cleopatra of ingratiating herself with Caesar as a political ploy to gain control of Egypt once Caesar leaves. Cleopatra rejects Pothinus's accusation, but Caesar takes no offense, reasoning that anybody in Cleopatra's position would do the same. Pothinus's attempt to slander her in front of Caesar enrages Cleopatra, so she secretly orders Ftatateeta to murder Pothinus.

The rooftop festivities continue. Cleopatra is delighted when Caesar suggests that he postpone his return to Rome to search for the source of the Nile and establish a new kingdom there. Their plans are interrupted by Pothinus's agonized scream. A bloody Ftatateeta returns to the roof. Soon after, they can hear a riot forming outside the palace. Cleopatra feigns ignorance but eventually admits that she arranged for Pothinus's murder as revenge. Caesar admonishes Cleopatra for destroying the peace. All hope seems lost until Caesar and his men learn that supporting Roman troops led by Mithridates of Pergamos have arrived to take on the Egyptian army. Caesar and his men leave to join the troops. Rufio realizes that it was Ftatateeta who killed Pothinus and murders her in retaliation. Cleopatra later discovers Ftatateeta's body.

Caesar and the Roman army have now defeated the Egyptians. Ptolemy's ship sank during battle and he drowned, leaving Cleopatra to rule Egypt in Caesar's absence. A military pageant is in full force to bid farewell to Caesar, who is preparing to return to Rome. A crowd cheers as Caesar approaches the harbor. As Caesar prepares to board his ship, he appoints Rufio to be the Roman governor and Apollodorus to oversee Egypt's art. Cleopatra approaches Caesar, dressed in mourning clothes. She accuses Rufio of the Ftatateeta's murder and is shocked and enraged when Caesar defends Rufio's actions as justified. Cleopatra initially sulks and refuses to say goodbye to Caesar, but she comes around once Caesar promises to send Mark Antony to Egypt to be her husband. Cleopatra weeps and waves as Caesar boards his ship and leaves for Rome.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Julius Caesar – Julius Caesar is one of the play's central protagonists. He was a Roman general and dictator of the Roman Republic. At the beginning of the play, Caesar is in his 50s and has just chased his rival, Pompey, to Egypt. On his way to the royal palace at Alexandria, Caesar meets 16-year-old Cleopatra and decides to resolve the ongoing dispute between Cleopatra and her brother, Ptolemy, for control of Egypt. Shaw's Caesar is pragmatic, logical, and unsentimental. He resents unnecessary bloodshed and vengeance, offering clemency to his enemies indiscriminately. Caesar's refusal to punish people who betray him often puts him at odds with his cohort, particularly Rufio, who finds Caesar's leniency to be naive and misguided. Shaw takes many liberties in his portrayal of Caesar, depicting him as a nuanced and vulnerable man instead of the untouchable, ruthless dictator that history has made him out to be. For instance, Shaw's Caesar is highly self-conscious about his age, and it embarrasses him when Cleopatra draws attention to his balding head or wrinkled face. Whereas the historical Caesar had an affair with Cleopatra, Shaw's Caesar primarily functions as Cleopatra's mentor, teaching her how to be a queen and instilling in her a reverence for his political ideals. While Cleopatra develops a childish infatuation with Caesar, Caesar remains objective and measured in their interactions. This displeases Cleopatra, who would prefer that Caesar abandon his military pursuits to pay attention to her. Caesar and Cleopatra's most significant conflict occurs in Act IV, when Cleopatra defies Caesar's stance against vengeance and orders her nurse, Ftatateeta, to execute Pothinus. Pothinus's assassination causes a massive uprising among his followers, and Caesar admonishes Cleopatra for thoughtlessly destroying the peace he worked so tirelessly to establish. In a battle that occurs between Acts IV and V, Caesar's men sink Ptolemy's ship. The young king drowns, leaving Cleopatra the sole ruler of Egypt when Caesar finally departs for Rome at the end of the play. Although Cleopatra resents Caesar's failure to condemn Rufio's murder of Ftatateeta, they part on good terms once Caesar promises to send Mark Antony to Egypt to be with her.

Cleopatra – Cleopatra is one of the play's central protagonists. At the beginning of the play, she is holding court in Syria after her younger brother Ptolemy, with whom she is vying for sole control of the Egyptian **throne**, banishes her from the royal palace in Alexandria. Whereas Cleopatra the historical figure was likely in her early 20s when she met Caesar, Shaw reimagines Cleopatra as a naive, immature teenager who still believes in nonsensical stories about cannibalistic Romans. Likewise, the play portrays Cleopatra's ongoing feud with Ptolemy as less a conflict of political import than a stereotypical squabble between siblings. Cleopatra worships the **Sphinx**. As such, the Sphinx–and cats in general–become an important symbol for her, evoking both her connection to Egyptian culture and the transitional element of her identity. Like the Sphinx, which has the head of a human and the body of a lion, Cleopatra exists between two worlds: she is simultaneously a

child and a young woman on her way to becoming a competent leader. Caesar becomes Cleopatra's mentor rather than her lover, teaching the inexperienced young queen how to command the respect of her subjects and instilling in her a reverence for his political ideals. Although Cleopatra develops a childish infatuation with Caesar and is eager to please him, her youthful sense of entitlement provides her with little of Caesar's disdain for unnecessary bloodshed, and she frequently fantasizes about exacting revenge on her enemies and subordinates. In Act IV, Cleopatra orders Ftatateeta to kill Pothinus in retaliation for Pothinus insulting her in front of Caesar. While Cleopatra attempts to construe her order for Pothinus's assassination as politically motivated, she ultimately acts out of spite. Although her reckless decision nearly destroys the peace between the Roman and Egyptian people that Caesar has established, he manages to defeat the Egyptian army once more. In a battle that takes place between Act IV and Act V, Caesar's army sinks Ptolemy's ship, drowning the boy-king and leaving Cleopatra the sole ruler of Egypt.

Rufio – Rufio is one of Caesar's lead officers. He's a burly, middle-aged man with a rough, unsentimental personality. Although Rufio is loyal to Caesar, he is also critical of Caesar's lenient treatment of their rivals. Rufio believes it is naive of Caesar to grant clemency indiscriminately and isn't opposed to unnecessary bloodshed if it allows the Roman army to conquer their enemies. In Act IV, Rufio discovers that Ftatateeta is responsible for Pothinus's murder, so he slashes her throat in retaliation. While Rufio (unlike Caesar) doesn't necessarily disagree with Ftatateeta's actions, he views her loyalty to Cleopatra as a threat to Caesar's control of Egypt and uses this to justify the act of vengeance. Before Caesar leaves for Rome at the end of Act V, he appoints Rufio the governor of Egypt. Caesar's decision surprises Rufio, who has no noble blood, but Caesar assures him that he considers Rufio his son. While Caesar condemns unnecessary bloodshed, he supports Rufio's decision to kill Ftatateeta, agreeing with Rufio's assessment of Ftatateeta as a viable threat to Roman rule.

Ftatateeta – Ftatateeta is Cleopatra's chief nurse. At the beginning of the play, Ftatateeta's overbearing and aggressive personality instills terror in Cleopatra, though she becomes more subservient once Cleopatra meets Caesar and learns how to exert power over her charges. In the Alternative to the Prologue, Belzanor, Cleopatra's head guard, states that Cleopatra's nurses and other attendants "put their commands in her mouth," implying that Ftatateeta, like Ptolemy's guardians, seeks political power from her relationship to Cleopatra. Like Cleopatra, Ftatateeta is outspoken and has a penchant for violence. While Julius Caesar might resent unnecessary bloodshed, Ftatateeta has no qualms about threatening bodily harm to people who stand in her way. Despite Ftatateeta's aggressive demeanor and possible aspirations for power, she raised Cleopatra from a child and genuinely cares about her. In Act III, for example, Ftatateeta exhibits immense concern over the porters' handling of the rolled-up Persian rug in which Cleopatra is hidden. Ftatateeta exhibits her loyalty to Cleopatra in Act IV, when she follows through with Cleopatra's command to murder Pothinus. When Rufio discovers that Ftatateeta has murdered Pothinus at Cleopatra's request, he decides that Ftatateeta's loyalty to Cleopatra is a threat to Caesar and the Roman army, and he kills her. Caesar ultimately agrees that Ftatateeta's murder was justified.

Pothinus – Pothinus is the play's only clear antagonist; he's Ptolemy's appointed guardian. Pothinus supports Ptolemy's claim to the royal **throne** because of his personal aspiration to rule Egypt by manipulating the child-king, who, at 10 years old, is incapable of making his own political decisions. One example of Pothinus using Ptolemy to advance his agenda occurs in Act II, when Pothinus impatiently feeds Ptolemy prompts about which part of Ptolemy's speech to the royal court comes next. The rehearsed, nervous way Ptolemy speaks implies that it was not Ptolemy, but Pothinus (or one of Ptolemy's other handlers) who wrote the speech. Pothinus becomes a prisoner of war following Rome's defeat of the Egyptian army at the end of Act III. Although it is Caesar's practice to let all his prisoners go, Pothinus chooses to remain in prison to spy on Caesar's people and continue his quest to secure Ptolemy's position as the sole ruler of Egypt. In Act IV, Pothinus tries to turn Caesar against Cleopatra by accusing her of ingratiating herself with Caesar as a political ploy to gain control of Rome. Although Pothinus's accusation doesn't faze Caesar, it deeply offends Cleopatra, and she orders Ftatateeta to assassinate Pothinus. The assassination incites a riot among Alexandria's villagers and threatens to destroy the peace Caesar has achieved between the Egyptian people and the occupying Roman army.

Ptolemy – Ptolemy is Cleopatra's 10-year-old brother with whom she shares the royal **throne**. Ptolemy and Cleopatra are married, as is customary for ancient Egyptian royalty. At the play's onset, Ptolemy and Cleopatra are feuding over who should have sole control of Egypt, and Ptolemy has driven Cleopatra out of Alexandria and removed her from the throne. The adults who mind Ptolemy, particularly his guardian, Pothinus, support Ptolemy's right to the throne because they see it as an opportunity to rule Egypt through Ptolemy, who is too young, inept, and inexperienced to make political decisions on his own. Ptolemy and Cleopatra's feud over who should rule Egypt is less a political conflict than it is a typical squabble between young siblings. In reality, neither Ptolemy nor his sister are experienced enough to rule the country; the play makes this abundantly clear in Act II, when Ptolemy must guide the struggling, nervous child-king through a rehearsed speech that the child most likely did not write on his own. Caesar recognizes Ptolemy's childish innocence and treats him with kindness, which makes Cleopatra jealous. Ptolemy dies

between the events of Act IV and Act V when he drowns after Caesar's army attacks his ship. His death leaves Cleopatra the sole ruler of Egypt.

Britannus – Britannus is an enslaved Briton man and Caesar's treasurer. He's a serious man of around 40 years old and is fiercely loyal to Caesar. Caesar nearly grants Britannus his freedom at the end of the play but hesitates to part with him after Britannus proclaims that he feels freer under Caesar's command than he would as a liberated man. Unlike many of the other characters, Britannus is not based on a historical figure and is purely Shaw's invention. Britannus behaves and talks like a contemporary (Victorian era) British person. Shaw uses the character of Britannus to reflect critically on British culture. By placing a modern British man in a play set in ancient Egypt, for instance, Shaw suggests that British culture has made less progress over the centuries than it would like to think.

Apollodorus – Apollodorus is a handsome Sicilian patrician (aristocrat) and amateur artist. He's so invested in art that he gets into a heated argument with a Roman sentinel who misidentifies him as a common carpet merchant. In Act III, Apollodorus helps smuggle Cleopatra, who's rolled up inside a Persian carpet, to the lighthouse on the island of Pharos to see Caesar. He later swims across the harbor to get a boat to rescue Caesar, Rufio, Britannus, and Cleopatra from the approaching Egyptian army. While Caesar and the other Roman officials value Apollodorus's loyalty, they don't take him particularly seriously. In Act IV, for instance, Caesar agrees with Rufio's observation that Apollodorus is a "popinjay," or a vain, flamboyant dresser, though he also maintains that Apollodorus makes good, entertaining company.

Lucius Septimius – Lucius Septimius is the Roman soldier who assassinated Pompey (Caesar's rival) prior to Caesar's arrival in Egypt. Caesar despises acts of vengeance and is disgusted when he learns of Pompey's fate. He's uncomfortable being in Lucius's presence and considers him a murderer. In the wake of Pothinus's murder and the resultant Egyptian uprising that occurs in Act IV, Caesar forgives Septimius and recruits him to be an officer in the battle against the Egyptian army. The historical figure Lucius Septimus killed Pompey at Pothinus's request, though there are no records of his fate.

Theodotus – Theodotus is Ptolemy's tutor. He's a wise, elderly man who reveres art, literature, history, and the humanities. Caesar's disregard for the destruction of the Library of Alexandria in Act II appalls Theodotus, who believes that learning from the past is essential to the future of humanity. Even so, Caesar cites the' brutal beheading of Pompey to argue that Theodotus's precious books and history have done little to instill an appreciation for life and humanity in the Egyptian people.

Achillas – Achillas is the general of Ptolemy's troops. He's tall, handsome, and respected, though rather dull. In addition to Ptolemy's troops, he also heads the occupying Roman army. In Act II, Achillas announces that he will side with the Egyptians. As a historical figure, Achillas was one of Ptolemy XIII's guardians. He and Lucius Septimius carried out Pompey's murder at the behest of Pothinus.

Mark Antony – Mark Antony served as an official during Caesar's Civil War; he never appears in person in the play. In Act II, Cleopatra tells Caesar of how Antony restored her father's rule of Egypt. She swoons over Antony's youth and good looks and daydreams about marrying him. When Caesar departs for Rome at the end of the play, he promises to send Antony to Egypt for Cleopatra. The real Mark Antony had an affair with Cleopatra and had three children with her.

Ra – Ra is the ancient Egyptian god of the sun. He's one of the most important deities in ancient Egyptian religion. While the play describes him as having a hawk's head, ancient Egyptian religion most often depicts him as a falcon-headed male. As a character, Ra appears only in the play's Prologue, where he delivers a monologue that insults his audience and establishes a historical and cultural context for Caesar and Cleopatra. In addition, religious imagery depicting Ra appears throughout the play.

Pompey – Pompey was Caesar's political ally and son-in-law who later became his rival. He fled to Egypt following his defeat at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 B.C.E. and was assassinated by Lucius Septimius upon his arrival. Learning of Pompey's death devastates Caesar, who despises unnecessary bloodshed, even that of his political enemies.

Roman Sentinel – The Roman sentinel patrols the pier in front of the palace at Alexandria. In Act III, acting on Caesar's orders, the sentinel refuses to let Ftatateeta, Apollodorus, and the Egyptian porters proceed to the royal palace to deliver carpets to Cleopatra. The sentinel and Apollodorus get into a heated argument after the sentinel mistakes Apollodorus, a patrician (aristocrat) with a deep appreciation for the arts, for a common carpet merchant. Although Ftatateeta manages to subdue the sentinel, Apollodorus refuses to act on Ftatateeta's urging to kill the sentinel in retaliation.

The Slave Girl – The slave girl is an enslaved person who plays the harp for Cleopatra in Act IV. When Cleopatra expresses interest in learning to play, the girl's teacher, an old musician, informs her that the undertaking requires learning the philosophy of Pythagoras and will take years to master. The enslaved girl, in contrast, has not had a proper musical education and only "learns as a dog learns." Cleopatra retorts that the enslaved girl plays more beautifully than her teacher despite her rudimentary education. Cleopatra's admiration for the enslaved girl's practical skills over the old musician's structured approach to music education shows that she has internalized Caesar's pragmatism.

The Old Musician – The old musician is the slave girl's harp teacher. He observes the girl's performance for Cleopatra in

Act IV. Cleopatra wants to learn to play the harp for Caesar, who loves music. She demands that the old musician teach her to play and threatens to throw him into the Nile and feed him to the crocodiles if she hasn't mastered the instrument after two weeks of instruction.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Centurion – The centurion commands the Roman guards who keep watch over the pier in front of the palace in Alexandria. He lets Ftatateeta, Apollodorus, and the Egyptian porters pass through to the palace once he learns that they are acting on Cleopatra's orders.

Bel Affris – Bel Affris is an Egyptian soldier who escapes to the royal palace in Syria to alert Cleopatra's guards to the arrival of Julius Caesar's army.

Belzanor – Belzanor is captain of the Egyptian guards that patrol Cleopatra's palace in Syria. He's a tough and effective leader in situations that call for violent use of force, but he's authoritarian and incompetent outside of battle.

Iras – Iras is one of Cleopatra's ladies. Iras and another lady, Charmian, tease Cleopatra her efforts to impress and emulate Julius Caesar.

Charmian – Charmian is one of Cleopatra's ladies. She teases Cleopatra about becoming "terribly prosy and serious and learned and philosophical" to impress and emulate Julius Caesar.

The Nubian Sentinel – The Nubian sentinel stands guard outside Cleopatra's palace in Syria. He runs inside the castle to pass along Bel Affris's warning about Julius Caesar's approaching army.

The Porters – The Egyptian porters carry the Persian carpets that Ftatateeta and Apollodorus deliver to Cleopatra in Act III.

The Major-Domo – The Major-Domo is a servant who tends to the dinner guests during the rooftop feast in Act IV.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ROMANTICIZATION OF HISTORY

Caesar and Cleopatra is George Bernard Shaw's fictionalized account of the relationship between historical figures Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, who met when Caesar arrived in Alexandria in 48 B.C.E. The play reimagines this initial meeting and follows Caesar as he restores Cleopatra to power after Caesar's rival, Pompey, deposed Cleopatra in 49 B.C.E. and granted control of the **throne** to Cleopatra's younger brother, Ptolemy XIII. Caesar and Cleopatra are familiar historical figures who appear in many works of art, literature, and film, including Shakespeare's histories, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*, which, on one level, Shaw explicitly mocks with his satirical, quirky retelling of the story. Most works that feature Cleopatra as their subject depict her as a seductress and ill-fated lover. Likewise, fictitious portrayals of Caesar often portray him as an unsubtle, ruthless tyrant whose ambition drives him to self-ruin. Shaw upends these conventional depictions, comically highlighting the flawed, ordinary aspects of Caesar's and Cleopatra's personalities. Shaw depicts Cleopatra as a 16-year-old girl still naive enough to believe in far-fetched myths about Romans' taste for human flesh. Early in the play, before Caesar teaches Cleopatra how to be an effective ruler, she is too fearful of suffering the wrath of Ftatateeta, her chief nurse, to make political decisions on her own. Shaw's Caesar, too, is a far cry from conventional depictions of the Roman politician. *Caesar and Cleopatra*'s Caesar is a balding, middle-aged man. His first meeting with Cleopatra is humiliating rather than romantic, with Cleopatra referring to him disparagingly as an "old gentleman." In fact, insecurity about his age is one of Shaw's Caesar's defining features: he's irked each time Cleopatra calls attention to his balding head or wrinkled face. Despite his political accomplishments, he falls victim to the ravages of time and feels pressured to prove his sustained bravery and strength despite a failing body. Shaw reimagines Caesar and Cleopatra as comically flawed, ordinary people to upend conventional depictions of them in other works and, on a broader level, criticize art's romanticization of history.

VENGEANCE VS. MERCY

One of *Caesar and Cleopatra*'s chief concerns is what constitutes an effective leader. In particular, the play grapples with how best to maintain order, control, and a sense of justice among one's subjects. To do this, the play presents two radically different approaches to discipline and governance. On one side of the spectrum is Julius Caesar, a merciful leader who grants clemency liberally and indiscriminately, regardless of whether he's dealing with an ally or an enemy. Caesar's distaste for unnecessary bloodshed often puts him at odds with his lead officer, Rufio, who curses Caesar for letting undeserving subjects escape the consequences of their crimes. For instance, even though Caesar and the Roman general and statesman Pompey had been rivals, Caesar takes no pleasure in learning that Pompey has been assassinated. Caesar's guiding moral principle is to inflict physical violence upon other humans as little as possible, no matter the risk such a stance might pose to personal pride or national security.

In contrast, Cleopatra proves to be a ruthless leader with an insatiable appetite for vengeance and violence. She has fantasies about poisoning her enslaved people and watching them squirm in pain, and she regularly uses the threat of violence to coerce her subjects into submission. She even admits that she would have no qualms about beheading her own brother if that was what it took for her to regain her rightful claim to the **throne**. One of Cleopatra's final acts of violence goes horribly awry when she defies Caesar and orders Ftatateeta to assassinate Pothinus (Ptolemy's guardian), initiating a city-wide uprising. Caesar admonishes Cleopatra for her misguided action. He suggests that she has initiated an infinite loop of violence where the wronged inflict violence on the wronged, each convinced that they are doing so "in the name of right and honor and peace," all the while allowing "murder [to] breed murder" and perpetuating a cycle of senseless violence. Shaw juxtaposes Caesar's merciful nature with Cleopatra's ruthlessness to illustrate the complexity of meting out punishment and the fragile, imperfect nature of justice.

PRAGMATISM VS. SENTIMENTALITY

Shaw's Caesar is a shrewd politician and a devout pragmatist. Every decision he makes is carefully calculated to fulfill some overarching, long-term goal. He pursues nothing for pleasure alone: everything must serve some larger purpose, and benefits must always outweigh the cost. For instance, in Act IV, Rufio reveals that Caesar holds phony "birthday" parties for himself whenever he wants to catch the attention of a woman he's interested in, or if there's "an ambassador to be conciliated." In fact, Rufio reveals that Caesar has had seven birthdays over the past 10 months alone. Caesar has no patience for romance and sentimentality, subscribing, instead, to a personal and political ideology of pragmatism that informs all of his actions and sterilizes all of his relationships. While such an attitude serves Caesar well in the political realm—in the end, he effectively defeats the Egyptians and reinstates Cleopatra's total control of the **throne**—the play also suggests that Caesar loses some human element of himself to his pathological commitment to pragmatism. In Act IV, when Caesar demands to know if Cleopatra has had anything to do with Pothinus's slaying (she has), Cleopatra lies and promises Caesar that she has not betrayed him. Caesar replies that Cleopatra could not have betrayed him anyway, since Caesar never trusted her in the first place. Caesar's guarded relationship with Cleopatra effectively prevents him from becoming the victim of Cleopatra's betrayal and disappointment. However, it also limits their capacity to know each other as friends, much less the impassioned lovers that conventional retellings of their saga make them out to be. Caesar's unwavering pragmatism might guarantee him more success in the political realm than Cleopatra, whose impulsivity and passion ultimately lead to unnecessary bloodshed and tragedy. At the same time, the play suggests that people lose a vital, human part of themselves when they approach every encounter as a game of odds, eschewing sentimentality and vulnerability for pragmatism and protection.

EMPIRE, CIVILIZATION, AND PROGRESS

Caesar and Cleopatra premiered in 1899, at the tail end of a century during which the British Empire's most significant expansion of power took place in Africa. At its height in 1922, the Empire spanned a quarter of the world and ruled over 450 million people. George Bernard Shaw belonged to a leftist organization called the Fabian Society. While Fabians advocated for the protection of the human rights of people who lived in colonies under British rule, they didn't reject imperial expansion altogether. In fact, the Fabian Society supported imperial expansion. This belief rested on the notion that the world naturally evolved into big, powerful states and that British imperial policy could be an instrument of progress, spreading effective, just governance throughout the world. The view that the expansion and development of civilization are inexorably linked with progress is present throughout the play. Julius Caesar repeatedly declares his belief in the power of the Roman Empire to advance society. When, in Act V, Apollodorus accuses Rome of producing no art, Caesar protests, asking Apollodorus: "Is peace not an art? Is war not an art? Is government not an art? Is civilization not an art?"

At the same time, the play offers ample criticism of imperialist expansion. While Caesar can justifiably praise certain achievements wrought through the expansion of the Roman Empire, his unwavering support of imperialist expansion also causes him to devalue and misunderstand the complexities of Ancient Egyptian culture. In Act II, for instance, Caesar's disregard for Egyptian culture and the past allows the library of Alexandria to burn, destroying priceless historical artifacts. *Caesar and Cleopatra*'s examination of the Roman Empire's occupation of Egypt offers a lens through which the reader may critique the British imperialist expansion of Shaw's contemporary England and other cultural practices of the mid-Victorian era. At a broader level, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* challenges the notion that technological advancement and the expansion of civilization are inherently tied to progress.

AGE, EXPERIENCE, AND POWER

Caesar and Cleopatra depicts Cleopatra as a stereotypically naive 16-year-old prone to impulsivity, irrationality, and selfishness, and it suggests that her youth hinders her ability to gain and hold onto power. Cleopatra's feud with Ptolemy over the Egyptian **throne** is less a political conflict than a senseless spat between

siblings who don't like to share. In Act II, for instance, Cleopatra has to physically resist the impulse to stick her tongue out at Ptolemy when he suggests that he wouldn't hesitate to behead her, should the opportunity present itself. Cleopatra's immaturity in this otherwise grave circumstance illustrates how her youth and inexperience compromise her ability to be an effective leader. Throughout the play, she repeatedly undermines her goal of reclaiming her royal throne with her inability to conduct herself pragmatically and in the manner of a seasoned politician and soldier like Caesar. For instance, Caesar regularly demonstrates his ability to consider the long-term consequences of his actions. He offers clemency to his foes in Alexandria because he views it as a political strategy through which he can establish a foundation of peace between Alexandria's Egyptian people and the occupying Roman population. Cleopatra, in contrast, acts on impulse to secure instant gratification. When she orders Ftatateeta to kill Pothinus in Act IV, for example, she does so only to accomplish the immediate goal of punishing Pothinus for insulting her. She fails to consider how the execution of a well-liked public figure might present more significant problems for her and Caesar down the road. In short, her youthful selfishness, shortsightedness, and impulsivity undermine her ability to govern effectively—even in situations where she strives to make decisions on her own rather than emulating Caesar. Cleopatra's ineffective governance, in turn, suggests that age and experience play a critical role in determining how much power a person can yield. In this light, Cleopatra's errors of judgment—and even her ruthlessness—become less the mark of an unhinged, incompetent leader than they are a consequence of her youth and inexperience.

It also bears noting that although the play doesn't explicitly delve into the issue of gender, there are numerous instances where characters devalue or exhibit a bias against women, such as when Caesar immediately sits on Cleopatra's royal throne at the end of Act I but refuses to sit in Ptolemy's in Act II. This suggests that gender, like age and experience, significantly impacts a person's ability to yield power effectively.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SPHINX

In addition to its association with Ancient Egyptian culture, the Sphinx symbolizes transition, specifically Cleopatra's transition from innocent girl to adult queen and Egypt's transition to Roman rule. In the Ancient Greek tradition, the Sphinx was a mythical creature with a woman's head, a lion's body, and a bird's wings. The Greek Sphinx is a ruthless antagonist who will kill and eat those incapable of solving her riddle. Unlike the Greek Sphinx, the Egyptian Sphinx is typically masculine. In addition, Egyptians considered the Sphinx to be a powerful but benevolent and protective force. The Sphinx of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* evokes characteristics of the Greek and Egyptian Sphinx. Like the Greek Sphinx, the Sphinx that Cleopatra flees to in Act I has the head of a woman. Yet, Cleopatra's decision to go to the Sphinx for refuge from the approaching Roman army implies that she views the Sphinx as a protector, which is characteristic of the Egyptian Sphinx.

In many ways, the Sphinx functions as Cleopatra's double. Like the Sphinx, which is half animal and half-beast, 16-year-old Cleopatra exhibits qualities of girlhood and queenhood, childish naivete and experience. While she longs to reclaim her royal **throne**, she's too distracted by the foolish spat with her brother, her naive beliefs about Roman barbarians, and her childish infatuation with Caesar to become a competent, effective leader. Just as the Sphinx exists simultaneously as human and beast, so, too, does it appear during the play's critical moments of transition. Caesar and Cleopatra meet and begin their political relationship at the Sphinx, symbolizing Egypt's transition from Egyptian to Roman rule. Later on, at the dinner party in Act IV, Cleopatra uses a miniature sphinx figurine and incense to facilitate communication with Father Nile, an Egyptian deity. Almost immediately after Cleopatra uses the Sphinx to summon the spirit, the dinner guests hear the frenzied shouts of Pothinus's assassination. The Sphinx appears at this critical moment when Cleopatra defies Caesar by ordering Pothinus's assassination, demarking Cleopatra's shift from a young girl too eager to please Caesar to even consider going against him to a ruthless, competent leader capable of advancing her own political goals.

THRONES

Thrones symbolize power and conquest. At the beginning of the play, Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy are embroiled in a bitter dispute over their respective claims to the Egyptian throne—that is, over which of them is the legitimate ruler of Egypt. Shaw repeatedly inserts throne imagery into the play to show who has and does not have power. At the beginning of the play, Ptolemy has banished Cleopatra from Alexandria. Not only does Cleopatra's banishment physically remove her from the royal palace, but it also unseats her from her physical throne within the palace, reflecting the loss of power she has suffered due to her banishment. When Caesar accompanies Cleopatra back to Alexandria after promising to help her reclaim her rule over Egypt, he immediately seats himself on Cleopatra's throne. Caesar's takeover of Cleopatra's physical throne signifies to the Roman soldiers who enter the throne room that it is he—*not* Cleopatra—who rules Egypt. Caesar's decision to take

Cleopatra's place on the throne visually conveys his power as a bold, capable leader. It also foreshadows Rome's eventual defeat of the Egyptian army and takeover of Alexandria.

Another critical moment occurs later in Act II, when Rufio offers a bronze tripod with a stick of incense burning on its seat to Caesar to sit down on when no other seats are available in the throne room. Rufio either ignorantly or intentionally ignores that the tripod had been resting before an image of Ra, arguably the most important deity in the ancient Egyptian religion. He picks up the stool and carelessly disposes of the incense. In so doing, he symbolically devalues Egyptian culture to serve Caesar, Egypt's Roman conqueror. Caesar, like Rufio, doesn't think twice about defacing an artifact of religious significance to the Egyptians and sits down on the tripod, eliciting audible gasps from the Egyptian court. Rufio and Caesar's careless treatment of the tripod symbolizes Rome's disregard for Egyptian culture. On a broader level, it criticizes the power of a colonizing force like Rome (or, in Shaw's contemporary society, the British Empire) to devalue and erase the cultures of the places they colonize.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Caesar and Cleopatra* published in 2006.

Prologue Quotes

"Ye poor posterity, think not that ye are the first. Other fools before ye have seen the sun rise and set, and the moon change her shape and her hour. As they were so ye are; and yet not so great; for the pyramids my people built stand to this day; whilst the dustheaps on which ye slave, and which ye call empires, scatter in the wind even as ye pile your dead sons' bodies on them to make yet more dust.

Related Characters: Ra (speaker), Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1-2

Explanation and Analysis

In the prologue, the Egyptian god Ra addresses the audience directly. In addition to establishing the historical context for Caesar's civil war, Shaw also uses Ra's address to belittle the audience and criticize the state of British culture at the time he wrote the play.

Caesar and Cleopatra premiered in 1899. At the end of the 19th century, the British Empire was poised to become the largest empire in the world. Africa, in particular, was the Empire's focus in the decades preceding *Caesar and Cleopatra*'s premiere. Ra criticizes imperialist expansion, cautioning his audience against feeling assured or vindicated by the British Empire's global influence. "Other fools before ye have seen the sun rise and set, and the moon change her shape and her hour," he reminds them, suggesting the British Empire's power is temporary and fleeting, and that the audience eventually will die and be forgotten despite the conquests of their empire.

What's more, Ra scoffs that the British Empire's power isn't even that impressive among empires, certainly not compared to "the pyramids [Ra's] people built," which "stand to this day." Ra juxtaposes the Great Pyramids of Giza, a recognizable symbol of ancient Egypt, with "dustheaps on which [the British people] slave, and which [they] call empires," to discredit the notion that the expansion of the British Empire is a laudatory or permanent thing. Eventually, the world will forget the triumphs of the British Empire, just like it has forgotten the "dead sons" the British people have expended fighting the wars through which they've gained their empire.

"All this ye shall see; and ye shall marvel, after your ignorant manner, that men twenty centuries ago were already just such as you, and spoke and lived as ye speak and live, no worse and no better, no wiser and no sillier.

Related Characters: Ra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from Ra's direct address to *Caesar and Cleopatra*'s audience. In addition to establishing the play's historical and cultural contexts, Ra's address also criticizes the Victorian-era culture from which Shaw's play was born. In this passage, Ra anticipates that the audience will "marvel" at how much in common they have with the play's ancient subjects, who "spoke and lived as [the Victorian audience] speak[s] and live[s], no worse and no better, no wiser and no sillier."

Ra insinuates that the Victorian audience sees themselves as an advanced civilization that has improved itself since antiquity, which is why it likely will shock them to see that they're not all that more advanced than the ancient subjects

Shaw depicts in his play. While the audience's presumed superiority is "ignorant" and presumptuous, Ra sees this superiority as typical of the British Empire, which believes their civilization's values are superior, advanced, and worthy of spreading to as many corners of the Earth as possible. In reality, Ra suggests, the ancient Egyptians behaved, more or less, as these contemporary people behave, and their civilization was no less civilized. Shaw uses Ra's monologue to suggest that the expansion and development of civilization don't automatically inspire progress and a heightened sense of morality.

An Alternative to the Prologue Quotes

❝ The palace, an old, low, Syrian building of whitened mud, is not so ugly as Buckingham Palace; and the officers in the courtyard are more highly civilized than modern English officers: for example, they do not dig up the corpses of their dead enemies and mutilate them, as we have dug up Cromwell and the Mahdi.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from the stage directions at the beginning of the Alternative to the Prologue, which takes place at the Syrian palace Cleopatra fled to after her brother Ptolemy banished her from Alexandria. Shaw compares the Syrian palace to Buckingham Palace, the royal residence of the monarch of the United Kingdom, located in London. He observes that the "old, low, Syrian building of whitened mud, is not so ugly as Buckingham Palace." The two palaces become symbols of the cultures they represent. By criticizing the superficial appearance of Buckingham Palace, Shaw humorously attempts to humble a country that takes pride in its national identity and imperial power. When Shaw claims that the architectural structure that symbolizes the British Empire is uglier and less advanced than a "building of whitened mud" constructed in antiquity, he suggests that British culture isn't as advanced and progressive as the power of its empire would suggest.

Shaw continues in his criticism, suggesting that not only is Syrian architecture superior to British architecture of the modern world, but also that their guards are "more highly civilized" than Victorian British guards. To justify his point, Shaw cites two shameful moments from British history—King Charles II's exhumation and post-mortem "execution" of Oliver Cromwell, who led the 17th-century British overthrowing of the monarchy; and the 1989 destruction of the tomb of the Mahdi, a Sudanese religious leader who led campaigns against occupying British armies, and whose corpse British forces later threw into the Nile.

❝ They care nothing about cowardice, these Romans: they fight to win. The pride and honor of war are nothing to them.

Related Characters: Bel Affris (speaker), Julius Caesar, Ra, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Bel Affris arrives at the Syrian palace to warn Cleopatra's guard about Julius Caesar's approaching Roman army. He recounts the battle he narrowly escaped, noting how the Roman army attacked his Egyptian army with no notice. While Bel Affris and the other Egyptian people consider attacking without notice an act of "cowardice," the Roman army represents a new kind of army, one that rejects "the pride and honor of war" and instead, "fight[s] to win." The Romans are more concerned with conquest and the expansion of their civilization—with the future and with progress—than they are with upholding age-honored wisdom about what it means to be an honorable, brave soldier.

Bel Affris distinguishes between honoring traditional values, such as "the pride and honor of war," as the Egyptians do, and disregarding these traditions, as the Romans do. With Caesar as their spokesperson, the Romans do not place history on a pedestal. Instead, they reject age-honored traditions in pursuit of conquest, curiosity, and imperial expansion. While there are elements of imperialism that Shaw explicitly takes issue with in the play, he seems to revere the progressive curiosity that fueled Julius Caesar's conquests.

❝ Cleopatra is not yet a woman: neither is she wise. But she already troubles men's wisdom.

Related Characters: Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Bel Affris, Ptolemy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

After Bel Affris arrives at the palace in Syria to warn Cleopatra's guard about Julius Caesar's approaching Roman army, the soldiers strategize about what to do next. The Persian (a Persian recruit to the unit) hatches a plan to sell Cleopatra to Ptolemy and coerce Julius Caesar into falling in love with her. At this point, they will offer to "rescue" Cleopatra from Ptolemy. He prefaces his suggestion with a reminder to his fellow guards about Caesar's weakness for women and Cleopatra's appeal to men, noting that, despite Cleopatra's youth, "she already troubles men's wisdom."

The Persian's remark foregrounds two of Cleopatra's key features as she appears in *Caesar and Cleopatra*: her youth and naivete. In this opening scene, Shaw underscores how different his Cleopatra is from other fictitious depictions of the historical figure. For instance, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* depicts the queen as a manipulative, ruthless, and ultimately tragic temptress. Shaw, in contrast, doesn't romanticize Cleopatra. Instead, he portrays her as a young, naïve child-queen whose actions result from youthful indiscretion and naivete rather than calculating ruthlessness. Furthermore, in the Persian's remarks, Shaw even implies that Cleopatra's beauty isn't weaponized by *Cleopatra*, but by men who wish to use her as a political pawn.

BELZANOR [*with solemn arrogance*] Ftatateeta: I am Belzanor, the captain of the Queen's guard, descended from the gods.

FTATATEETA [*retorting his arrogance with interest*] Belzanor: I am Ftatateeta, the Queen's chief nurse; and your divine ancestors were proud to be painted on the wall in the pyramids whom my fathers served.

Related Characters: Belzanor (speaker), Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Ftatateeta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

As Belzanor and the rest of Cleopatra's guard prepare to take Cleopatra away from the Syrian palace to avoid Julius Caesar's approaching Roman army, Belzanor summons Ftatateeta, Cleopatra's chief nurse, to present the guard with the young queen. Belzanor, with "solemn arrogance," tries to exert dominance over Ftatateeta by boasting about his esteemed title. He informs her that he is "the captain of the Queen's guard descended from the gods." As an Egyptian, Belzanor believes that his ancestors were gods and uses this supposed lineage to exert power over Ftatateeta.

However, Belzanor's plan backfires when it fails to impress Ftatateeta. She reminds him that his "divine ancestors" were hardly saints, for their divine status was only made possible because they exploited people of lower classes like Ftatateeta's ancestors, enslaved people who built the pyramids whose walls immortalized the gods' holy images.

Ftatateeta's insult diminishes Belzanor's status, removing the gods and their descendants from their pedestal by drawing attention to the injustices and exploitation that gave them power in the first place. Ftatateeta's scathing remark is a condemnation not only of ancient Egyptian society, but also of the British Victorian society to which Shaw belonged, which expanded its empire and wealth as it mistreated citizens of its colonies and protectorates.

Act 1 Quotes

In the little world yonder, Sphinx, my place is as high as yours in this great desert; only I wander, and you sit still; I conquer, and you endure; I work and wonder, you watch and wait; I look up and am dazzled, look down and am darkened, look round and am puzzled, whilst your eyes never turn from looking out—out of the world—to the lost region—the home from which we have strayed. Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the race of men, are no strangers to one another: have I not been conscious of you and of this place since I was born? Rome is a madman's dream: this is my Reality.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Julius Caesar is wandering in the desert when he encounters the Sphinx to which Cleopatra has run to seek refuge from Caesar's approaching army. Caesar doesn't

notice Cleopatra sleeping soundly between the Sphinx's paws and delivers a grand, sweeping monologue in which he praises the Sphinx, whom he regards as his equal.

This monologue is the audience's introduction to Julius Caesar and gives them insight into his personality. His impulse to relate to the mythic, powerful Sphinx, claiming himself to have a "place [...] as high as [the Sphinx's]" and that both he and the Sphinx are "strangers to the race of men" depicts Caesar as a divine, otherworldly being. He's proposing that his impulse to "work and wonder," be curious, and expand Rome's influence has allowed him to transcend mortality.

Caesar's speech celebrates imperialist expansion, which he sees as the path that allows mortals to achieve a godly degree of power comparable only to the mythic power of the Sphinx. In some ways, Caesar even sees himself as *superior* to the mythic creature. "I conquer, and you endure," he proclaims, alluding to the steadily increasing influence of Rome on Egyptian culture and politics over the centuries. Caesar sees himself and his Roman Republic as part of a new era in which a belief in the limitlessness of human achievement will allow nations to achieve a degree of power and influence that the ancient Egyptians who built the Sphinx centuries before could not have imagined possible.

Of course not: I am the Queen; and I shall live in the palace at Alexandria when I have killed my brother, who drove me out of it. When I am old enough I shall do just what I like. I shall be able to poison the slaves and see them wriggle, and pretend to Ftatateeta that she is going to be put into the fiery furnace.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Julius Caesar, Ptolemy, Ftatateeta

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra first meets Caesar at the Sphinx and fails to recognize him as the terrifying Roman commander. Instead, she sees him as an odd but amusing older man, and she confides in him about her ongoing dispute with her brother Ptolemy over the Egyptian throne. As Cleopatra relays the details of the dynastic dispute to Caesar, the audience gains insight into Cleopatra's youth and political ineptitude. It's immediately apparent that Cleopatra's reasons for wanting to rule Egypt have more to do with selfishness and a desire to have something her brother currently has. "When I am old enough I shall do just what I like," insists Cleopatra, sounding more like a child who is tired of adults telling her what to do than a competent, experienced leader with concrete goals about the future of her nation and principles to guide her leadership.

This passage also illustrates Cleopatra's penchant for violence. Within minutes of meeting Caesar, she's already informed him of her intent to order her brother's execution. Further establishing her penchant for violence is the gleeful manner in which she looks forward to "be[ing] able to poison the slaves and see them wriggle," and antagonizing Ftatateeta with threats of throwing the chief nurse "into the fiery furnace." If Cleopatra were not a child, these admissions would have a more sinister tone. Yet, her youth grants her some lenience. The reality is that Cleopatra isn't a ruthless tyrant so much a power-hungry teenager who lacks the perspective, empathy, and reverence for life that the play suggests comes with age and experience.

CLEOPATRA [*very seriously*] Oh, they would eat us if they caught us. They are barbarians. Their chief is called Julius Caesar. His father was a tiger and his mother a burning mountain; and his nose is like an elephant's trunk [*Caesar involuntarily rubs his nose*]. They all have long noses, and ivory tusks, and little tails, and seven arms with a hundred arrows in each; and they live on human flesh.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra and Caesar have just met for the first time at the Sphinx, where Cleopatra has run away to seek refuge from Caesar's approaching Roman army. Humorously and ironically, she remains unaware that the amusing older man she has just met at the Sphinx is, in fact, Caesar himself.

In this scene, Cleopatra describes Caesar *to* Caesar, drawing from prejudiced, fantastical horror stories she has heard about Romans to supplement the visualization. Shaw plays the serious tone Cleopatra adopts as she describes Caesar for comic effect, particularly the detail of Caesar

"involuntarily rub[bing] his nose" as Cleopatra compares his stereotypically large Roman nose to "an elephant's trunk." Beyond being humorous, though, Cleopatra's misinformed description of Caesar definitively shows the audience how young and naïve she is.

Unflattering accounts of Cleopatra by Roman historians have portrayed her as a ruthless harlot. However, Shaw offers a more sympathetic portrayal of the young queen, reimagining her as a young, inexperienced person who, at a young age, had to grapple with the enormous responsibility of ruling a nation—a task for which she was woefully unprepared, if her belief in such ridiculous tales is any indication.

Act 2 Quotes

Ptolemy: Yes—the gods would not suffer—not suffer—[*He stops; then, crestfallen*] I forgot what the gods would not suffer.

THEODOTUS: Let Pothinus, the King's guardian, speak for the King.

POTHINUS [*suppressing his impatience with difficulty*] The King wishes to say that the gods would not suffer the impiety of his sister to go unpunished.

Related Characters: Ptolemy, Theodotus, Pothinus (speaker), Julius Caesar, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Before Caesar and Cleopatra arrive at the palace of Alexandria, 10-year-old Ptolemy attempts to deliver a speech to his royal court about the importance of not letting Julius Caesar, a foreigner, meddle in Egypt's government and unseat Ptolemy, the rightful heir to the Egyptian throne. However, Ptolemy's wavering voice makes it clear that the boy-king isn't comfortable addressing his court. His comically "crestfallen" demeanor upon "forg[etting] what the gods would not suffer" also suggests that it was not Ptolemy who wrote this fervent condemnation of Caesar's intervention in Egyptian affairs but, more likely, his guardians.

Theodotus explicitly reveals the degree to which Ptolemy's adult guardians rule Egypt through their control of the boy-king when he urges Pothinus to "speak for the King." The "impatience" that Pothinus can hardly hold back suggests that he often must speak on Ptolemy's behalf. If Ptolemy has trouble addressing his court, it's logical to assume that he's equally if not more ill-equipped to take on the other demands of ruling an entire nation. Pothinus might claim that it's "the King" who "wishes to say that the gods would not suffer the impiety of his sister to go unpunished." However, it's clear to the audience of the play and, likely, to Ptolemy's court, that it's really Pothinus and Ptolemy's other guardians who think this way, and that Ptolemy is merely a puppet they use to advance their own political agendas.

CAESAR [*recovering his self-possession*] Pardon him, Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Britannus , Theodotus, Cleopatra, Ptolemy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Caesar and his men engage with Ptolemy's court at the palace of Alexandria over the ongoing dynastic dispute between Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy. Brittanus responds with disapproval and visceral disgust when Theodotus explains that Cleopatra and Ptolemy are legally married, as is the custom among Egyptian royalty.

Caesar apologizes for Britannus. He claims that Britannus "is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature" to excuse Britannus's rude behavior. Embedded in Caesar's disparaging remarks about Britannus is Shaw's critique of the dehumanizing attitude with which conquering empires, such as the British Empire of Shaw's day, consider their colonized nations. He's taking issue with the mistreatment that conquering empires like the British Empire exhibit toward the nations they colonize. This was something of which Shaw and the Fabian Society (the socialist organization that he joined as a young man) were critical.

Of course, given Caesar's tendency to assess every interaction and decision in terms of its political ramifications, it's necessary to regard Caesar's words with some skepticism. Caesar doesn't necessarily disagree with Britannus. To the contrary, his need to "recover[] his self-

possession" after learning about Cleopatra and Ptolemy's incestuous marriage suggests that he, too, is just as disgusted by the marriage as Britannus is. Caesar's disparaging apology for Britannus reveals that Caesar is constantly thinking about how to navigate a situation to elicit the most political gain. In this instance, he's claiming to respect the Egyptian custom of marriage between royal siblings to ingratiate himself with the Egyptian people so that they might side with him in matters concerning the ongoing dispute between Ptolemy and Cleopatra.

CAESAR. Vengeance! Vengeance!! Oh, if I could stoop to vengeance, what would I not exact from you as the price of this murdered man's blood. (*They shrink back, appalled and disconcerted.*) Was he not my son-in-law, my ancient friend, for 20 years the master of great Rome, for 30 years the compeller of victory? Did not I, as a Roman, share his glory? Was the Fate that forced us to fight for the mastery of the world, of our making? Am I Julius Caesar, or am I a wolf, that you fling to me the grey head of the old soldier, the laurelled conqueror, the mighty Roman, treacherously struck down by this callous ruffian, and then claim my gratitude for it! (*To Lucius Septimius*) Begone: you fill me with horror.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Lucius Septimius, Pompey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Upon Caesar's arrival at the palace of Alexandria, he learns that Lucius Septimius, acting on the orders of the Egyptian court, murdered Caesar's rival, Pompey, to win Caesar's favor. Caesar responds with an impassioned monologue, condemning Lucius Septimius's actions and the concept of vengeance.

"Vengeance! Vengeance!!" cries Caesar. "Oh, if I could stoop to vengeance, what would I not exact from you as the price of this murdered man's blood." Caesar's remark conveys his unwillingness to commit acts of vengeance or revenge altogether. However, if he could find it in himself to "stoop to vengeance," he finds Lucius Septimius's actions more worthy of punishment than Pompey's. Caesar's disapproval of Septimius's actions has to do with Septimius's blatant disregard for human life, affirmed in the fact that he murdered a man out of passion or principle rather than necessity. Pompey arrived in Alexandria after suffering a defeat against Caesar at the Battle of Pharsalus and posed no threat to the Alexandrians. His assassination was committed as an act of respect toward Caesar, not to protect the greater good against a credible threat to their safety.

Caesar continues, arguing that the rivalry that ultimately developed between himself and Pompey, who had been Caesar's son-in-law when he was married to Caesar's late daughter, Julia, was not "of [his and Pompey's] making" but a matter of "Fate." This belief prohibits Caesar from viewing his rivalry with Pompey as a personal matter. Moreover, Pompey's history as a "laurelled conqueror" and "mighty Roman" make his targeted murder even more of a disgrace. Finally, Caesar drives home his point by comparing himself to "a wolf," which implies that he believes there's something animalistic and undignified about vengeance.

CAESAR. Cleopatra: I really think I must eat you, after all.

CLEOPATRA (*kneeling beside him and looking at him with eager interest, half real, half affected to show how intelligent she is*). You must not talk to me now as if I were a child.

CAESAR. You have been growing up since the Sphinx introduced us the other night; and you think you know more than I do already.

CLEOPATRA (*taken down, and anxious to justify herself*). No: that would be very silly of me: of course I know that. But, (*suddenly*) are you angry with me?

CAESAR. No.

CLEOPATRA (*only half believing him*). Then why are you so thoughtful?

CAESAR (*rising*). I have work to do, Cleopatra.

CLEOPATRA (*drawing back*). Work! (*Offended*) You are tired of talking to me; and that is your excuse to get away from me.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar, Cleopatra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra is pleased when Caesar allows her to remain in the room as he prepares to go to battle against the Egyptians, but she's immediately upset once it becomes

clear that his military strategizing takes precedent over paying attention to her.

Caesar and Cleopatra's comical exchange demonstrates how Cleopatra's age warps her priorities and limits her ability to understand the demands of ruling a nation. The exchange also challenges historical and earlier literary depictions of Cleopatra and Caesar's relationship, which place romance at the forefront of Caesar's dealings with Cleopatra. The exchange Caesar and Cleopatra participate in in this scene resembles a parent whose patience with their attention-seeking child is quickly waning.

Cleopatra wants Caesar to take her seriously, which is why his reference to her earlier naïve belief that Romans eat people offends her. Yet, despite her demand that Caesar not "talk to [her] now as if [she] were a child," when Caesar attempts to treat her as an adult by being frank and confronting her about her inflated self-confidence, she responds defensively, suddenly fearful that Caesar is "angry with [her.]" When Caesar refuses to entertain her dramatics by reminding her that he has work to do preparing for the imminent battle against the Egyptians, she becomes even more agitated. She insists that Caesar's supposed "work" is merely an "excuse to get away from [her]."

This scene explicitly positions Caesar's age, experience, and pragmatism against Cleopatra's youth, inexperience, and childishness. Caesar's status as a seasoned politician and conqueror allows him to focus on the task at hand. At the same time, Cleopatra's youthful self-centeredness inhibits her from realizing that she shouldn't take Caesar's rejection personally.

❝ THEODOTUS. What is burning there is the memory of mankind.

CAESAR. A shameful memory. Let it burn.

THEODOTUS (*wildly*). Will you destroy the past?

CAESAR. Ay, and build the future with its ruins.

Related Characters: Theodotus, Julius Caesar (speaker), Pompey, Ra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after the Egyptians declare war on Caesar, Theodotus runs into the palace to inform Caesar that the Egyptians have set Caesar's boats on fire, and the fire has spread to the library of Alexandria. The destruction of the library of Alexandria, which houses precious ancient books and artifacts, devastates Theodotus. Theodotus is shocked and outraged when Caesar and his men don't share in Theodotus's grief over the priceless loss of history. This passage establishes Theodotus's and Caesar's opposite views on history's importance to humankind.

Theodotus sees the destruction of the library of Alexandria as a literal and figurative "burning" of "the memory of mankind." Theodotus's view of the loss of history as tragic reflects his reverence for the past and belief that civilization's adherence to the past's traditions is a valuable asset to humanity's future. In contrast, Caesar finds the past "a shameful memory." He thinks humanity should "let it burn" and "build the future with its ruins." He thinks adherence to time-honored traditions and cultures limits humanity and inhibits progress. Caesar's progressive mindset reflects Ra's remarks about him representing the "new Rome" in the prologue. Caesar's curiosity, ambition, and concern for the future set him apart from the old school of leadership to which Caesar's rival, Pompey, and Ptolemaic Egypt, belong.

While Shaw appears to take issue with the exploitation of colonized peoples and human rights abuses that so often accompany imperialist expansion, Caesar's ambition and curiosity are traits he admires in Caesar, who, in the endnotes that follow the play, he describes as an ideal hero.

Act 3 Quotes

❝ APOLLODORUS. I do not keep a shop. Mine is a temple of the arts. I am a worshipper of beauty. My calling is to choose beautiful things for beautiful Queens. My motto is Art for Art's sake.

Related Characters: Apollodorus (speaker), Roman Sentinel , Ftatateeta, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

When Apollodorus and Ftatateeta attempt to gain entry into the palace of Alexandria to deliver Persian carpets to Cleopatra, a Roman sentinel refuses to grant them access to the castle. The sentinel also mistakes Apollodorus for a common rug merchant. The sentinel's mistake offends Apollodorus, who is a patrician (member of the noble class)

and amateur artist.

Shaw's own body of work challenges Apollodorus's philosophy of "Art for Art's sake," since Shaw wrote social commentary that challenged the norms of Victorian England. In fact, Apollodorus's humorous irritation at being mislabeled as a commoner is itself a critique of a popular philosophy in Victorian England that claimed that the value of art is separate from its moral, political, or practical function. Throughout the 19th century, the philosophy functioned as a rejection of the belief that art should serve a higher moral or political purpose. The phrase is commonly associated with Walter Pater and the Aesthetic Movement, which rejects the notion that art should serve a higher moral or political purpose and that the highest forms of art, as Apollodorus suggests, ought to be appreciated for their craft and beauty alone.

❝ CAESAR. In the fire. Would you have me waste the next three years of my life in proscribing and condemning men who will be my friends when I have proved that my friendship is worth more than Pompey's was—than Cato's is. O incorrigible British islander: am I a bull dog, to seek quarrels merely to show how stubborn my jaws are?

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Pompey, Britannus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67-68

Explanation and Analysis

Caesar and his men have taken the island of Pharos. Britannus returns from talking with some messengers who have just arrived at the island and excitedly presents Caesar with a bag containing letters exchanged between Pompey's people and the occupying Roman army. Reading the letters, Britannus explains excitedly, would give Caesar the identities of the men who have schemed against him. Yet, to Britannus's dismay, Caesar orders him to burn the letters. Caesar's explanation for this decision illustrates his pragmatism, disavowal of unnecessary bloodshed, and embrace of clemency.

Caesar bases his decision not to read the letters on the fact that punishing the letter writers serves no practical purpose. To Caesar, punishing them only proves "how stubborn [his] Jaws are[.]" In other words, choosing to punish men who pose no immediate threat to Caesar serves no purpose other than to show that Caesar is ruthless and unreasonable. It would suggest that he punishes people out of spite rather than a need to fulfill a larger practical or political purpose.

The men who wrote the letters aligned themselves with Caesar's rival, Pompey. They betrayed Caesar not for personal reasons, but because Caesar had not yet "proved that [his] friendship [was] worth more than Pompey's was." Because the men acted practically rather than personally, Caesar cannot justify punishing them as personal revenge for their betrayal. Furthermore, there's no practical sense in punishing men who will readily join forces with Caesar once they see that he will reward them for their loyalty.

Finally, "Cato" refers to Cato the Younger, a Roman senator and contemporary of Caesar whose conservative principles put him at odds with Caesar. Cato notably supported Pompey's sole consulship in 52 B.C.E. in a calculated effort to drive a wedge between Caesar and Pompey. Cato's actions played a part in the outbreak of Caesar's civil war in 49 B.C.E.

Act 4 Quotes

❝ CHARMIAN. He makes you so terribly prosy and serious and learned and philosophical.

Related Characters: Charmian (speaker), Julius Caesar, Cleopatra, Pothinus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra sits and gossips with some of her ladies in her chamber. One of her ladies, Charmian, teases Cleopatra about Cleopatra's transparent efforts to emulate Caesar's "philosophical" and rational demeanor. Charmian offers this remark as an observation about Cleopatra's humane, patient treatment of her subjects, which is antithetical to the cruel, authoritarian impulses she inherited from her father.

Charmian's remark undercuts the transformation Cleopatra claims to have undergone since Caesar took her under his wing. Charmian speaks patronizingly of Cleopatra's new, "terribly prosy and serious and learned and philosophical" personality. In so doing, she affirms Cleopatra's earlier admission about assuming this new personality solely to impress her mentor, Caesar, on whom Cleopatra also has developed something of a childish crush.

Knowing Cleopatra has changed her behavior to please Caesar instead of to fulfill some inner changed moral compass impacts how the reader views Cleopatra's significant decisions later in the act. For instance, it prevents readers from viewing her order for Pothinus's assassination as a calculated political strategy and compels them instead to see it as a naïve and impassioned attempt to exact vengeance upon Pothinus for embarrassing her in front of Caesar.

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 or disliking; I do what must be done, and have no time to attend to myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness. If Caesar were gone, I think I could govern the Egyptians; for what Caesar is to me, I am to the fools around me.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Pothinus, Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra honors Pothinus's request to meet with her; he's now a prisoner of war. It becomes immediately apparent to Cleopatra that Pothinus wanted to meet with her because he'd thought her to be a naïve child whom he could manipulate in some way to benefit himself. In this passage, Cleopatra assures Pothinus that she has changed and is no longer as "foolish" as she was before meeting Caesar.

Of course, Cleopatra has just openly admitted to a group of her ladies that her changed moral compass and style of leadership isn't the product of an internalized sense of moral righteousness or any legitimate principle, but an effort to emulate and impress Caesar. Thus, her bold claim that the pursuit of "greatness" and duty dictate her life rather than "happiness" and selfishness is not entirely true. Further cementing her foolishness is her failure to realize how openly admitting to Pothinus, who has a clear incentive to ensure that Cleopatra falls out of favor with Caesar, that she would like for Caesar to leave Alexandria and pass on total control of Egypt to her. Ultimately, Pothinus pounces on Cleopatra's careless omission, passing it along to Caesar as evidence of Cleopatra's desire to betray and get rid of Caesar to gain complete control of Egypt in his absence.

In short, Cleopatra's desperate attempt to show how mature and wizened she's become since Caesar took her under his wing only proves the opposite: that she is still a naïve child whose principles are shallow, and who fails to grasp the consequences of her actions.

POTHINUS (*looking hard at her*). Cleopatra: this may be the vanity of youth.

Related Characters: Pothinus (speaker), Cleopatra, Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

During his meeting with Cleopatra, Pothinus suggests that Cleopatra's claim about having grown wiser and more capable of ruling Egypt on her own in Caesar's absence is not, in fact, evidence of newfound maturity but of "the vanity of youth." Pothinus's observation is correct. In order to convince Pothinus that she is no longer the foolish girl she once was, Cleopatra declares herself to be a reformed leader who forgoes personal satisfaction to accomplish larger goals. In other words, it's a sense of duty and a reformed moral compass that drives her actions now, not a childish need for instant gratification. She is now prepared to put her people's needs above her own, and she analyzes situations practically rather than emotionally.

Nevertheless, Cleopatra's overconfidence betrays the superficiality of her transformation. In Pothinus's words, it is evidence of "the vanity of youth." Her motivation for appearing wizened, practical, and calculating—to impress Caesar—is further evidence of her immaturity. It shows that her priorities align with the self-gratifying pursuits of an attention-seeking teenager rather than a just leader whose main priority, ideally, is to serve their nation's people. Despite Cleopatra's claims of transformation, reformation, and experience, it's clear to Pothinus—and the audience—that she is no less selfish, vain, and inexperienced than she was at the start of the play. She's acting selfless and pragmatic to impress those around her, especially Caesar, parading around like an attention-seeking child rather than a competent, experienced leader—and this dynamic is evident to everyone but Cleopatra herself.

❝ CLEOPATRA: Love me! Pothinus: Caesar loves no one. Who are those we love? Only those whom we do not hate: all people are strangers and enemies to us except those we love. But it is not so with Caesar. He has no hatred in him: he makes friends with everyone as he does with dogs and children.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Pothinus, Julius Caesar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

During Cleopatra and Pothinus's meeting, Cleopatra mentions looking forward to Caesar leaving Egypt, since his absence could allow her to rule Egypt on her own. Pothinus asks Cleopatra how she could want Caesar to leave when he loves her. She refutes Pothinus's accusation, arguing that "Caesar loves no one."

Cleopatra argues that Caesar is incapable of love because he is also incapable of hate. The play suggests that this renders love meaningless, since love is only the absence of hate. Caesar's almost pathologically pragmatic outlook on life inhibits him from regarding people emotionally. Instead, he sees everybody, Cleopatra included, as a possible means to a political end. The reason that Caesar "makes friends with every as he does with dogs and children" is not because he likes or loves them, but because he doesn't want to leave any opportunity for personal or political gain unpursued.

Even as Cleopatra is unable to suppress her childish infatuation with Caesar, she acknowledges that the attention Caesar pays to her is absent of emotional attachment. While Cleopatra's naivete and inexperience are defining features of her character, she also exhibits moments of tremendous insight, as she does here. These moments make her complex and nuanced and prevent her from becoming a parody of herself.

❝ POTHINUS. From her own lips I have heard it. You are to be her catspaw: you are to tear the crown from her brother's head and set it on her own, delivering us all into her hand—delivering yourself also. And then Caesar can return to Rome, or depart through the gate of death, which is nearer and surer.

CAESAR (*calmly*). Well, my friend; and is not this very natural?

POTHINUS (*astonished*). Natural! Then you do not resent treachery?

CAESAR. Resent! O thou foolish Egyptian, what have I to do with resentment? Do I resent the wind when it chills me, or the night when it makes me stumble in the darkness? Shall I resent youth when it turns from age, and ambition when it turns from servitude? To tell me such a story as this is but to tell me that the sun will rise to-morrow.

Related Characters: Pothinus, Julius Caesar (speaker), Cleopatra, Ptolemy

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Pothinus interrupts Caesar's dinner party on the palace rooftop to inform him of Cleopatra's intent to use Caesar to "tear the crown from her brother's head and set in on her own," at which time she will either force him to "return to Rome, or depart through the gate of death." Pothinus's accusation isn't entirely true—Cleopatra has expressed her desire to use her alliance with Caesar to reclaim her place on the throne once he returns to Rome, though she hasn't threatened to put him to death if he refuses to leave.

At any rate, Pothinus's plan to drive a wedge between Caesar and Cleopatra fails when Caesar doesn't see Cleopatra's plans as "treachery" but as "very natural." According to Caesar, it makes as much sense to "resent" Cleopatra for wanting to regain her position on the royal throne as it would to "resent the wind when it chills [him], or the night when it makes [him] stumble in the darkness[.]" This is because Cleopatra wants to take advantage of their relationship to ascend to power, which he believes is as understandable and unpreventable as these natural phenomena. Caesar's calm, understanding response to Pothinus's attempt to stir conflict reinforces his pragmatic approach to life. He's incapable of taking offense to Cleopatra's behavior because he views every action and decision—his own included—as a means to a political end.

CLEOPATRA (*sinking back trembling on the bench and covering her face with her hands*). I have not betrayed you, Caesar: I swear it.

CAESAR. I know that. I have not trusted you.

Related Characters: Cleopatra, Julius Caesar (speaker), Pothinus, Ftatateeta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Pothinus's anguished scream interrupts the rooftop dinner party that Cleopatra has held in honor of Caesar. Cleopatra knows precisely what is going on, since she secretly ordered Ftatateeta to assassinate Pothinus earlier in the evening. As everybody struggles to find out what's going on, Cleopatra feigns ignorance, only telling Caesar that she "ha[s] not betrayed [him.]" As usual, Caesar is steps ahead of Cleopatra. He replies that there's no way Cleopatra could have betrayed his trust, since he "ha[s] not trusted her" in the first place.

Caesar's blunt admission aligns with his habit of approaching every situation and relationship practically rather than sentimentally. He does not let passion or subjective bias cloud his understanding of people and their intentions. On the one hand, such an outlook on life enables Caesar to extend clemency and mercy to his adversaries instead of punishment. He gives people the benefit of the doubt and only punishes them when it's politically necessary, not out of anger or retribution. On the other hand, Caesar's pragmatism inhibits him from investing in people in positive ways. Although Caesar has served as a mentor to Cleopatra, he has also maintained a permanent distance between the two of them. In so doing, he never forgets that he and Cleopatra exist on a political battleground where mistakenly trusting someone who ends up being disloyal could lead to his political or mortal demise.

CAESAR. If one man in all the world can be found, now or forever, to know that you did wrong, that man will have either to conquer the world as I have, or be crucified by it. [...] These knockers at your gate are also believers in vengeance and in stabbing. You have slain their leader: it is right that they shall slay you. [...] then in the name of that right (*He emphasizes the word with great scorn.*) shall I not slay them for murdering their Queen, and be slain in my turn by their countrymen as the invader of their fatherland? Can Rome do less than slay these slayers too, to show the world how Rome avenges her sons and her honor? And so, to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand. [...]

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Cleopatra, Ftatateeta, Pothinus, Apollodorus , Rufio, Britannus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 99-100

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra has just admitted to Caesar that she ordered Ftatateeta to assassinate Pothinus. As an angry mob gathers outside the palace to avenge their leader's death, Cleopatra pleads with Caesar to admit that her actions were justified. However, unlike Apollodorus, Rufio, and Britannus, who believe Cleopatra was right to slay Pothinus, Caesar refuses to condone Pothinus's murder. Instead, he condemns Cleopatra's actions and the concept of vengeance altogether. In a long monologue, Caesar argues that the problem with vengeance—even justified vengeance—is that it invariably produces justification for more vengeance.

Even if Cleopatra was right to slay Pothinus, who did pose a threat to Cleopatra's ability to reclaim her royal throne, by this logic, Pothinus's followers have just as much a right to slay her. Then, if Pothinus's followers succeed in slaying Cleopatra, Caesar has just as much justification for slaying them, too. This slippery slope of violence and vengeance will continue, according to Caesar, "to the end of history, [and] murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace[.]" For Caesar, whose chief concern is to make strategic political decisions based on what will elicit the most logical, desirable outcome, killing Pothinus simply isn't worth initiating this chain reaction of justified acts of violence. Caesar's monologue poses challenging questions about when—if ever—the justification for violence is great enough to disregard any harmful consequences that an act

of violence might create.

Act 5 Quotes

APOLLODORUS. I understand, Caesar. Rome will produce no art itself; but it will buy up and take away whatever the other nations produce.

CAESAR. What! Rome produces no art! Is peace not an art? Is war not an art? Is government not an art? Is civilization not an art? All these we give you in exchange for a few ornaments. You will have the best of the bargain. […]

Related Characters: Apollodorus , Julius Caesar (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Before leaving Egypt to return to Rome, Caesar appoints Apollodorus to be in charge of Egypt's art. After happily accepting the position, Apollodorus comments on Rome's failure "produce [any] art itself." Instead, it "buy[s] up and take[s] away whatever the other nations produce." Apollodorus's remark outlines one unethical hallmark of imperialism: powerful empires, such as Caesar's Rome or Shaw's Britain, exploit other nations for their land, resources, and culture before ultimately claiming these features as their own. For instance, before the onset of direct British rule of India in the mid-19th century, India laid claim to almost 25% of the world economy. By the time the British Empire ended its rule of India a century later, that figure had dropped to less than 4%.

Caesar's response to Apollodorus presents an opposing viewpoint. He justifies imperialism because imperialist expansion is a positive thing for the nations ruled by powerful empires and for humanity at large because it allows for the spread of "civilization," democracy, and western ideals. Caesar believes imperialism offers Egypt "the best of the bargain," since it enables the Egyptians to receive the culture, government, and social norms of Rome, whose culture Caesar deems superior to Egypt's, all for the meager price of "a few ornaments." Caesar is effectively saying that Egyptian civilization is inferior to Roman civilization. As such, Egypt can only stand to benefit from Rome's influence. Such a view has long served as justification for imperialist expansion.

CAESAR (energetically). On my head be it, then; for it was well done. Rufio: had you set yourself in the seat of the judge, and with hateful ceremonies and appeals to the gods handed that woman over to some hired executioner to be slain before the people in the name of justice, never again would I have touched your hand without a shudder. But this was natural slaying: I feel no horror at it.

Related Characters: Julius Caesar (speaker), Cleopatra, Rufio, Ftatateeta, Pothinus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Caesar departs Egypt to return to Rome, Cleopatra confronts Caesar about Rufio's slaying of Ftatateeta. To Cleopatra's surprise, Caesar supports Rufio and believes he was right to murder Ftatateeta. In this passage, Caesar affirms that Rufio's slaying of Ftatateeta was, in fact, "well done" and justified.

Caesar supports Rufio's slaying of Ftatateeta because Rufio decided to commit the slaying logically, after recognizing Ftatateeta's fervent loyalty to Cleopatra as a threat to Caesar's life. If loyalty to Cleopatra had compelled Ftatateeta to kill Pothinus, there's no reason to think she wouldn't do the same to Caesar if Cleopatra asked her to. So, Caesar supports Rufio's slaying of Ftatateeta because Rufio committed the act as a practical measure—not as an impassioned effort to punish or torture Ftatateeta. Had Rufio murdered Ftatateeta in a state of passion—"with hateful ceremonies and appeals to the gods," and "in the name of justice," Caesar could not condone the death. However, because Rufio killed Ftatateeta as a logical, preventative measure, and without ceremony or spite, Caesar deems the act a "natural slaying" and "feel[s] no horror at it."

The circumstances of Ftatateeta's slaying are very much the opposite of those of Pothinus's, to which Caesar was vehemently opposed. When Cleopatra ordered Ftatateeta to slay Pothinus in Act IV, she gave her order impulsively, in an impassioned state of rage after Pothinus embarrassed her in front of Caesar. Thus, to Caesar's mind, Pothinus's slaying was spiteful, unnecessary, and unnatural.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

The Egyptian god Ra stands in the doorway of his temple in Memphis, Egypt. He observes the play's audience with a look of disgust on his face and addresses them directly. Ra commands the audience to gaze upon his hawk's head and remember that he was once a powerful god. He belittles his audience, emphasizing their insignificance within the broader context of human civilization. While the great pyramids that Ra's people built are still standing, the empires of Ra's audience are fragile, short-lived, and built on the dust of generations of dead sons.

Ra breaks the fourth wall, addressing his audience directly. This technique allows Shaw to draw his audience into the play, showing them that Ra's slights against British Victorian culture are directed toward them. Most of Shaw's plays are socially conscious. He uses them as vehicles through which to challenge aspects about his culture and society he finds problematic. Here, Ra speaks of the insignificance of British culture to show his Victorian audience that while their British Empire might have influence and power now, this power is temporary. He implies that the pyramids of Ra's people—the ancient Egyptians—will outlive the British Empire.

Ra establishes a dichotomy between the old Rome and the new Rome. The old Rome was "poor and little, and greedy and fierce." At the same time, its smallness and simplicity meant that it was always aware of its desires and its limits. Moreover, the gods pitied the old Rome and protected it from harm. Everything changed when old Rome decided it wanted more. The old Romans exploited their poor so vigorously that "they became great masters of that art" and learned how to make robbery appear just and sanctioned.

Ra's dichotomy between the old Rome and the new Rome is a metaphor for imperialist expansion. The old Rome was "poor and little, and greedy and fierce," and self-contained. The new Rome exploits its lower classes and the lower classes of its new territories to benefit the empire. The empire (whether it be Rome or the British Empire of Shaw's era) justifies this exploitation and oppression—this robbery required to expand the reach of their civilization in the name of progress. When Shaw describes the new Romans as "great masters of that art," he's suggesting that it's common for imperial regimes—like ancient Rome, or the contemporary British Empire—to disguise the exploitation involved in conquering other nations as a sign of progress or something that's beneficial to civilization at large.

Two great men emerged during the transitional period between the old Rome and the new: Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar. Pompey, a soldier, represented the old Rome, which considered soldiers to be great, important figures. Pompey's friend Julius Caesar, in contrast, represented the new Rome, which valorized advancement and expansion and was the Rome of the gods. In time, the gods turned on Pompey, who talked ceaselessly of "law and duty" and other dull matters. The gods embraced Caesar instead, for Caesar lived his life boldly and without constraint.

Julius Caesar represents a new kind of cultural ideal, one that values the development and expansion of civilization. In the play's endnotes, Shaw praises Caesar for his "originality," an attribute that comes through in Ra's description of Caesar's bold, unrestrained pursuit of a bigger, better world. Pompey's focus on "law and duty," by contrast, is nowhere near as compelling.

Pompey sought to slay Caesar, prompting Caesar to flee across the Adriatic Sea. Pompey followed Caesar and conquered him and at first, Caesar accepted the defeat of the new Rome by the old Rome. However, when he realized that he had the gods on his side and Pompey did not, he reversed his fortune and went on to defeat Pompey at the Battle of Pharsalus. Pompey fled Rome to seek refuge in Egypt, where he was beheaded by Lucius Septimius, a soldier who had once served him. Mortals shuddered at Septimius's brutality, but the gods laughed, for they recognized Septimius for what he was: a knife that Pompey had sharpened willfully. In the end, Pompey would have fared better if he had trained Septimius to be a ploughshman.

Caesar and Cleopatra *takes place during Caesar's civil war (49-45 B.C.E.), a series of battles waged between Caesar and Pompey, and one of the last conflicts in which the Roman Republic took part before it became the Roman Empire. Pompey was executed on September 28, 48 B.C.E., by Lucius Septimius, Achillas, and Savius, who ambushed the unsuspecting Pompey onboard his ship. The irony of Pompey's death, as Ra suggests, is that Pompey enabled his killers by failing to conquer them. Historically, he is remembered as a hero of the Roman Republic, which, not long after his death, was transformed into an Empire. His equanimity and democracy were his downfall.*

Ra taunts his audience, asking if they've come to the play to see a scandalous story about a temptress. If so, they're going to be disappointed, for this play's Cleopatra is a child who is still terrified of her nurse. Ra provides additional context for the play he is introducing, which takes place after Caesar arrived in Egypt and received Pompey's slain head, but before he returned to Rome and was slain himself. The play will show its "ignorant" audience that men 20 centuries ago were no wiser or more advanced than the ignorant masses of the modern world.

Ra further insults his audience by implying that they've come to the play not to learn about history or humanity, but to be titillated by the seductive Cleopatra. Shaw anticipates and subverts these base, "ignorant" expectations by portraying Cleopatra as a naïve child rather than the temptress she's been portrayed in earlier literary or film adaptations. Ra weaponizes his audience's ignorance and lowly taste against them, suggesting that it's proof that they're not as advanced or superior to earlier civilizations as they'd like to think.

At this point, Ra suspects that his audience has grown impatient with him. Moreover, Ra's wisdom is wasted on such common, uninformed masses. From here on out, they'll have to hear the rest of the story from those who experienced it firsthand. Ra orders the audience to be quiet so they can listen to a great man speak. He bids them a good night and forbids them from applauding him.

Ra reminds his audience of their lowly, ignorant status. The great man to whom he refers is Julius Caesar, the play's protagonist. Ra closes his monologue by establishing where and when its action begins: after Caesar has followed Pompey to Rome following Pompey's defeat at the Battle of Pharsalus.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PROLOGUE

It's an October night on the Syrian border of Egypt. The year is 48 B.C.E., and a dozen Egyptian guards stand guard outside a palace. Half of them listen intently to one of their peers tells a scandalous story. The others watch their captain, Belzanor, throw dice with a young Persian recruit. Belzanor is 50 years old. He's tough and competent in situations that call for violence, but he's inept and authoritarian otherwise. In addition, the Egyptian guards "are more highly civilized than modern English soldiers," for it's only the latter who "dig up the corpses of their dead enemies and mutilate them," citing the "dug-up" corpses of Cromwell and the Mahdi as examples.

Shaw continues his project of comparing contemporary British culture to ancient Egyptian culture. Here, as Ra does in the prologue, Shaw uses his stage directions to dispel the notion that British culture of the modern era is as advanced or "civilized" than they would like to think. When he accuses English soldiers of "dig[ging] up the corpses of their dead enemies and mutilat[ing] them," he's referring to the reinstated King Charles II's order to exhume and "execute" the remains of Oliver Cromwell, who led the British overthrowing of the monarchy in the 17th century, after the monarchy was restored. Shaw also alludes to an incident from his recent past, when in 1898, British forces destroyed the tomb of the Mahdi, a Sudanese religious leader who led campaigns against occupying British armies in 1885. The British threw his remains into the Nile.

Suddenly, the Nubian sentinel standing guard at the palace's gateway hears a rustling and calls out into the darkness. A strange voice replies, claiming to bring "evil tidings." Belzanor enthusiastically orders his men to receive the mysterious speaker "with honor," and the guards clear a path for the speaker. Belzanor explains to a confused Persian recruit that Egyptians welcome visitors who bring evil tidings, since no god would accept their sacrificial blood.

The Egyptian guards' reverence for honor shows that they are a civilization with strong ties to the past and tradition. This places them in conflict with Caesar, who is known for his originality and pursuit of imperialist expansion.

The stranger staggers clumsily through the gate, laughing as he walks. He's wounded and carries a Roman sword in one hand. Belzanor demands to know who would dare laugh in House of Cleopatra the Queen and orders the man to identify himself. The man introduces himself as Bel Affris and identifies himself as a descendant of the gods, which signifies that he is an Egyptian. Belzanor and the other Egyptians greet him warmly.

Bel Affris's wounds and the Roman sword he carries in his hand, combined with the scene-setting Ra provides in the prologue, suggests that Bel Affris has just come from an altercation with Julius Caesar's approaching Roman army. It's also interesting to note the way the guards describe Cleopatra and demand such respect for their queen—when Ra shared earlier that Cleopatra is a child, not necessarily an adult woman who demands to be taken seriously.

Bel Affris, a guard at the temple of Ra in Memphis, warns the Egyptians that Julius Caesar's Roman army is on its way to conquer Egypt. He explains what happened a few days before. He and some of his men traveled to the boy-king Ptolemy to ask why the King sent Cleopatra to Syria. They also planned to strategize how to handle the Roman officer Pompey, whom Caesar had just defeated and chased into Egypt. When Bel Affris and his men arrived, they discovered that Ptolemy had slain and beheaded Pompey, and that Caesar was already on his way into Egypt. Caesar's army arrived soon after Bel Affris. Most of Bel Affris's men fled, but Bel Affris stayed behind and killed a Roman soldier. Afterward, he stood by his captain. The Romans took pity on them and spared their lives.

The Ptolemy to which Bel Affris refers is Ptolemy XIII, Cleopatra's younger brother. Following the death of their father, Ptolemy XII Auletes, in 51 B.C.E., Cleopatra and her brother took the throne as co-rulers of Egypt but had a fallout that resulted in Pompey exiling Cleopatra to Roman Syria in 48 B.C.E. She returned later that year, backed by an army, to confront Ptolemy and regain control of Egypt, so we can assume that her return to Egypt will occur sometime soon in the play. Caesar's Roman army's inclination to spare Bel Affris and his captain their lives suggests something about Caesar's character, or at least his characteristics as a leader. He seems to have a practical stance on violence and killing. He could have killed Bel Affris and his captain because they are their enemies, but he chose not to because they were outnumbered and didn't pose a danger to his army.

Before anybody can stop him, the Nubian sentinel runs into the palace to warn every one of the approaching army. Bel Affris asks Belzanor how they ought to protect the Egyptian women from the Romans. The Persian suggests that they let the Romans kill the women: it will be cheaper than killing them themselves, which would cost them "blood money."

The Persian's casual remark about it costing less to simply let the Roman soldiers kill the Egyptian women illuminates this world's attitudes toward women. They're regarded as objects to be bought and sold rather than as human beings whose lives matter beyond their monetary worth. Cleopatra's guard would rather leave their women to be attacked by the Romans than spare them this fate by killing them themselves, since the latter option would require them to pay their families "blood money," a compensation the offender pays to the victim's family.

Belzanor explains that his men will have to bring Cleopatra to safety. He laughs when Bel Affris asks whether they'll need Cleopatra's permission to do so, since Cleopatra is only 16 and isn't able to give orders. Belzanor conspires to transport Cleopatra out of town to keep her safe from Caesar, after which point everybody can continue the charade that the teenager—rather than her priests and nurses, who put words in her mouth for their own benefit—is in charge.

Belzanor's remark suggests a direct link between Cleopatra's age and her inability to rule independently. Her adult caretakers take advantage of her naivete and inexperience, giving advice to the young queen that satisfies their own desires for the Kingdom of Egypt's future.

The Persian has a different plan: the Egyptians should sell Cleopatra to her brother, Ptolemy, with whom she is at war. Caesar loves women, but at 50 years old, no young women want him, and no old woman is foolish enough to respect him. The Persian proposes that the Egyptians weaponize Caesar's love of women against him, manipulating Caesar into falling for Cleopatra, secretly selling Cleopatra to Ptolemy, and then offering their services to "rescue" her for Caesar.

The Persian's plan to make a deal with Ptolemy reveals an additional change Shaw has made to the conventional tellings of Cleopatra's story. Instead of Cleopatra being a temptress who uses her looks and sensuality to woo and manipulate Caesar, Shaw suggests that Cleopatra is a blameless pawn who was manipulated by men.

Suddenly, frantic female servants and nurses spill out of the palace. Belzanor orders his men to stop them. He calls for Ftatateeta, Cleopatra's chief nurse. Ftatateeta emerges from the crowd and approaches Belzanor, who introduces himself, haughtily, as "the captain of the Queen's guard, descended from the gods." Ftatateeta is unimpressed and tells Belzanor that his "divine ancestors were proud to be painted on the wall in the pyramids of the kings whom [her] fathers served." Belzanor ignores this and orders Ftatateeta to fetch Cleopatra. Ftatateeta insists that Cleopatra has run away. After the Persian threatens Ftatateeta with his knife, she reluctantly explains that Cleopatra worships sacred cats and has likely run away to the desert to seek refuge with the **Sphinx**. Just then, the Nubian sentinel emerges from the palace and announces that the sacred white cat is missing. Panic ensues.

Belzanor's efforts to exert dominance over Ftatateeta by bragging about his position and divine ancestry backfires when Ftatateeta uses these attributes against him. She suggests that his authority makes him not divine and powerful, but complicit in a long history of exploitation and oppression of lower classes like her ancestors, who built the pyramids whose walls immortalized Belzanor's godly ancestors. Ftatateeta suggests that there is an exploitative underbelly hiding in plain sight behind powerful civilizations. Her comments pertain to ancient Egypt, but Shaw uses her remark to criticize the British Empire of his contemporary Victorian England as well, suggesting that the British Empire's power and reach is only as powerful and good as the disadvantaged peoples it mistreated to form its colonies.

ACT 1

A strange mist cuts through the darkness, and the quiet sound of the harp of Memnon fills the air. A full moon illuminates the desert, and the **Sphinx** becomes visible. A young girl lies sleeping atop a pile of red poppies one of the Sphinx's paws. Trumpet notes blast through the silence to announce the arrival of Julius Caesar. He enters, saluting and praising the Sphinx, whom he considers a kindred spirit. Caesar and the Sphinx have their differences: for instance, the Sphinx remains calm, still, and assured, whereas Caesar wanders around, troubled and confused. Yet, both relate better to each other than to humanity. "Rome is a madman's dream: this is my Reality," declares Caesar, who believes it was his destiny to come here.

Memnon is a figure from Greek mythology. He was the king of Aethiopia, a region in Africa thought to be located south of Egypt. He was a fierce, respected warrior on par with Achilles. The harp reference comes from the writings of Pausanias, who describes how the sound of harp music can be heard at sunrise each morning beside the Colossi of Memnon, two stone statues depicting the Pharoah Amenhotep III. That Caesar's approach is accompanied by this harp music situates him geographically in Egypt and alludes to his military prowess, insinuating that it's on par with Memnon's. When Caesar compares himself to the Sphinx, he is suggesting that he has achieved the same level of power and cultural significance as the Sphinx. He also implies that his culture is superior to Egyptian culture when he suggests that he was destined to come to Egypt. While the Sphinx, a relic of antiquity, enchants Caesar, he ultimately feels entitled to replace the old world it represents with his newer, supposedly superior civilization.

Caesar's speech wakes the girl. Upon seeing Caesar, she calls out to him, addressing him as "Old gentleman." Caesar startles, then takes offense to being called an old man. He can't see the girl and thinks that the **Sphinx** is speaking to him. He runs toward the Sphinx and discovers the girl nestled between its paws. The girl introduces herself as Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Unaware of Caesar's identity, Cleopatra warns him of the approaching Roman army and urges him to hide with her, since the Romans will eat them both if they find them. The girl confuses Caesar, and he assumes that he must be dreaming.

Many fictitious and historical accounts of Caesar's life depict him as a larger-than-life, heroic figure. Shaw strays from this depiction, rendering Caesar a normal, middle-aged person who is self-conscious about his age. In another instance of Shaw straying from tradition, Cleopatra and Caesar's initial encounter is humiliating and comical rather than seductive and romantic.

Cleopatra sits on the **Sphinx**'s left paw and offers Caesar the right. She asks him if he's seen her white sacred cat. She brought the cat with her to sacrifice to the Sphinx, but it ran away after she left the city. Caesar hasn't seen the cat. He asks Cleopatra if she lives nearby. She explains that she's the Queen and will live in the palace at Alexandria after she kills her brother, who has banished her from the kingdom. Cleopatra can't wait to be old enough to do whatever she wants, and she fantasizes aloud about poisoning enslaved people and watching them suffer.

Cleopatra's immature ideas about what power entails—being able to do whatever she wants and boss people around—further emphasizes her youthful naivete. She's a far cry from the ruthless, competent queen that many historical and fictitious accounts of her life depict her as being. Her ruthlessness—wanting to see enslaved people squirm in pain—is perhaps less of an unchecked evil than a youthful disregard for mortality, or a youthful selfishness.

Still convinced that he is dreaming, Caesar accuses Cleopatra of being an "impossible little dream witch," which prompts her to laugh and call Caesar "a funny old gentleman." Caesar cringes as Cleopatra reminds him, yet again, of his old age. Undeterred, Cleopatra gushes to Caesar about how much she loves young, strong men. While Caesar certainly isn't young, Cleopatra admits, she's been lonely and is happy to have someone to talk to. She wonders aloud if the Romans might know any sorcerers who could use magic to transport them away from the **Sphinx**.

The names that Caesar and Cleopatra call each other in this scene further emphasize their extreme age gap for comic effect. Shaw knocks these two familiar historical figures from the pedestal of greatness, showing them as the real people they might have been: not immune to the foolishness of youth, nor the vulnerability of aging.

Still unaware of Caesar's true identity, Cleopatra confides in her new friend how frightened she is of the Romans, who—she's been told—are ruthless, barbaric cannibals. Their leader, Julius Caesar, is worst of all. Caesar asks Cleopatra if she wants to see a real Roman, but the prospect terrifies Cleopatra. Caesar tries to calm her down, reminding her that it's only a dream. She removes a pin from her hair and pokes it into his arm repeatedly to show Caesar that he's mistaken. Caesar yells at Cleopatra, causing her to cry. Caesar calms down and gently reminds the girl that queens don't cry.

Cleopatra further shows her youthful gullibility by believing truly ridiculous stories she's been told about Romans being evil monsters who eat people. Shaw develops an interesting power dynamic between Cleopatra and Caesar here. Cleopatra temporarily, briefly gains the upper hand over Caesar by making him feel self-conscious about his age, but he easily puts her in her place by yelling at her and hurting her feelings. Their relationship in this scene is more akin to that of a parent and child than of romantic partners.

It suddenly strikes Caesar that Cleopatra is right—he's not dreaming—and he hurriedly gets up to return to his camp. Still terrified of the approaching Roman soldiers, Cleopatra wraps her arms around him and begs him to stay. After a pause, Caesar asks Cleopatra to examine his "rather long nose" in the moonlight. Cleopatra looks at Caesar, realizes that he is a Roman, and screams. She jumps down from the **Sphinx**'s paw and attempts to flee, but Caesar catches her. If she stays, Caesar tells Cleopatra, he'll teach her how to avoid being eaten by the Romans. Cleopatra accepts Caesar's offer, and Caesar (still hiding his true identity) explains that Caesar doesn't eat women—only girls and cats. If Cleopatra wants to survive, she must meet Caesar at her palace and convince him that she is a woman. Cleopatra reluctantly agrees. She and Caesar make their way to the palace.

A so-called "Roman nose" or "Aquiline nose" is a nose with a prominent bridge. In post-Enlightenment Europe, the racialized stereotype was thought to be a sign of intelligence. This is what Caesar is alluding to when he asks for Cleopatra to observe his "rather long nose," causing her to immediately recognizes that she's been in the presence of a Roman this entire time. Caesar is using his new relationship with Cleopatra as a political maneuver to get himself in at the royal palace at Alexandria. It's a political relationship rather than a romantic one, which, too, differs from previous historical and fictitious accounts.

Caesar and Cleopatra arrive at the palace and enter the throne room. Following Caesar's prompting, Cleopatra timidly asks an enslaved Nubian person to light all the lamps. Just then, Ftatateeta enters, sternly orders the enslaved person to stop what he's doing, and scolds Cleopatra for disobeying her and running away. Cleopatra cowers in fear. Caesar interferes, ordering the enslaved person to obey his queen's orders and criticizing Cleopatra for not exerting power over Ftatateeta. She won't fool Caesar if she behaves so timidly, Caesar tells her. Caesar turns to leave, but Cleopatra begs him to stay. He relents and orders Ftatateeta to kneel before Cleopatra. When Ftatateeta hesitates, Caesar asks the enslaved person if he knows how to behead a person. The enslaved person nods enthusiastically and flashes a menacing smile. Caesar's intimidation works: Ftatateeta kneels before Cleopatra and apologizes for her disobedience.

Before Cleopatra meets Caesar, she's not an experienced, capable leader—she's a young girl who's afraid that her nurse will punish her. This scene juxtaposes Cleopatra's youth with Caesar's experience in another way, showing how Caesar knows how to exert power over others—here, by implicitly threatening to behead Ftatateeta—to achieve long-term political goals. He's not threatening Ftatateeta out of vengeance or thirst for power. He's doing so to force her to submit to Cleopatra, which will provide Cleopatra with a sense of power. Caesar has reasons for wanting Cleopatra in power, though it remains unclear why at this point in the play.

Ftatateeta's submission excites Cleopatra, who eagerly orders Ftatateeta to leave the **throne** room. Before Ftatateeta can leave the room, Cleopatra finds a snake-skin on the throne and runs after Ftatateeta to beat her with it. When Caesar rushes forward to stop the beating, Cleopatra runs toward the Nubian slave and beats him, instead. The enslaved person flees. Caesar shakes his head at the monster he's unleashed in Cleopatra, and Cleopatra embraces Caesar. She tells him that she loves him for making her a queen and promises to make him—and all the men she loves—into kings. Cleopatra segues into a fantasy of turning hordes of young men with strong arms into kings and whipping them to death once she tires of them. Her adolescent fantasies make Caesar feels self-conscious about his wrinkled face.

While Caesar has just forced Ftatateeta to submit to Cleopatra to fulfill a long-term political goal, Cleopatra relishes her newfound power, seeing it as a means of obtaining instant gratification. This further positions Caesar as the seasoned, practical leader against Cleopatra, the naïve, power-hungry teenager. Cleopatra's impulse to consider the romantic possibilities of her newfound power—attracting young men and then disposing of them once they no longer please her—offers further evidence of her youthful incompetence. She's not interested in power for diplomatic reasons but for selfish, superficial reasons. While one of this scene's functions is to further pit Caesar's experience against Cleopatra's youthful inexperience, Caesar ultimately undercuts his competence and experience when he appears visibly wounded by Cleopatra's gushing over younger men, feeling self-conscious about his comparatively old, wrinkled face.

Cleopatra comes to her senses and remembers the Roman army's imminent arrival. Still unaware of Caesar's identity, Cleopatra suggests that she and her new companion hide until the Romans leave. However, Caesar convinces Cleopatra that they will find her and eat her if she hides. If Cleopatra wants to trick Caesar and remain alive, Caesar argues, she must not show him that she's afraid. Suddenly, the buccina (a brass instrument used by the ancient Roman army to summon soldiers) sounds, announcing Caesar's arrival. Caesar orders Cleopatra to assemble her servants and prepare to receive Caesar in the **throne** room. Cleopatra summons Ftatateeta and orders her to fetch her queen's robes and crown. Ftatateeta leaves and returns with Cleopatra's regalia and other female servants to help dress her.

Cleopatra's presence in the throne room symbolizes her position as ruler of Egypt. Once more, Shaw subverts earlier depictions of Cleopatra's relationship with Caesar by suggesting that Caesar is using and manipulating Cleopatra's youthful naivete—here, her childish fear of the Romans—for political gain. Earlier depictions have Cleopatra as the manipulator, using her beauty and sensuality to manipulate men like Mark Antony for political gain.

An enslaved person runs into the **throne** room to announce the arrival of the Romans. Cleopatra wants to follow them, but Caesar holds tightly to her wrist. She stares emotionlessly ahead as the sound of the approaching Roman soldiers echoes through the corridor outside the throne room. Caesar seats himself on the throne. When the Roman soldiers enter the room, they all shout "Hail Caesar." Cleopatra turns to Caesar and stares at him in disbelief. She runs to him, weeps, and collapses in his arms.

Cleopatra's impulse to follow the enslaved people and servants out of the throne room shows how incapable and reluctant she is to actually rule. She's attracted to the superficial aspects of power, such as telling people what to do, but she's too young and afraid to fulfill the actual responsibilities of a ruler. When Caesar seats himself on Cleopatra's throne, he symbolically transfers Cleopatra's power to himself. He has successfully ingratiated himself with her to earn himself a position on the royal throne. Correspondingly, she drops to her knees before him like an obeying subject, realizing that she has been played. Further, she's genuinely grateful that he chose to spare her despite the rumors she believes about bloodthirsty, brutal Romans.

ACT 2

Ptolemy Dionysus, the temperamental 10-year-old king of Egypt, follows his guardian, Pothinus, into the loggia at the royal palace in Alexandria where his Egyptian court has assembled to greet him. Ptolemy's tutor, Theodotus, a wise old man, and Achillas, the general of Ptolemy's troops, are also there. Achillas is tall, handsome, and respected, though he's rather dull. Pothinus is a 50-year-old eunuch with a lot of zest and enthusiasm, though he's rather "common" and ill-tempered.

A loggia is a room with one or more open sides. Ptolemy is even younger than Cleopatra (Shaw's Ptolemy is 10, as opposed to the historical Ptolemy, who was 15 during his dynastic dispute with Cleopatra), so it's logical to assume that his guardians are manipulating him to achieve their own political goals, just as Cleopatra's guardians and Caesar are influencing her. Certainly, the stage directions' characterization of Pothinus as an enthusiastic, "common," and ill-tempered man evoke somebody who's bitter about lacking the power they think they deserve, and who therefore has reason to manipulate Ptolemy for personal and political gain.

Ptolemy nervously sits on the **throne**. Pothinus tells the court that the Ptolemy has an announcement to make. Ptolemy begins his speech, though he sounds as though he's reciting a script, and he frequently turns to Pothinus for help remembering what to say next. Ptolemy tells the court that he is the firstborn son of Auletes the Flute Blower, who was king until Ptolemy's sister, Berenice, removed him from the throne. She took control of his kingdom until the gods sent a Roman captain named Mark Antony to restore Auletes's power and behead Berenice. After Auletes's death, his other daughter, Cleopatra, took control of the kingdom. What's more, Cleopatra and her witch, Ftatateeta, have cast a spell on Julius Caesar to ensure that he upholds Cleopatra's illegitimate rule in Egypt. Suddenly awash with "political passion," Pothinus vows not to let a foreigner unseat the king from his rightful throne.

Ptolemy's nervous posture on the throne suggests that he, like Cleopatra, is inexperienced and ill-equipped to be an effective leader. That Pothinus must consistently help Ptolemy remember bits of a speech, which his wavering cadence suggests he didn't even write in the first place, serves as further evidence of his incompetence and inexperience. That Pothinus deems Ftatateeta a witch speaks to the way society treats women. Ftatateeta's support for Cleopatra to rule Egypt is motivated by the same things that motivate Pothinus—a desire to achieve personal and political ends through her connection to one of the royal heirs to the throne. Yet, he construes her as an unhinged, power-hungry witch rather than a politically pragmatic person like himself.

Just then, a burly, middle-aged Roman officer named Rufio appears in the loggia and announces Caesar's arrival. Caesar enters. He wears a wreath on his head to hide his baldness. His secretary, Brittanus, walks beside him. Like Caesar, Brittanus is middle-aged and balding. Caesar approaches Ptolemy, pats him on the shoulder, and sympathetically remarks how boring kinghood must be for a boy Ptolemy's age. Theodotus introduces Caesar to the other members of Ptolemy's court. Caesar comments on the lack of chairs in the court. Ptolemy gets up to offer Caesar his **throne**, but Caesar kindly declines. Rufio spots a tripod with incense burning on it in front of an image of Ra. He picks it up and brings it to Caesar sit on. Other members of the court gasp at Rufio's "Roman resourcefulness and indifference to foreign superstitions."

Caesar doesn't greet Ptolemy as he would a political equal. Like his relationship with Cleopatra, he approaches Ptolemy with patronizing kindness, as one would expect a parent might treat a child. Unlike his interaction with Cleopatra, however, Caesar declines Ptolemy's offer to sit on his royal throne. Symbolically, this could suggest that Ptolemy's status as a male engenders more respect in Caesar. Conversely, it could reflect Ptolemy's involvement in Caesar's plans to secure Roman rule of Egypt, a goal he will achieve through his relationship with Cleopatra, not her brother. Finally, Caesar and Rufio's handling of the tripod reflects their blatant disrespect for and ignorance about Egyptian religion. Shaw seems to suggest that such disrespect is a common characteristic of imperial powers. He's criticizing not only the Romans' treatment of the Egyptian people, but also his contemporary British Empire's treatment of their colonies.

Caesar sits down, prompting more gasps from the Egyptians. He explains to Pothinus that he's come to retrieve the 1,600 talents (money) that the Egyptians owe him. Caesar's request stuns Pothinus, who reluctantly admits that the King's treasury doesn't have that much money since Cleopatra unlawfully took control of the **throne**. He also grumbles about Caesar being petty enough to demand their taxes. Caesar reminds Pothinus that "taxes are the chief business of a conqueror of the world" before ordering the court to fetch Cleopatra. The court is under the impression that Cleopatra has run away to Syria and are shocked when she appears in the doorway, hiding behind Ftatateeta.

When Caesar sits down on the tripod, he symbolically exerts dominance over Egypt and Egyptian culture. The action suggests Egypt's eventual status as a Roman province, which began in 30 B.C.E., years after Caesar's assassination, with Rome's annexation of the Ptolemaic Kingdom. The 1,600 talents Caesar mentions refers to the money Caesar demanded from Ptolemy XII 60 B.C.E. in exchange for protection. Ptolemy paid Caesar by taxing the Egyptian people, which led to a revolt that ultimately necessitated Ptolemy to flee Egypt for Rome. Pothinus's claim that Cleopatra unlawfully took control of the throne is a baseless accusation. In reality, Cleopatra was co-ruling Egypt with her father, (Ptolemy XII), until Ptolemy XII's death in 51 B.C.E., at which point Cleopatra's brother, Ptolemy XIII, became co-ruler. It's worth noting that Ptolemy XIII is the Ptolemy Shaw depicts in the play, though for unclear reasons, the character is listed as Ptolemy XIV in the cast of characters.

Caesar tells Cleopatra to act like a queen. She drags Ptolemy from the **throne**, sits down in his place, and mocks him when he cries. Caesar feel sympathy for Ptolemy and holds his hand, which enrages Cleopatra. She stands up and tells Ptolemy he can have his stupid throne back, if he wants it so badly. When Caesar tries to scare Cleopatra into submission, she tells him that she's not afraid of him anymore and that he ought to eat her husband, instead. The Romans are shocked to learn that Cleopatra is referring to Ptolemy, her brother. Theodotus explains that Egyptian royals may only marry other royals.

Cleopatra relishes physically dragging Ptolemy from the throne. Her mocking behavior and Ptolemy's tears reminds the audience of the royal siblings' young ages and complete ineptitude as leaders. In this scene, they become spoiled children fighting over a toy they don't want to share rather than political adversaries vying for the power to govern. The Romans' disgusted response to Cleopatra and Ptolemy's marriage reveals their intolerance for cultures different than their own, a minor criticism on Shaw's part of the attitudes that conquering imperialist powers, such as the British Empire, exhibit in the lands they colonize.

Caesar suggests that Ptolemy and Cleopatra rule Egypt together. However, Pothinus isn't happy with this arrangement. If the taxes that the Egyptians owe the Romans are the price they must pay for their freedom, Pothinus argues, then Caesar simply should take the money and leave them alone. The Egyptian courtiers applaud and shout "Egypt for the Egyptians!" Tension builds in the loggia. Achillas, the Roman general whom Aulus Gabinus left to command the Egyptian army, announces that he will side with the Egyptians, who outnumber the Romans. Achillas's betrayal angers Rufio, but it amuses Caesar.

There's nationalist tension beneath Cleopatra and Ptolemy's childish squabble over the royal throne. The Egyptians strongly resent having to yield to Caesar and Roman rule. And yet they'll subtly have to do this if they reinstate Cleopatra's reign, since Cleopatra is backed and sanctioned by Caesar. Losing the support of Achillas, the commander in charge of the occupying Roman army, should be a major blow to Caesar, who should need all the Roman support he can get. But his casual response to Achillas's betrayal implies that he knows more than Rufio and has some trick up his sleeve. His casual response also further develops his character, showing him to be a pragmatic, cool person, unlike Rufio, who becomes easily impassioned by Achillas's betrayal.

Caesar sends for his army. They enter the loggia, revealing that that the Romans greatly outnumber the Egyptians. Britannus declares that the Egyptians are all Caesar's prisoners now, but Caesar disagrees. He argues that the Egyptians are his "guests," not his prisoners. Caesar's merciful treatment of the Egyptians disappoints Cleopatra, and she asks him if he will chop off the Egyptians' heads. Caesar is shocked that Cleopatra would order him to behead her own brother, but Ptolemy stubbornly admits that he'd behead his sister if he had the chance, too. Cleopatra fights the instinct to undermine her new, queenly status by sticking out her tongue at Ptolemy.

Caesar's generosity toward the Egyptians by sparing them their lives and their freedom shows that he is a just, compassionate leader uninterested in vengeance and unnecessary cruelty. This sets him apart from Britannus and Rufio, whose loyalty to Rome and Caesar drives their desire for the Egyptians and Roman traitors like Achillas to be punished. Indeed,, they seek vengeance even when doing so isn't politically necessary, given the fact that the Romans outnumber the Egyptians.

Caesar tells Pothinus that any Egyptian who wants to leave is free to go. Rufio fumes at Caesar's clemency. Determined to show Caesar that he is still indebted to Ptolemy, Pothinus summons forth Lucius Septimius, a clean-shaven, fit man dressed in a Roman officer's uniform. Lucius informs Caesar that he beheaded Pompey—Caesar's rival—upon Pompey's arrival on Egyptian soil. Theodotus chimes in, eagerly adding that Pompey's wife and child witnessed the beheading. Theodotus tells Caesar that Pompey's death enables Caesar to "keep [his] reputation for clemency, and have [his] vengeance too." Caesar calls Lucius a murderer and laments how Lucius's actions have forced vengeance upon him. He and Pompey might have been rivals, Caesar argues, but not by their choosing.

The historical figure Lucius Septimius, along with Achillas, really were responsible for Pompey's assassination. This is the assassination that Ra was referring to in the play's prologue. The relish with which Pothinus, Septimius, and Theodotus deliver news of the assassination shows that they have a different ethical and political stance on vengeance than Caesar, who resents that Pothinus's people have forced him to "have [his] vengeance" through Pompey's murder. Whereas an impassioned, emotional drive for vengeance drove Pothinus to order Pompey's murder, Caesar adopts a more pragmatic attitude. He argues that it is unethical for him to kill Pompey, since their becoming rivals was arbitrary in the first place.

Lucius scoffs at Caesar's grief, arguing that Caesar was okay with exacting vengeance on Vercingetorix's defeated men, whom he defeated in Gaul. Caesar argues that these casualties were "a necessary protection to the commonwealth, a duty of statesmanship—follies and fictions ten times bloodier than honest vengeance." Furthermore, he now sees that he was a fool to allow Vercingetorix's men to perish for Rome. Caesar argues that it's not right to use these deaths to justify Pompey's slaying, either. Caesar tells Lucius that he, like the Egyptians, is free to go. Angry that Caesar has let Lucius off the hook for Pompey's murder, Rufio angrily accuses Lucius of being a Republican.

Lucius is referring to Vercingetorix, king and chieftain of the Arvenerni tribe who led the Gauls in a battle against Julius Caesar during Caesar's Gallic Wars in 46 B.C.E. Vercingetorix was executed despite having willfully surrendered to Caesar in 52 B.C.E. at the Battle of Alesia. The Roman victory played a major role in the creation of the Roman Empire, and Caesar argues that exacting vengeance on Vercingetorix and his forces was different than Lucius Septimius exacting vengeance on Pompey, since the former was "a necessary protection to the commonwealth," whereas Pompey's murder was committed purely out of spite. Further, Caesar even questions whether the killing of Vercingetorix's men was as necessary as he once thought it was. In this scene, Caesar further establishes himself as a leader who condemns unnecessary bloodshed and other acts of cruelty.

Caesar puts his hand on Rufio's shoulder and leads him out of the loggia to cool down. After Lucius exits, Caesar, Rufio, and Britannus form a circle to strategize. Rufio suspects that Lucius would behead them, too, if he had the chance. Caesar cautions Rufio against making assumptions about Lucius and reminds him that they must not fight Lucius's vengeance with vengeance of their own. Britannus disagrees, but Rufio tells him that Caesar's mind is made up and there's no sense in arguing with him.

Caesar leading Rufio out of the loggia to calm down juxtaposes Caesar's calm, measured, pragmatic personality with Rufio's impassioned, impulsive personality. Caesar's detached, objective demeanor allows him to assess the Romans' current situation more clearly than Rufio. He recognizes Rufio's suspicions about Lucius's willingness to harm them as based on Rufio's anger at Lucius for killing Pompey, more than any indication Lucius has given them that he plans to do them harm.

Caesar turns around and realizes that Ptolemy is still in the hall. Rufio grabs Ptolemy's hand to lead him away. Ptolemy asks Caesar if he's kicking him out of his palace. Caesar addresses the boy kindly and promises not to hurt him. However, he advises Ptolemy that it will be safer for him to be with his own people rather than here, where he is "in the lion's mouth." Ptolemy motions to Rufio as he informs Caesar that he's afraid of "the jackal," not the lion. Caesar applauds Ptolemy's bravery, which makes Cleopatra jealous. She asks Caesar if he'd like her to leave with the others. Caesar tells Cleopatra that he'd prefer that she stay. Cleopatra feigns indifference and remains in the loggia.

That Caesar and the others fail to notice Ptolemy is further evidence of Ptolemy's childish, unintimidating demeanor. He doesn't have the authoritative presence of a respected ruler; he's a child whom adults overlook. Cleopatra's irritation toward Caesar for praising Ptolemy's bravery provides additional insight into the superficial, childish aspect of their fight for the royal throne. It also further develops the kind of relationship she has with Caesar. She wants him to pay attention to and approve of her like a parent might, more than like a romantic partner would.

Caesar calls for Ftatateeta. When she appears at the door, Caesar informs her that Cleopatra will hold court here in Alexandria and tasks her with assembling female servants to wait on the queen. Cleopatra tells Ftatateeta that she will have her thrown into the river Nile if she doesn't follow Caesar's orders. Cleopatra's brutality shocks Caesar. This prompts Cleopatra to accuse Caesar of being "very sentimental." Though, she suggests, if Caesar listens to her, he eventually "will soon learn to govern." Cleopatra's unearned confidence stuns Caesar. Ftatateeta flashes him an I-told-you-so grin before leaving to fetch the other servants. Once everyone else has left, Caesar warns Cleopatra that she knows less than she thinks she does.

Another characteristic of Cleopatra's behavior that exemplifies her youth is her inflated sense of confidence and corresponding lack of self-awareness. When Cleopatra accuses Caesar of being "very sentimental" for protesting her threat to punish Ftatateeta, she acts as though Caesar hasn't just taught her how to stand up to Ftatateeta in the first place. The knowing look that Ftatateeta flashes at Caesar as she departs positions herself and Caesar as equals—as adults who must humor the antics of a spoiled child.

Caesar tells Cleopatra that he has work to do and must leave. Cleopatra reminds Caesar that she's made him a king, and that kings don't work, which is something she learned from her late father. Cleopatra describes her father as a great ruler who beheaded her sister after she tried to steal the throne from him. He only regained control of the kingdom after a brave, handsome young man—much younger than Caesar, Cleopatra observes—traveled across the desert and slayed Cleopatra's sister's husband. Caesar informs Cleopatra that it was *he* who sent the man, a captain named Mark Antony. Cleopatra eagerly asks Caesar if he thinks Antony might like to be her husband. Caesar says yes, though he's visibly bothered by Cleopatra's interest in Antony's youth. He also warns Cleopatra that many women love Antony. Unmoved, Cleopatra vows to woo Antony and make him kill all the other women.

Cleopatra's inherited beliefs about royalty not needing to work adds another dimension to Cleopatra and Caesar's opposite philosophies of power and authority. So far, Caesar has shown himself to be a just leader who strives not to abuse his power and who condemns unnecessary bloodshed. Cleopatra seems ruthless and unprincipled on the outside, but the reality is that she is simply too young and experienced to have formed any personal philosophies about power. Mark Antony served as a general in Caesar's civil war. According to the Greek historian Plutarch, it was Antony who, in 55 B.C.E., convinced Aulis Gabinus to lead Roman forces into battle against the Egyptian kingdom, who, acting on behalf of Berenice IV, Pharaoh Ptolemy XII's daughter, had deposed Ptolemy XII. Cleopatra's instinct to fixate on Antony romantically rather than politically is further evidence of her political incompetence.

Caesar informs Cleopatra that her father never paid Caesar the 16,000 talents he owed him for restoring his lost crown. Because Caesar will likely never receive the unpaid debt, he reminds Cleopatra, it's important that he returns to his work. Cleopatra pleads with Caesar to tell her more about Mark Antony, but Caesar warns her that Pothinus will cut off harbor access if Caesar doesn't get started on his work. And if nobody can access the harbor, then Mark Antony can't come to Egypt, either. Hearing this inspires Cleopatra to have a change of heart, and she insists that Caesar start working immediately.

Cleopatra lacks the ability to focus on long-term goals. She's too irritated by the fact that Caesar is ignoring her to realize the importance of Caesar forming a cohesive military strategy against the Egyptians. Her youthful selfishness blinds her to the urgency of the situation, and it's only through enticing her with the prospect of seeing Mark Antony that Caesar manages to disengage her. His strategy for getting Cleopatra off his back is akin to a parent coercing their young child to do their schoolwork or clean their room with the promise of sweets or TV time.

Just as Caesar is about to leave to find Brittanus, a wounded Roman soldier enters the loggia and announces that Achillas's Roman army has arrived in the city, and the citizens are fighting back. Rufio and Britannus, who have been watching the battle from the balcony, enter the loggia. Caesar relays the soldier's news. Rufio stares incredulously as Caesar orders him to burn all the Roman ships and leave most of Egypt for the Egyptians, but he reluctantly leaves to deliver Caesar's message. He returns a while later and tells Caesar that the Egyptians have taken the west harbor and lit five ships on fire. Caesar asks if they've gotten to the east harbor or the lighthouse yet. Rufio is annoyed and tells Caesar he ought to do the work himself if he wants it done faster. Caesar gently asks for Rufio's forgiveness.

Caesar's apology to Rufio provides further insight into his style of leadership. He treats his underlings with respect and is mindful about abusing his power. Caesar's command to burn the Roman ships and seize the island of Pharos instead of the main city of Alexandria seems not to be another instance in which Caesar is pragmatically considering long-term consequences in his military strategizing and not abusing power by attempting to acquire more land and power than he needs. It's likely he has some reason for wanting to leave Alexandria alone—to leave Egypt for the Egyptians, though his underlings can't figure out why that might be.

Just then, Theodotus runs in, visibly shaken. He informs Caesar that the library of Alexandria is on fire, but the news doesn't faze Caesar or Rufio. Theodotus accuses Caesar of being a brutish soldier who doesn't appreciate "the value of books" and recorded history. Caesar argues that Egyptians' lives are worth more than any book. Furthermore, the world ought to "build the future with [the past's] ruins." He calls out the hypocrisy of Theodotus having such high regard for a few books while gleefully celebrating Pompey's beheading.

Theodotus and Caesar represent two competing ideologies about history's value to the present. Theodotus believes that humanity must preserve and learn from its past and accuses Caesar of having no sense of "the value of books," history, or tradition. Caesar, in contrast, sees Theodotus's fixation on the past as counterintuitive and detrimental to the advancement of civilization. He thinks that the present task of saving lives should take precedent over saving burning books. Symbolically, this suggests that worshipping the past actually diminishes the quality of life of people in the present and future. Caesar sees progress and setting one's sights on the future as vital to humanity's wellbeing.

Theodotus leaves to try to save the library of Alexandria, and Caesar orders Pothinus to tell the Egyptians not to kill any more Roman soldiers. Rufio returns and berates Caesar for letting more Egyptians go. Caesar laughs at Rufio's outrage and reminds him that every Egyptian soldier that they capture requires them to imprison two Roman soldiers to stand guard. Rufio scowls, unhappy about Caesar outwitting him yet again.

Caesar's ability to set aside his personal feelings about the Egyptian army and Achillas's betrayal allows him to strategize effectively. Rufio's outrage and desire for vengeance prevents him from accurately assessing what vengeance will actually require, which is manpower (two Roman soldiers for every captured Egyptian soldier) that would be better allocated elsewhere.

Cleopatra runs into the loggia, Caesar's helmet and sword in hand. Britannus trails after her. Cleopatra dresses Caesar for battle. When she removes his wreath, she sees his bald spot and bursts into laughter. When she places the Roman helmet on Caesar's head, she jokingly remarks that he "look[s] only about 50 in it!" Her remarks visibly irritate and embarrass Caesar.

This scene is played for comedic effect. Cleopatra undercuts Caesar's image of himself as a brave soldier by calling attention to his bald spot, a sore point for Caesar, who we've already seen is self-conscious about his age. In another amusing twist, Shaw renders the laurel wreath Caesar wears upon his head, typically a symbol of military success and victory in ancient Rome, a comical toupee of sorts—not a symbol of Caesar's bravery but of his self-consciousness.

Caesar and his men prepare to head to battle. He asks Cleopatra if she's scared. She says no, but not convincingly. Caesar orders her to go to the battle and watch him take Pharos island: if she is to be Queen, it's important for her to watch battles. Before Caesar, Rufio, and Britannus can leave, Cleopatra tells them that they won't be able to leave Egypt, since the Egyptian army, headed by Theodotus, is emptying the harbor with buckets to extinguish the fire at the library of Alexandria. Rufio scolds Caesar, insisting that it was his clemency that allowed this setback to happen. As usual, however, Caesar is one step ahead of the game. He tells Rufio that he wanted to distract the Egyptians with the fire to buy his army time to seize the lighthouse. Rufio scowls at Caesar's cleverness. Cleopatra waves as Caesar and his men depart.

Caesar outwits Theodotus, who is too distracted by the burning library of Alexandria to prevent Caesar from capturing the lighthouse on Pharos. Not only does this lead to a literal victory for Caesar, but it's also a symbolic victory of Caesar's progressive outlook over Theodotus's embrace of the past. Theodotus's adherence to the past stands in the way of saving his people and culture and advancing their civilization, leaving him and his people vulnerable to the outside threat of Caesar's Roman army. Caesar's refusal to choose the past over the present and future gives him the upper hand.

ACT 3

A Roman sentinel stands guard outside the palace at Alexandria and looks across the harbor toward the lighthouse. He's so absorbed in his work that he hardly notices when Ftatateeta, Apollodorus the Sicilian, and four Egyptian porters carrying rolls of carpet, approach him. Apollodorus calls out to the sentinel and criticizes the Romans' inattentiveness—had Apollodorus not signaled his arrival, the sentinel would have been the fourth Roman guard who failed to notice his party. Unamused, the sentinel informs Apollodorus that the guards are watching the land and water, keeping their eyes peeled for Egyptian forces that might arrive to halt Caesar's attack on the island of Pharos.

Presumably, Ftatateeta and Apollodorus are headed to the royal palace to deliver the carpets to Cleopatra. The middle of a heated civil war seems an odd time for them to do this, which suggests that they might be up to something—perhaps they're hiding something inside the rolled-up carpets. Like many other characters in Shaw's play, Apollodorus was a real historical figure. He was one of Cleopatra's royal followers and supposedly helped her enter the palace of Alexandria to see Julius Caesar, ingratiate herself with him, and gain his support during the power struggle over the royal throne with Ptolemy XIII.

Motioning to the rolled carpets, the sentinel asks if Apollodorus is a carpet merchant. The question offends Apollodorus, who is a patrician. Apollodorus explains that he has *selected* the world's finest carpets to bring to Cleopatra so that she may choose how to decorate her palace. Nevertheless, the sentinel refuses to let the party through without the password.

Being a patrician, a culturally informed member of the aristocracy, is a central feature of Apollodorus's identity. He resents the sentinel calling him a merchant because it suggests that he's a culturally illiterate commoner. Shaw seems to use this character to poke fun at contemporary British culture, where "art for art's sake," or the philosophy that art should exist and be appreciated for its craft and beauty outside of fulfilling some social or political function, was a fashionable philosophy.

As Apollodorus and the sentinel argue back and forth, Ftatateeta grabs the sentinel from behind. She orders Apollodorus to stab him through the throat. Other soldiers rush forward to defend the sentinel and disarm Ftatateeta. Ftatateeta is disappointed that Apollodorus didn't kill the sentinel when he had the chance. The centurion orders his men to back down after Apollodorus informs him they are coming to the palace on Cleopatra's orders. However, the centurion tells Apollodorus that nobody—not even the queen—will be allowed back into the harbor. Apollodorus and the others continue toward the palace.

Ftatateeta's insistence that Apollodorus kill the sentinel shows that she has a similar attitude toward vengeance and violence as Cleopatra. Thus far, Shaw has portrayed the Egyptian court as brutal and unreasonable, and in that regard, little different from the personality of Cleopatra, who is a literal child. It's possible to read this as a comment about an imperial power's tendency to infantilize the subjects of the nations it conquers.

Cleopatra spots the approaching party and calls out to Ftatateeta from the palace window. She runs to greet them, ignoring Ftatateeta's insistence that it isn't proper for her to let men to see her. Cleopatra tells Apollodorus that she doesn't have time to choose a carpet today and orders her visitors to fetch her a boat instead. Apollodorus complies, but the sentinel refuses to let them pass. Cleopatra orders Ftatateeta to strangle the sentinel. Apollodorus threatens the man with his sword. The violence enthralls Cleopatra, and she looks on excitedly from a distance.

This is the second time Ftatateeta has called attention to the scandal of letting men see Cleopatra outside of rigorously structured circumstances. Perhaps this is Shaw's effort to further recast Cleopatra as a young girl whose activities are highly monitored, and who is protected by the adults in her life, rather than the scheming, manipulative harlot she is depicted as in other fictitious retellings of her life (and in unflattering historical depictions of her written by the Romans).

The centurion arrives and explains to Cleopatra that Caesar has ordered the Roman soldiers not to let her leave without his permission, and it's his "duty" to obey Caesar. Apollodorus argues that "duty" is the term "a stupid man" uses when he is "doing something he is ashamed of." Apollodorus attempts to bribe the soldiers into abandoning their posts with the promise of wine, but to no avail.

Apollodorus's insult about the centurion's adherence to "duty" more broadly critiques the idea that conformity begets oppression. He's suggesting that people allow themselves to partake in morally dubious acts with the reasoning that they are simply doing their job or following orders. Apollodorus's noble position is played for comedic intent here, though, since not letting through a couple of carpets to protect the royal residents during a civil war is arguably a reasonable, innocuous position.

Suddenly, Cleopatra has an idea. She asks Apollodorus if he's willing to bring a carpet of her choosing to Caesar and take "great, GREAT care of it." Apollodorus says that he can, and Cleopatra orders him to stay put while she and Ftatateeta run into the palace to select a carpet. Apollodorus remains outside with the Roman soldiers. He points ahead, observing that the Egyptian army is moving ahead with their goal to recapture Pharos. The centurion orders some of his men to stay put while the rest go with him to warn the south posts of the approaching Egyptian army.

Cleopatra seems to want to get some item or piece of information to Caesar, and she's realized that she can do so in a rolled-up carpet. This is why she makes Apollodorus to take "great, GREAT care of it," because whatever she wants to transport is fragile and must be handled with care. It's unclear what Cleopatra needs to get to Caesar, but she demonstrates that she's adopted some of Caesar's cleverness and pragmatism by developing a clever way to accomplish the task.

As the centurion and his men leave, the porters and Ftatateeta reappear with a carpet. Ftatateeta tells Apollodorus that the carpet is a present from Cleopatra to Caesar. It has crystal goblets and sacred pigeons' eggs rolled up inside it and must be handled very delicately. Apollodorus pays the porters before leaving to beat the Egyptians to the lighthouse. Ftatateeta watches the boat drift away and begs the gods to "bear her safely to the shore." The sentinel realizes that Ftatateeta has smuggled Cleopatra onto the boat in the rolled-up carpet. He curses her, and Ftatateeta praises the "Gods of Egypt and Vengeance."

Cleopatra's plan was to wrap herself in the carpet for Apollodorus to deliver to Caesar. The scene is inspired by supposedly true events. It's said that Cleopatra hid herself in a bed-sack or carpet to gain entry into the palace at Alexandria, from which her brother, Ptolemy XIII, had banned her. Ftatateeta's anxiety about the handling of the carpet reveals that, while she condescends and instills fear in Cleopatra, she genuinely seems to care about her wellbeing, as well. Finally, Ftatateeta's praise of the "gods of Egypt and Vengeance" aligns her position on vengeance with Cleopatra and the other Egyptians. She doesn't much seem to care about unnecessary bloodshed.

Meanwhile, at the lighthouse, Rufio rests after the morning's battle, eating dates out his helmet and drinking wine. Caesar stands behind him on the lighthouse balcony, peering anxiously into the distance. Britannus returns from the top of the lighthouse. He reports seeing messengers walking toward them from the island and sets off to meet them. Once alone, Caesar confesses his fear that the Romans will lose the battle. He wishes he had a better idea of how his soldiers across the embankment are doing. Rufio tells Caesar that men his age forget to eat, which could explain why Caesar feels so pessimistic about the war. Rufio offers his helmet of dates to Caesar, insisting he eat some. Caesar takes offense to Rufio's comment about his old age but complies with his request. He feels immediately reinvigorated.

Caesar is a skilled and pragmatic leader, but he's not invincible. Uncertainty haunts him, and he recognizes his capacity to lose battles despite his many victories. Rufio undercuts Caesar's philosophizing when he suggests that Caesar is only grumpy and forlorn because he's too old to remember to eat. This is played for comic effect and further reimagines Caesar as a heroic but human historical figure. As well, that Rufio offers Caesar dates, specifically, seems perhaps to be an indirect reference to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, in which the poisonous snake that Cleopatra sends for to die by suicide is brought to her in a basket, concealed beneath a pile of figs. Perhaps the dates foreshadow Cleopatra's imminent arrival.

Britannus returns and announces that their Rhodian mariners have obtained a bag of letters passed between Pompey's party and the occupying army. He explains that the letters will show Caesar who his enemies are once and for all. To Britannus's horror, Caesar orders him to burn the letters, reasoning that there's no point in condemning men who have since proved themselves to be Caesar's friends and allies. Caesar explains that he "do[es] not make human sacrifices to [his] honor, as [Britannus's] Druids do" and throws the letters into the water.

This is another example of Caesar's disapproval of vengeance. He thinks it's senseless to punish soldiers who betrayed him long ago, since they are no danger to him now and could serve a practical purpose to him in the ongoing battle. He opts to do what's best and leave the soldiers' past wrongs unpunished to serve the Roman army better in the future. When Caesar tells Britannus that he "do[es] not make human sacrifices to [his] honor, as [Britannus's] Druids do," he's alluding to the supposed practice of the Celts and Druids, ancient contemporaries of Britannus, a Briton, to conduct human sacrifices. It's worth noting that much of the existing historical documentation attesting to this are unflattering accounts written by the Classical Greek and Roman civilizations with a political agenda. In fact, Caesar himself wrote disparagingly of the religious rites of the people of Gaul in 44 B.C.E. Shaw seems to be criticizing the tendency of imperial powers to disparage and devalue the customs of the nations they conquer.

Apollodorus approaches Caesar and Britannus outside the lighthouse and explains that he has sailed from Alexandria to give Caesar a gift from Cleopatra. The gift, a Persian carpet, is filled with pigeons' eggs and crystal goblets and must be handled with care. Caesar orders Apollodorus to return to Alexandria and tell Cleopatra to stop goofing around, since he'll be back at the palace later that evening. Apollodorus can't return, however, since somebody threw a bag into the sea which landed on his ship, sinking it. Rufio orders the carpet to be maneuvered off the ship by the crane. Caesar backs away as the crane hoists the carpet into the air. The crane drops the carpet onto the center of the platform, and Rufio and Caesar remove the chain tying it to the crane. The men unroll the carpet, revealing Cleopatra. Caesar is pleased to see her.

Caesar's directive to Apollodorus to tell Cleopatra to stop messing around reframes Cleopatra's clever plot to smuggle herself aboard the ship in a carpet to see Caesar as a less a heroic political maneuver and more a childish ploy to get his attention. The bag that hit and sank Apollodorus's ship is undoubtedly the bag of prisoners' letters that Britannus brought Caesar. It's a bit of absurd and coincidental humor that this bag ends up destroying the group's only option of escaping the island. Symbolically, perhaps, it also suggests that Caesar's merciful nature can sometimes backfire on him, and it might have served him better to exercise vengeance over clemency, seeing as how it was his desire to pardon rather than punish the letter writers that propelled him to throw the bag into the sea without reading any of the letters.

Frazzled but unharmed, Cleopatra gets up, rests her head against Caesar's chest, and begs him not to leave her to lead his soldiers into battle. Rufio angrily tells Cleopatra that the men will perish if Caesar doesn't lead them, but Cleopatra insists that soldiers' lives don't matter. Caesar orders Apollodorus to take Cleopatra back to the palace. She protests, insisting that everybody there wants to kill her. Caesar tells Cleopatra that the soldiers' lives are just as important as hers, so it's essential that he's there to lead them into battle.

Cleopatra's behavior in this scene reaffirms that scheming to see Caesar is less a political plot than the product of her childish obsession with him. She fails to understand the high stakes of the ongoing civil war and has no regard for the lives of soldiers. Her interest in being the ruler of Egypt has nothing to do with political power or leadership and more to do with laying claim to something her brother wants. Again, though, Shaw's portrayal of Cleopatra is sympathetic. She's a selfish child who can't see beyond her own desires, not a heartless authoritarian leader.

Britannus frantically calls down from the parapet to announce that the Egyptians have arrived at the barricade at the west harbor. Caesar bemoans the Romans stationed at the barricade who will now die due to his miscalculations. Rufio blames Caesar for letting Cleopatra distract him from strategizing effectively. Apollodorus returns from the shore. He informs the group that he has dropped the ladder into the sea. While this ensures that the Egyptians can't reach the group, it also traps them at the lighthouse.

Caesar's characteristics as a leader come through more in this scene, in which he places his anxieties about the soldiers he commands above concern for himself. The placement of this scene directly after Cleopatra has suggested that the soldiers' lives don't matter further emphasizes their opposing principles as leaders. Caesar's age and experience give him more empathy for others than Cleopatra has.

Apollodorus tells the group that he can swim to the harbor and send a ship to retrieve them. Caesar suggests that the rest of them swim, too. Rufio points out that Caesar is twice Apollodorus's age and might not be up for such strenuous activity. Rufio's slight offends Caesar, and he decides to be the first of them to jump into the water. Caesar tells Rufio to throw Cleopatra into the water once Caesar rises to the surface and then jump in himself. Britannus can't swim, so Caesar tells him to wait for the rest of them in the lighthouse. Caesar jumps into the water. Cleopatra squirms and shrieks as Rufio tosses her into the sea and then jumps in himself. After a while, Britannus hears cheering coming from the distant sea, signaling that the others have reached the harbor and secured a ship.

Caesar is pragmatic and level-headed under normal circumstances, but it's clear that his enthusiasm about jumping into the sea is less a practical matter of survival than an impassioned effort to prove that he is still strong and physically capable despite his advanced (relative to Apollodorus) age. That Caesar and Rufio decide to throw Cleopatra into the water without consulting her further establishes her as a young person incapable of making decisions about herself and others. Once more, Caesar handles Cleopatra as though she were his child, not a political peer.

ACT 4

Six months later, Cleopatra rests in her chamber at the palace in Alexandria and listens to a slave girl play the harp. The girl's instructor, an old musician, sits nearby and assesses the performance. Ftatateeta and some other female enslaved people listen to the performance from the doorway. Cleopatra asks the musician if he can teach her to play the harp, too, since Caesar loves music. The musician tells Cleopatra the task will take four years, since she must first learn the philosophy of Pythagoras. Cleopatra asks if the slave girl learned to play this way, too, and the musician explains that the girl is enslaved and "learns as a dog learns." Cleopatra tells him that she will learn the slave girl's way, since she plays better than the musician, anyway. Cleopatra pays the girl and dismisses them.

Pythagoras was an ancient Greek philosopher who supposedly discovered that musical pitches could be translated into mathematical equations. In other words, there's a direct correlation between the length of string on a stringed instrument and the pitch the string produces. There's an inherent elitism in the old musician's claim that knowledge of Pythagoras's theory is necessary to learn the harp, since the enslaved girl (not to mention most contemporary musicians) master their instrument without such extraneous technical knowledge. Cleopatra's rejection of this traditional, institutionally sanctioned type of musical education shows that she has adopted Caesar's progress-oriented personal philosophy, rejecting arbitrary reverence to the past and tradition in favor of a more practical approach to the world.

Cleopatra asks her ladies and enslaved people for gossip. One girl, Iras, tells Cleopatra that Pothinus has been attempting to bribe Ftatateeta to speak with Cleopatra. Cleopatra declares that she will only see the guests that *she* wants to see. The girls laugh at Cleopatra. Annoyed, Cleopatra asks the girls if they know why she allows them to say whatever they want, even if it's at her expense. One of the girls, Charmian, replies that it's because Caesar would let them, and Cleopatra copies everything that Caesar does. The girls erupt into laughter.

This scene presents further evidence of just how hard Cleopatra has tried to emulate Caesar's personal principles and approach to leadership. She's trying to treat her subjects with more mercy and compassion, a far cry from her earlier embrace of violence and retribution. Yet, one gets the sense that Cleopatra's new embrace of compassion is less evidence of her new principled demeanor than a childish effort to impress Caesar.

When Ftatateeta returns, Cleopatra asks her if the rumors about Pothinus are true. Ftatateeta sputters. Cleopatra ignores Ftatateeta's discomfort and orders her to accept Pothinus's bribe and bring him to her chamber. Ftatateeta leaves. Iras wishes that Caesar would return to Rome. Charmian agrees, arguing that Caesar makes Cleopatra "so terribly prosy and serious and learned and philosophical." Their conversation ends when Ftatateeta returns with Pothinus.

As established in Act II, Pothinus has a clear incentive to want Ptolemy to have complete control of Egypt, so it's sensible to question his reasons for wanting to speak with Cleopatra. He likely has something up his sleeve to compromise her ability to rule or, perhaps, to create conflict between Cleopatra and Caesar. Charmian's remark about Caesar making Cleopatra "so terribly prosy and serious and learned and philosophical" condescends Cleopatra's newly merciful, empathetic, and measured style of leadership. Charmian portrays the change in Cleopatra as insincere, superficial, and primarily driven by Cleopatra's desire to impress and mimic Caesar.

Cleopatra asks Pothinus if he's heard any news about future battles from his rebel friends. Pothinus reminds her that prisoners don't receive mail, then he accuses her of being a child incapable of understanding the complex matter of war. Cleopatra assures him that she is no longer a child. Cleopatra orders everyone besides Pothinus to leave. Ftatateeta protests, but Cleopatra threatens to throw her into the Nile if she resists. Ftatateeta mutters about Cleopatra being as bad as "what these Romans call a New Woman" but obeys and exits the chamber.

Cleopatra's threat to throw Ftatateeta into the Nile—a remark that recalls the power-hungry embrace of violence she exhibited prior to Caesar's mentorship—undercuts her claim to Pothinus that she is no longer a child. While Cleopatra might have internalized Caesar's teachings about mercy and pragmatism on a superficial level, she's still an immature teenager prone to lapses in judgment and impulsivity.

Once Cleopatra and Pothinus are alone, Cleopatra asks Pothinus why he wanted to speak to her. He's visibly flustered and claims that he wanted to ask her for his freedom. Cleopatra doesn't believe him, arguing that he would have gone to Caesar for this request, not her. She correctly guesses that Pothinus had planned to approach Cleopatra about something assuming that she was still a naïve child. Now that he sees that she's grown up, he can no longer ask her. Pothinus realizes that Cleopatra really has changed. He wonders aloud whether Cleopatra is really queen or if she, like the rest of them, is enslaved by Caesar. While Cleopatra might be enslaved now, she promises Pothinus that Caesar will make her queen when he departs Egypt for Rome.

Pothinus is visibly uncomfortable because, despite Cleopatra's occasional lapses in judgement, it's clear to him that she really has matured under Caesar's guidance and will be less susceptible to manipulation than Pothinus had hoped she might be. Pothinus's question about whether Cleopatra is acting of her own volition or on Caesar's orders seems to be an attempt to rile Cleopatra, and it works: Pothinus gets Cleopatra to admit to her quest for power and desire for Caesar to leave Egypt. Since Pothinus has incentive to have Cleopatra, once more, deposed, it's reasonable to predict that Pothinus will use Cleopatra's admission against her, perhaps alerting Caesar to Cleopatra's supposed attempt to remove him from Egypt to fulfill her personal political agenda.

Pothinus mentions the rumors floating around that Cleopatra is in love with Caesar. Cleopatra insists that she only admires Caesar for teaching her how to be wise. Moreover, Cleopatra is in love with a different Roman, a man named Mark Antony, whom Caesar has promised to bring to Egypt. After a moment, Pothinus asks Cleopatra why she sent for him today. Cleopatra tells Pothinus that he is wrong to assume that he will rule Egypt through Ptolemy, should Ptolemy gain control of the throne. Caesar will eat him, Ptolemy, and Achillas "as a cat eats mice." Pothinus argues that the Egyptians outnumber Caesar's ranks, but Cleopatra ignores him and leaves.

For all of Cleopatra's efforts to appear wizened and experienced, she hasn't handled this encounter with Pothinus all that well. In rejecting Pothinus and expressing her desire to rule Egypt in Caesar's absence, she's upset Pothinus and given him information that he could potentially use against her. She hasn't approached this interaction with political strategy in mind and acted, instead, on her passionate hatred of Pothinus. As the play has repeatedly demonstrated through Caesar's expertly orchestrated military and political maneuvers, it is always advisable to keep one's subjective feelings separate from politics and leadership.

Pothinus tries to follow Cleopatra, but Ftatateeta, who has been eavesdropping on their conversation, stops him. She tells Pothinus that he should arrange for Lucius Septimius to speak with Cleopatra, since she refuses to listen to her own people. Pothinus tells Ftatateeta that he's going to go to a Roman even more powerful than Lucius, since literally any ruler is better "than a woman with a Roman heart." He tells Ftatateeta that her scheme to rule Egypt through Cleopatra will never work, since Cleopatra will never claim the throne while Pothinus is alive.

When Pothinus accuses Cleopatra of being "a woman with a Roman heart," he's criticizing what he sees as Cleopatra's betrayal of her Egyptian people to advance the pursuits of Caesar's Roman agenda. He's effectively claiming that nationalist loyalty is a more admirable trait in a leader than effective leadership. He's letting his impassioned nationalism get in the way of rationally assessing the future of Ptolemaic Egypt.

Meanwhile, Rufio climbs onto the palace roof, where a table is set for dinner. Rufio sits down at the table. Caesar appears, freshly bathed and dressed in a purple silken tunic. He nods approvingly at Rufio's fine clothing and suggests that Rufio must have dressed up to celebrate Caesar's birthday. Rufio scoffs, reminding Caesar that he always says it's his birthday when he wants to impress a beautiful woman or ingratiate himself with some public official—in fact, Caesar has had seven birthdays over the past 10 months alone. Caesar tells Rufio that Cleopatra and Apollodorus the Sicilian will dine with them this evening. Rufio curses Apollodorus, calling him a "popinjay." Caesar doesn't disagree, though he adds that the man is always a good time. Furthermore, old politicians will bore Cleopatra, and he needed to invite a guest capable of entertaining her.

Caesar's birthday party scheme comically illuminates how fully Caesar's pragmatism influences his every action. He can't even indulge in leisurely activities without bringing political strategy into the mix. A "popinjay" is a pejorative term for a vain person, typically one who dresses flamboyantly. Caesar and Rufio's use of the term to describe Apollodorus shows that they don't take him particularly seriously, specifically due to his reverence for art and beauty, which they (and particularly Caesar) believe are secondary to pragmatic concerns such as the advancement and expansion of civilization.

Rufio implies that he has something important to tell Caesar, and Caesar motions for his enslaved people to draw the curtains. Once certain that they are alone, Rufio tells Caesar that Pothinus wants to speak with him about a supposed scheme the women are developing. Caesar is irritated when he learns that Pothinus hasn't escaped, which Caesar usually expects and allows prisoners to do. Rufio tells Caesar that Pothinus willfully sacrifices his freedom to spy on Caesar. He also admits that he has brought Pothinus with to speak with Caesar. Caesar reluctantly agrees to see him. Pothinus enters, stalls for a bit, and then informs Caesar that Cleopatra is plotting to betray him.

Caesar's pattern of expecting and allowing prisoners to escape is an extreme example of his commitment of clemency and pragmatism. Caesar's policy derives from the pointlessness of expending additional Roman soldiers to monitor prisoners whom he has already defeated. Pothinus's claim about Cleopatra is evidence that she was foolish not to be more careful about what she disclosed to him in their meeting together. While Cleopatra claims to be more mature and fit to lead Egypt, the lack of caution she exercised around Pothinus—and the potentially negative ramifications of that carelessness—shows that she still lacks the foresight to consider the long-term consequences of her behavior.

Before Caesar can respond to Pothinus's scandalous claim, Cleopatra appears, dressed glamorously. Caesar tells her that Pothinus was just about to say something about her that she ought to hear, too. At first, Pothinus refuses to speak. Cleopatra warns him that she has ways of making him talk, but Pothinus insists that Caesar would never approve such methods. Sure enough, Caesar grants Pothinus his freedom and orders him to never appear again. Cleopatra is furious that Caesar won't punish Pothinus. Pothinus refuses to leave, however. He demands that Caesar speak with him in private, suggesting Caesar's life is in danger. Finally, Pothinus breaks the news in front of Cleopatra: Cleopatra wants Cesar to leave Egypt—either voluntarily or by death—because she believes that he will crown her the ruler of Egypt upon his departure.

Cleopatra's implicit threat to torture Pothinus if he doesn't speak is further evidence of the superficiality of her supposed maturation. It shows that she's just as impulsive, impassioned, and drawn to violence as she was at the start of the play. Pothinus's claim isn't entirely true—Cleopatra never mentioned a plan to force Caesar to leave Egypt. Nonetheless, Pothinus's accusation has the potential to turn Caesar against Cleopatra despite their somewhat affectionate relationship, since Caesar will always act practically rather than emotionally to preserve or maximize his power.

Cleopatra furiously denies Pothinus's accusation, but Caesar is entirely unmoved. He tells Cleopatra that even if she doesn't realize it, she likely wants him to leave Egypt—and she should. Caesar can't justify being angry at Cleopatra, since it's only natural that she would want to rule Egypt. Cleopatra is overcome with emotion, so Caesar, Rufio, and Pothinus exit to give her some time to collect herself.

Caesar's pragmatism and rationality ends up working in Cleopatra's favor, since he understands that it's logical for Cleopatra to want to regain her control of Egypt. She's been upfront about this desire all along, and it's only natural that she would want to leverage her relationship with Caesar to accomplish her goal of reclaiming the royal throne.

Only Ftatateeta and Cleopatra remain on the roof. Once Cleopatra is satisfied that nobody can hear her, she orders Ftatateeta to kill Pothinus. Ftatateeta smiles a toothy grin and promises to follow through with the request. Caesar returns, followed by Apollodorus and Rufio. Cleopatra runs to Caesar and wraps her arms around him. Ftatateeta exits, exchanging a meaningful glance with Cleopatra on her way out. Apollodorus compliments Cleopatra's beauty. The Major-Domo enters to take the guests' dinner orders. He offers Caesar delicacies like sea hedgehogs, sea acorns, and beccaficos, but Caesar opts for a simple meal of British oysters instead. He and Rufio both turn down the Greek wines the Major-Domo offers, opting for barley water and Falerian, respectively, instead.

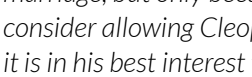
Cleopatra's motivation for ordering Ftatateeta to kill Pothinus is an act of vengeance against him for embarrassing her in front of Caesar, not a calculated political strategy. Cleopatra's failure to consider the long-term consequences of her actions and tendency to act on impulse have elicited negative results in the past, so it seems likely that nothing good will come of the assassination, if Ftatateeta succeeds in the first place. Caesar's austere palate reflects his pragmatic attitude toward life. He doesn't see the point in eating the delicacies Cleopatra has provided when a no-frills meal of British oysters and barley water will nourish him sufficiently.

Cleopatra teases Caesar about his common tastes. He reluctantly tries one of the wines and jokes that he will pass a law against such luxuries when he returns to Rome. Cleopatra tells him that it's okay to indulge and be idle from time to time. She offers her hand to him, and he kisses it. Cleopatra pauses a moment before asking Caesar when he intends to leave for Rome. Caesar suggests that he might never return. Rufio is shocked. Caesar explains that he's had enough of Rome and thinks it would be nice to discover the origin of the Nile with Cleopatra and establish a new kingdom there.

It's more likely that Caesar is testing the waters with the suggestion that he and Cleopatra abandon Alexandria and politics to discover the origin of the Nile and establish a new kingdom there. Caesar clearly has a parental sort of affection for Cleopatra, but, thus far, he's kept a healthy distance from her and refused to humor her childish need for his attention over attending to his political responsibilities. More likely, Caesar is observing Cleopatra's response to gauge how much of Pothinus's accusation is true and how much of a threat he must consider Cleopatra.

The prospect of forming a new kingdom excites Cleopatra. She tells Caesar that she is a descendent of the Nile and ought to name the kingdom herself. She sends for a priest. A priest enters not much later, carrying a miniature **sphinx** atop a small tripod that contains smoking incense. Caesar asks what all the "hocus-pocus" is all about. Apollodorus suggests that they ask Cleopatra's "hawkheaded friend" to name the new kingdom. Cleopatra silences them, not wanting their jokes to offend the god Ra. She tells the men that only her sphinx can name the kingdom and calls on the spirit of the Nile to name the kingdom.

Caesar's reference to Cleopatra's ancient Egyptian religious rites—symbolized here by the miniature sphinx—as "hocus-pocus" and Apollodorus's reference to the Egyptian deity Ra as Cleopatra's "hawkheaded friend" reflects their ignorance and cultural insensitivity. It's similar to the scene in Act II where Caesar carelessly sits down on the tripod that the Egyptians were using as a shrine to Ra. Caesar only seems to respect Egyptian culture when it behooves him to do so. For instance, in Act II, Caesar condemns Britannus's visible outrage at Cleopatra and Ptolemy's incestuous marriage, but only because Caesar is about to ask Pothinus to consider allowing Cleopatra and Ptolemy to rule Egypt together and it is in his best interest to appear respectful of the Egyptian court's customs.



Cleopatra wonders if the Nile will make his presence known by "rap[ping] on the table." Caesar can't believe that people still believing in such nonsense "in this year 707 of the Republic[.]" Next, Cleopatra asks the Nile to speak in his own voice. Suddenly, they hear a man's agonizing scream. Caesar glares at Cleopatra and demands to know the cause of the scream. Cleopatra feigns ignorance. Without warning, Caesar rises from the table. He's convinced a murder has taken place and orders Apollodorus to go down to the courtyard to investigate. Caesar is about to follow him when Ftatateeta appears, a "murderous expression" on her face. Rufio immediately understands what has happened and quietly warns Caesar that something is going on between Ftatateeta and Cleopatra.

The reference to table-wrapping is Shaw's cheeky dig at Spiritualism, a movement popular in the Victorian era that promoted the belief that the dead could communicate with the living. Spiritualists held seances during which people seated around a table claimed to hear tapping sounds which, according to spiritualists, were the attempts of spirits to communicate with the living from beyond the grave. It's now commonly accepted that table-rapping and other unusual phenomena were nothing more than scams and parlor tricks. Caesar's disbelief that people could believe in such antics "in this year 707 of the Republic" emphasizes how truly unbelievable it was that Victorian people still believed in them centuries later.

Cleopatra lunges at Ftatateeta, kissing her violently. She rips off her own jewelry and places it on Ftatateeta. Ftatateeta says nothing and only walks over to Ra's alter to pray. Caesar demands that Cleopatra tell him what happened. She feigns ignorance again and moves closer to caress him. Caesar doesn't respond to Cleopatra's advances. Rufio tries to make Ftatateeta leave, but Ftatateeta remains loyally at Cleopatra's side. Caesar tells Cleopatra to order Ftatateeta to leave. Cleopatra tells Caesar that she loves him and obliges; Ftatateeta exits. Rufio follows, cursing Caesar for his passivity.

Cleopatra and Ftatateeta's intense affection, Ftatateeta's refusal to leave Cleopatra's side, and Ftatateeta's willingness to kill Pothinus reflects the depth of Ftatateeta's loyalty to Cleopatra. Rufio seems to recognize this intense loyalty as a threat to Caesar, which is perhaps why he tries to force Ftatateeta to leave. Given Caesar's track record of pragmatism, it doesn't bode well for Ftatateeta or Cleopatra if Caesar decides that one or both of them pose a threat to him. Finally, Cleopatra's remark to Caesar seems less a sincere declaration of love than a calculated attempt to endear herself to him, for she seems to detect the unease in the room and has begun to realize that Caesar might react poorly when and if he discovers that she ordered Ftatateeta to murder Pothinus.

Once they are alone, Caesar asks Cleopatra to tell him the truth. Cleopatra says little but promises that she hasn't betrayed him. Caesar acknowledges that this is true—but only because he never trusted her in the first place. Suddenly, a trumpet sounds below. Rufio returns, followed by Lucius Septimius. Seeing Pompey's murderer again disgusts Caesar. Rufio tells Caesar that the townspeople have gone crazy and are tearing down the palace, while Lucius explains that someone has murdered Pothinus. The news horrifies Caesar. Rufio eyes Cleopatra and tells Caesar that whoever slayed Pothinus must be "a wise man and a friend of [Caesar's]," prompting Cleopatra to stand and boldly declare that it was *she* who ordered Pothinus's assassination. Cleopatra promises that she only did so after Pothinus tried to coerce her to conspire with him against Caesar—and after he insulted her to her face.

Caesar's cold admission that he has never trusted Cleopatra in the first place reflects his strategy of approaching the world practically and logically rather than sentimentally. He doesn't often form intimate, emotional bonds with others because doing so makes him vulnerable to betrayal and disappointment. Maintaining a distance between himself and Cleopatra protects Caesar against the type of betrayal Cleopatra has committed by disavowing Caesar's practice of clemency over vengeance to order Pothinus's assassination. On the other end of the spectrum, Cleopatra's admission that she ordered Ftatateeta to kill Pothinus after Pothinus insulted her shows that Cleopatra continues to make emotional, impulsive decisions—the very type of behavior Caesar condemns.

Cleopatra turns to Lucius and asks whether she was right to avenge herself. Lucius approves of Cleopatra's actions but warns her that Caesar likely disagrees with him. She turns to Apollodorus next. While Apollodorus agrees that Pothinus's death was justified, he wishes Cleopatra would have called on him to engage Pothinus in a duel so that the man could have died honorably. Next, Cleopatra consults Britannus. Britannus tells her that she was right to punish Pothinus for his misdeeds and that Caesar is too merciful.

Lucius, Apollodorus, and Rufio's approval of Cleopatra's decision to assassinate Pothinus lends a degree of moral ambiguity to her actions. While she clearly failed to consider the possible negative consequences of her actions, it's also true that Pothinus's loyalty to Ptolemy puts her power status in jeopardy, as well. One question that remains is whether Cleopatra ordered Pothinus's assassination because she saw him as a political threat, or because she was angry that he humiliated her in front of Caesar. Either way, in her haste, she failed to realize that Pothinus's popularity as a public figure would generate a negative reaction to his assassination.

Finally, Cleopatra turns to Caesar. Caesar furiously gestures toward the sound of the rioting villagers that have finally reached the palace. Like Cleopatra, the villagers "are believers in vengeance and in stabbing." Because Cleopatra has killed their leader, they, too, seek vengeance. Furthermore, when the mob inevitably kills Cleopatra, it will be Caesar's duty to avenge her. In this way, "to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace[.]" Cleopatra realizes the gravity of her error and begs Caesar not to leave her. Caesar replies that only she is to blame for destroying the peace that he created through his leniency and merciful treatment of the Egyptians. Still, not everybody disagrees with Cleopatra. Apollodorus stands behind her and promises that she will not die alone. Rufio argues that he has an instinct to kill.

Unlike the other men, Caesar wholeheartedly condemns Cleopatra's actions. He seems to recognize that she acted on impulse because Pothinus upset her, failing to consider the dire consequences of her actions—such as the possibility that Pothinus's rioting supporters "are believers in vengeance and in stabbing," too. In this passage, Caesar lays out his stance against vengeance more clearly than ever before, explaining that society will always present injustices that the wronged may avenge "in the name of right and honor and peace[.]" In this way, "to the end of history, murder shall breed murder." He makes a case against vengeance by arguing that—even if it's justified—it's impractical, since there is no end to the domino effect of injustice and retaliation that it begets.

Lucius offers to join Caesar in battle against the Egyptians, delivering the good news that the Roman army has arrived in Alexandria. Caesar excitedly accepts Lucius's offer, and the men get to work strategizing battle plans. One by one, the men abandon Cleopatra to join Caesar's ranks.

Cleopatra's supporters abandon her the minute it becomes more practical for them to support Caesar instead. Her failure to understand that politics—not loyalty, nor emotional obligation—drives every action in her politicized world becomes her downfall.

The men head downstairs to address the troops. Cleopatra approaches Caesar timidly and asks if he's forgotten her. Caesar brushes her aside. Referring to Cleopatra as "my child," Caesar tells her that he's too busy at the moment but promises that "[her] affairs shall be settled" when he returns. He exits, leaving Cleopatra to wallow in her humiliation and self-pity. Rufio tells Cleopatra that she has "played [the game] and lost," and that "the woman always gets the worst of it." As he is about to leave, he whispers to her knowingly, suggesting that her assassin botched his job, since Pothinus wouldn't have screamed if her man had stabbed the right way, in the throat. Cleopatra coyly insinuates that her assassin wasn't a man.

When Caesar calls Cleopatra "my child," he's putting her in her place and letting her know that her impassioned decision to retaliate against Pothinus has counteracted any respect he might have had for her. Once more, Cleopatra is a helpless child who must rely on Caesar to solve her problems for her. Rufio's remark that Cleopatra has "played [the game] and lost" depersonalizes Cleopatra's abandonment by Caesar and the others, employing a Caesarian logic to suggest that her abandonment is nothing personal—it's simply that she misjudged the political situation when she ordered Pothinus's assassination, and now the others have judged the aftermath of her miscalculation and decided that it's in their best interest to take Caesar's side. Rufio's observation that "the woman always gets the worst of it" resonates with the play's exploration of gender inequality. His meaning is rather ambiguous, but he could be suggesting that women's perceived tendency to be emotional rather than logical (an unfounded claim) puts them at a disadvantage in the political sphere.

Rufio draws open the curtains to leave. He sees Ftatateeta, who is still praying at Ra's pale white alter, and asks Cleopatra if Ftatateeta is responsible for the murder. Cleopatra doesn't answer directly, but she angrily advises Rufio—and everyone else—to think twice before "ma[king] the Queen of Egypt a fool before Caesar." Rufio stares gravely at Cleopatra before walking through the curtains, loosening his sword as he walks.

Rufio seems to have put two and two together that it was Ftatateeta who murdered Pothinus. Cleopatra intends for Rufio to interpret her comment as a threat against anyone who, like Pothinus, tries to humiliate her in front of Caesar. She wants the warning to show Rufio that she can be a ruthless player in the game of politics, but all her admission really does is confirm that she ordered Pothinus's death for emotional rather than logical reasons (she was upset that Pothinus humiliated her). Additionally, Cleopatra's warning shows Pothinus that Cleopatra is capable of ordering Ftatateeta to kill, and that Ftatateeta is more than willing to kill on Cleopatra's behalf. These two facts make Cleopatra and Ftatateeta real threats to Caesar and his men. Thus, it seems likely that Rufio loosens his sword because he intends to use it. Given that he now recognizes Ftatateeta as a real threat, it's reasonable to predict that Rufio intends to kill Ftatateeta and eliminate the threat she poses to Caesar.

Cleopatra hears Roman soldiers cry out, "Hail Caesar!" down below. Feeling suddenly scared and alone, she cries out for Ftatateeta but receives no reply. Cleopatra cries out louder and louder. Finally, she frantically draws back the curtains, revealing Ftatateeta's dead body lying before the alter of Ra. Her throat is cut, and her dark, red blood seeps into the white stone of the alter.

The cry of "Hail Caesar" parallels the closing scene of Act I, in which the Roman soldiers greet Caesar as they encounter him seated on Cleopatra's throne. As in the beginning, the soldiers' cries of "Hail Caesar" signify Caesar's return to power. Presumably, he's now subdued Pothinus's supporters. As well, he's exerted dominance over Cleopatra, symbolically putting her in her place by turning her supporters against her and excluding her from the resolution of the civil uprising. Finally, Rufio has killed Ftatateeta, likely to eliminate the threat her loyalty to Cleopatra poses to Caesar's grip on power.

ACT 5

Six months have passed since Bel Affris announced Caesar's arrival at the old palace on the Syrian border. Today, a military pageant is in full force outside the palace at Alexandria. In the east harbor, Caesar's ship waits to take him back to Rome and Roman soldiers line up to keep the townsfolk under control. Other soldiers mill about, chatting casually. Belzanor, the Persian, and the centurion are among their ranks. Apollodorus comes forward, and the centurion lets him pass through. The soldiers hound Apollodorus for updates about Caesar. Apollodorus informs them that Caesar is still in the market with the Egyptian priests, whose lives he has spared. He also reveals that Ptolemy drowned in the Nile when Caesar's men sank his barge.

Act V functions as an epilogue to the main content of the play. It provides closure by giving the audience a brief glimpse at the state of Alexandria following Caesar's defeat of the Egyptian army and the civic uprising that followed Pothinus's assassination. Apollodorus's update that Caesar has spared the lives of the Egyptian priests reflects his continued advocation of clemency over vengeance. Ptolemy's drowning (which really did happen—he likely died on January 13, 47 B.C.E.) leaves Cleopatra the sole ruler of Egypt.

Caesar, Rufio, and Britannus arrive. Everyone cheers. Rufio reminds Caesar that they have yet to appoint a Roman governor. Caesar suggests Mithridates of Pergamos, the soldier whose troops came to Caesar's aid. When Rufio argues that they might need Mithridates's help elsewhere, Caesar appoints Rufio governor. Rufio is shocked, since he doesn't have any noble lineage, but Caesar reminds him that considers Rufio his son.

Mithridates of Pergamos was a nobleman from Anatolia, or Asia Minor, which encapsulated much of modern-day Turkey. Caesar's decision to appoint Rufio governor despite his common lineage reflects Caesar's progressive values. Caesar doesn't believe that Rufio's humble upbringing has any impact on his future as a leader.

Next, Caesar turns to Britannus, praising the bravery he exhibited in battle and declaring that Britannus has more than earned his freedom. Britannus protests, vowing that "only as Caesar's slave [has he] found real freedom." Britannus's declaration moves Caesar, and he realizes that he can longer bear to part with Britannus.

Modern readers will recognize that Britannus would be objectively freer if were not Caesar's enslaved servant, but the gist of his remark is that his exposure to Caesar's principled, merciful, and progressive ideals have given his life meaning and purpose.

Next, Caesar turns to Apollodorus and informs him that he will leave Egypt's art in his hands. Apollodorus gratefully accepts the responsibility. While Rome produces no art of its own, Apollodorus states, it is known to "buy up and take away whatever the other nations produce." Apollodorus's remark leaves Caesar aghast. "Is peace not an art? is war not an art? is government not an art? is civilization not an art?" he asks.

Caesar and Apollodorus's brief debate parallels the argument Caesar has with Theodotus in Act II about the destruction of the library of Alexandria and the importance of history. Once more, Caesar suggests that art and history are secondary to progress and the advancement of society. Apollodorus's remark about Rome's tendency to "buy up and take away whatever the other nations produce" touches on the exploitation inherent in imperialist expansion. Rome—and Shaw's contemporary British Empire—may advance their own civilizations, but this advancement always comes at the expense of the nations they colonize. Additionally, Apollodorus's comment touches on the imperialist practice of looting cultural artifacts from the places they colonize. To this day, British museums display items that were forcibly taken from various former colonies.

Caesar knows that he's forgetting something but can't place his finger on what it could be. Suddenly, Cleopatra approaches him. She's dressed in black and has a grave, tragic expression on her face, which sets her apart from the joyous crowd. Caesar incorrectly assumes that Cleopatra is in mourning for Ptolemy. Cleopatra tells him he should talk to Rufio.

Cleopatra is dressed in black to mourn the death of Ftatateeta. Her tragic expression reveals the depth of her loss. Even though she and Ftatateeta antagonized each other, the bond Cleopatra had with her nurse was stronger and more affectionate than any relationship she appears to have with her living family members. Cleopatra suggests that Caesar talk to Rufio thinking that Caesar will condemn Ftatateeta's murder like he has condemned previous murders.

Caesar turns to Rufio, who presents Caesar with a hypothetical dilemma. What would Caesar do, asks Rufio, if he were faced with a lion that wanted to eat him? Caesar replies that he would kill the lion. Rufio explains that Cleopatra had a "tigress" that killed men for her, and that he showed the tigress mercy by "only cut[ting] its throat." Rufio's explanation enrages Cleopatra. She informs Caesar that Rufio killed Ftatateeta. She's further enraged when Caesar replies that Ftatateeta's murder was not an act of vengeance, but a "natural slaying" about which he "feel[s] no horror."

Cleopatra is upset because Caesar's approval of Ftatateeta's murder doesn't align with his typical impulse to condemn all bloodshed. For Caesar, however, Ftatateeta's loyalty to Cleopatra—a loyalty so fierce it drove her to murder—makes her a threat to the stability and peace he and his army have worked to establish in Alexandria. As such, Caesar considers Ftatateeta's murder a justified, "natural slaying." This justification—and the fact that Rufio committed the murder quickly and humanely—allows Caesar to "feel no horror" at Ftatateeta's death.

Cleopatra threatens to expose Caesar for the "unjust and corrupt" hypocrite that he is, but Caesar merely laughs at her childish behavior. Initially, Cleopatra is too upset to say goodbye to Caesar. However, she comes around when Caesar promises to send over Mark Antony to be her husband. Caesar says goodbye to Cleopatra and kisses her on the forehead before he boards the ship. Cleopatra weeps and waves her handkerchief at his ship as it sails through the harbor.

Cleopatra's moral outrage strikes Caesar as funny, likely because Cleopatra has repeatedly shown that she has no qualms about violence when it doesn't negatively affect her. It amuses Caesar that Cleopatra changes her tune about violence and retribution, deeming him an "unjust and corrupt" hypocrite the minute that violence and retribution no longer benefit her.

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