Spartacus continues the epic cinematic trend of exposing the naked male figure to the gaze of the audience, as in the bath scene above where Antoninus is the object of attempted seduction. Later in the Roman public baths, the film shows the strapping nude body of Caesar gliding through the pool to underscore his emergent political power, then juxtaposed to the softer body of Crassus as the two aristocrats debate the future of Rome clad only in tiny towels. As in earlier epic films, the nude male body suggests a visual negotiation between strength and vulnerability. At the *ludus*, the body of Spartacus is subjected to the gaze of the other gladiators during training: "Kirk Douglas' stance expresses a perfect balance between proud self-display and humiliating exposure" (Fitzgerald, 37). The pampered Roman ladies experience an erotic thrill from reviewing the line of male gladiators prepared to fight to the death, as Lady Claudia purrs: "Don't put them in those suffocating tunics. Let them wear just . . . enough for modesty." In this episode, women become the active subject of the gaze, suggesting a transition to the more sexually liberated female of the 1960s. The aroused Roman women even notice the powerful appeal of the slave girl, Varinia, whose sexuality is highlighted elsewhere in the film. Varinia's natural bath scene, where she reveals her nude body in a forest pool before announcing her pregnancy, associates her fertility with the life-giving properties of water. Spartacus, like the audience, is overcome by her erotic allure: "I want to make love to you," he growls. The scene becomes an intriguing precursor to the erotic and maternal strategies of the main character in *Cleopatra* (1963), in contrast to the cosmetic indoor luxury of the Egyptian queen's bath.

CORE ISSUES

1. How does the film represent the moral quality of Roman political power and military leadership, especially in the character of Crassus?
2. How does the film characterize Spartacus and his army of slaves?
3. How does the film portray the conflict between rule and revolt? Between traditional order and personal freedom?
4. How do the themes expressed in the film about ancient slaves rebelling against the power of Rome suggest parallels to contemporary American life in 1960? How are those themes relevant to us today?
5. Describe the film's moral and/or political message.

Chapter 5

Cleopatra (1963)

The motion picture the world has been waiting for!

Director:	Joseph L. Mankiewicz
Screenplay:	Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Ranald MacDougall, and Sidney Buchman C. M. Franzero (book)
Produced by:	Walter Wanger for 20th Century Fox
Running Time:	246 minutes

Cast

Cleopatra	Elizabeth Taylor
Julius Caesar	Rex Harrison
Mark Antony	Richard Burton
Octavian	Roddy McDowall
Rufio	Martin Landau
Sosigenes	Hume Cronyn
Apollodorus	Cesare Danova
Agrippa	Andrew Keir
Brutus	Kenneth Haigh
Cassius	John Hoyt
Flavius	George Cole
High Priestess	Pamela Brown
Cicero	Michael Hordern
Canidius	Andrew Faulds
Eiras	Francesca Annis
Charmian	Isabelle Cooley

Plot Outline

Part 1. On the battlefield of Pharsalus in Greece, Julius Caesar grimly surveys the carnage. It is 48 BC and Caesar has just defeated the legions of his rival, Pompey the Great, whose dead soldiers are cremated honorably on the field. With Caesar is his right-hand man, Rufio. Caesar berates Pompey's captured officers, and then pardons them. Pompey himself has escaped to Egypt, where he will try to gain the support of the new rulers, the young Pharaoh Ptolemy XIII and his elder sister, Cleopatra VII. Caesar follows him to Egypt and arrives at the port in Alexandria, where the docks are crowded with buyers and sellers in busy market stalls. The boy king Ptolemy is carried to the steps of the palace to meet his Roman visitors. The Egyptian courtiers expect the Romans to manhandle the crowd on their way to the palace, but Caesar is the "master of the unexpected." As Caesar and his officers disembark, they stroll casually through the mob, stopping to sample the wares before they arrive at the palace. The members of the Egyptian court are startled by the Romans' unceremonious attitude. Ptolemy's advisors include Theodotus, his tutor, Achillas, the commander of his armies, and Pothinus, a eunuch and the young Pharaoh's regent. They inform Caesar that Egypt is embroiled in a civil war, in which the king's sister, Cleopatra, is challenging her brother's right to the throne. To curry favor with Caesar, the Egyptians present him with Pompey's signet ring, as well as his severed head, having executed him the moment he arrived in Alexandria. Caesar is outraged, but also cautious, aware Rome's position in Egypt is precarious. He alerts Ptolemy and his court he will exercise the guardian right of Rome over Egypt. Then he orders Rufio to find the rest of Pompey's body and give him proper funeral rites.

Caesar takes up residence in the palace to prepare Rome's defenses for possible engagement. His mute body servant, Flavius, alerts him a "rug merchant" has arrived with a gift from the exiled Cleopatra, a large rolled-up carpet. Caesar dismisses his officers and cuts the bindings of the carpet: out spills Cleopatra onto the floor. The "rug merchant" turns out to be her loyal servant, Apollodorus the Sicilian. Caesar is astonished and intrigued by the beautiful royal girl in his quarters. She proceeds to demand that he make her sole monarch of Egypt. They engage in a fiery verbal duel but sparks of mutual attraction flash between them. Cleopatra knows he was not pleased by the murder of Pompey, as Caesar reveals the ring he now wears on a chain around his neck was a gift to Pompey from his wife, Caesar's daughter, Julia. When Cleopatra departs, there appears to

be a détente between them. Later, in a secret corridor, Cleopatra spies on Caesar through a peephole, listening to him discuss her attributes and proclivities with Rufio and his officers. After the men leave, she continues to watch as Caesar experiences an epileptic seizure and Flavius helps him. Against her will, Cleopatra begins to have feelings for this complex Roman, and she asks her advisor, Sosigenes, about the nature of the disease. Caesar visits Cleopatra's apartments, where she luxuriates in her bath attended by a poet and a bevy of maids. She warns Caesar her brother's forces, which vastly outnumber the Romans, have surrounded the palace. Captivated both by her naked beauty and keen intellect, Caesar listens to her advice. That night, Caesar orders the Egyptian fleet burned to give him control of the harbor. The fire spreads to nearby buildings, including the famous Library of Alexandria. Cleopatra bursts into Caesar's quarters and confronts him about the fire, accusing him of trying to destroy her city. They argue passionately over the respective merits of Roman and Egyptian culture and he coerces her into a kiss. Caesar departs to direct the Roman forces against the Egyptians attacking the palace gate. The attack is repelled, and Caesar has a victory. Rufio will soon arrive with the troops of Mithridates as backup to secure their position.

The next day, an attempted poisoning is foiled when Cleopatra's maid notices the odd behavior of a royal taster, and Pothinus is revealed as the instigator of the plot. Caesar conducts a formal trial in which Pothinus is convicted of the assassination attempt, as well as inciting war against the Romans, and is sentenced to death. Ptolemy and his tutor Theodotus are sent to the front to join the army of Achillas, a journey that means certain death. Caesar is exhausted and has everyone dismissed. Cleopatra realizes she has now been made undisputed monarch of Egypt, and wishes to talk more with Caesar. His headache worsens, and as he tries to send her away, she notices the warning signals of another epileptic fit. She rushes to get the implements, as she saw Flavius do when she was spying, but Caesar recovers. They share a moment of intimacy where Caesar reveals his fear of the mob, and Cleopatra responds with genuine love. At her official coronation, the entire court bows to Cleopatra and Caesar nods to the uneasy Romans to do the same. Caesar is grateful for everything Cleopatra can give to Rome: money, wheat, building materials, and access to the trade routes of the East. She wants Egypt and Rome to work together to fulfill the global mission of Alexander the Great. In bed, they talk of politics and the conversation turns to Caesar's lack of a son to succeed him. Cleopatra compares herself to the fertile Nile River and promises to give him a son. They continue their discussion at the tomb of Alexander.

Plate 9 *Cleopatra*. Cleopatra (Elizabeth Taylor) is crowned Queen of Egypt, as Julius Caesar (Rex Harrison) looks on approvingly. Courtesy of 20th Century Fox/ The Kobal Collection.

where Cleopatra tries to rouse Caesar to take up the great warrior's vision of world unity: "Make his dream yours, Caesar." She tells him the child she now carries will be a symbol of the new unified world. The childless Caesar is overjoyed at the prospect of being a father and delays his return to Rome. An Egyptian priestess predicts the child will be a son, clad in "cloth of gold."

Rumors have reached Rome that Caesar has married the Egyptian queen who is expecting his child. Mark Antony visits Caesar's barren wife, Calpurnia, to allay her fears, but he cannot deny the truth of the stories. In Alexandria, Cleopatra's son is born. When her maid sets the child at Caesar's feet as instructed by the queen, Caesar picks him up, thereby acknowledging him as his own according to Roman law. He gives the child, Caesarion, the necklace with Pompey's ring. Back at Rome, the senators discuss what this new royal son might mean for Caesar's ambitions. An anxious Cicero thinks Caesar plans to seize imperial power. Brutus claims

he is happy Caesar has a son, but when Antony asks Octavian, Caesar's nephew and heir, if he is upset, Octavian keeps his opinions to himself. Caesar at last departs from Egypt, promising to send for Cleopatra and the child. Two years later, he arrives in Rome, honored as a victorious general in a glorious triumph. After a third year, Cleopatra grows impatient. Rufio finally announces Caesar has been named "dictator for life" and has sent for her to come to Rome.

On the day of Cleopatra's arrival, a purple-clad Caesar sits on the dais to watch her procession as it enters the Forum. Alongside him are Octavian and Antony, while the senators and noble ladies, including Calpurnia, watch from their seats. The Roman people are delighted by the spectacle of exotic dancers and parading soldiers. Cleopatra emerges through the arch seated next to her son, Caesarion, both of them dressed in gold, atop an immense Egyptian Sphinx of black granite pulled by an army of brawny servants. Caesar is elated by the sight, and Antony is intrigued. When the queen approaches Caesar, she and the child bow before him for all to see, in a gesture to acknowledge his status and power in Rome. Gossip runs wild in the city as Caesar spends time with Cleopatra and their son. Caesar becomes annoyed with the protocols of the Senate approval process and starts to desire more concrete power than "dictator" to effect changes in Rome. He demands they make him "emperor." Rome will not tolerate a king, and some of the senators are alarmed by Caesar's attempt to establish sole rule, so they induce Brutus to destroy Caesar. When Caesar reveals the Senate is set to vote on extending his authority, both Antony and Cleopatra encourage him to solidify his power. But after several bad omens, a worried Cleopatra warns Caesar to be careful. On the Ides of March 44 BC, a mob of senators led by Brutus and Cassius attacks Caesar, stabbing him to death next to a statue of Pompey. The body is brought to the Forum and burned on a pyre. After the murder, Octavian, not Antony, is proclaimed Caesar's heir. That night, Antony visits Cleopatra as she is about to set sail on the Tiber. After a tense exchange, they make a pact to meet again.

Part 2. At the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, Mark Antony has led a successful campaign against the assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius, now dead. Antony is hailed by the army as the victorious general, while his rival, the sickly Octavian, ails in his tent. Antony cannot hide his dislike of Octavian, and the officer loyal to him, Agrippa. Yet Antony and Octavian decide to form a triumvirate with Lepidus, a politician, and agree to divide the empire: Lepidus will take Africa, Octavian will get Italy, Spain, and Gaul, while Antony will control the East. Antony sets up his

command at Tarsus in Asia Minor, and plans a campaign against Parthia on the eastern frontier, but Rufio informs him they need supplies from Egypt, money and food for the legions. Antony, refusing to grovel to Cleopatra, sends Rufio to summon her, but she rebuffs him, saying she will only meet Antony on Egyptian soil. When Cleopatra arrives in Tarsus on a magnificent gilded barge with purple sails, Antony thinks she is giving in to him. But Cleopatra informs his officers she will entertain Antony only on her ship, on "Egyptian soil." She invites him to a lavish banquet where they engage in a refined battle of wills. Antony becomes jealous when he sees Cleopatra wearing a necklace of gold coins struck with the image of Caesar. While the party rages, Cleopatra retires to her stateroom, followed by a drunken Antony, who rips the veil surrounding her bed. The two become lovers and the next day he returns to Alexandria with her, abandoning all thoughts of Rome. In his absence, Octavian smears him in the Senate, saying Antony is giving away the empire under the influence of the Egyptian queen. Octavian has claimed the name and legacy of Caesar for himself and threatens the supporters of Antony. When this news is reported to Cleopatra, she confronts Antony and urges him to secure his rights back in Rome. Although Antony is reluctant to leave her and Egypt, after a passionate farewell, he sets out to resolve matters with Octavian. They meet at Brundisium, where Octavian proposes a plan to cement their new alliance: he offers Antony his sister Octavia in marriage, and Antony accepts.

Cleopatra is enraged when she hears of the marriage. Meanwhile, Antony is in Athens with Octavia, bored and longing to return to Alexandria to renew their bond. But Cleopatra rejects the envoys Antony sends. When he finally comes in person, she makes him wait before granting him an audience. She humbles him, forcing him to kneel to her in public. Cleopatra states her conditions for a new treaty with Egypt: she demands that he cede a third of the Roman Empire to Egypt as the price of her alliance. Antony refuses, and she taunts him as subservient to Octavian. In private, they argue passionately about Octavian's strategy to make Antony unpopular at Rome. Cleopatra demands he divorce Octavia and marry her according to the Egyptian religion, then cede her the eastern territories to assert his power. She wants to fight Octavian and Antony gives in out of love for her. Sosigenes asks to be sent to Rome to sue for peace one last time.

In Rome, Octavian provokes a public outcry against Antony by casting the divorce of his sister as Antony's rejection of Rome. The Senate is reluctant to fight a war against Antony, so Octavian brashly reads Antony's

last will. He reveals Antony's wish to be buried in Alexandria, as Octavian says, beside "his Egyptian whore." He manipulates the Senate into declaring war against Egypt. On the steps of the Senate, Octavian impales the poor old Egyptian envoy on the golden spear of war. In Alexandria, they debate war strategy. Cleopatra has built a huge fleet of ships, and wants to engage Octavian at sea. Antony's officers, Rufio and Canidius, want to fight on land but Antony dismisses them and follows Cleopatra's plan. The issue is decided at a naval battle at Actium off the west coast of Greece. The admiral Agrippa leads Octavian's fleet while Octavian lies seasick in his cabin. Agrippa tricks Antony into chasing a ship bearing Octavian's insignia, and traps him in a ring of Roman ships. As Cleopatra watches from her barge, believing Antony dead and the battle lost, she orders her ship back to Alexandria. With his ship ablaze and sinking, his men drowning, Antony catches sight of her ship as it departs. In desperation, he jumps into a small boat and pursues her, oblivious to the loyal men of his legions begging for his help. Antony drags himself onto Cleopatra's ship while Agrippa tells Octavian he has a victory.

In Alexandria, Antony sinks into depression. He blames Cleopatra for abandoning him and causing him to desert his men in the sea battle. When she warns him Octavian is on his way, his only response is stony silence. Agrippa comes to offer peace in exchange for the head of Antony but Cleopatra refuses and sends him away. Cleopatra finds Antony brooding in the shrine of the deified Caesar and she coaxes him back to life. Antony and Rufio set out with their remaining two legions to meet Octavian. In the palace, Cleopatra gives instructions to Apollodorus. After she sends Caesarion away with guards disguised as merchants, giving him the ring of Pompey as a token, Cleopatra retires to her mausoleum with her two maids, Eiras and Charmian. At the front, Octavian tells Agrippa he intends to take Antony and Cleopatra alive. Antony's troops, depleted and dispirited, desert him in the middle of the night and go over to Octavian. In the empty camp, Antony finds the loyal Rufio slain, holding the legionary standards. Antony rides into the middle of Octavian's army, trying to engage them in combat, but no one will fight him. He rides back to the palace, where Apollodorus tells him Cleopatra is in her mausoleum. Thinking she has abandoned him again, Antony falls on his sword. Mortally wounded, Antony is lifted into Cleopatra's tomb, where he dies in her arms.

On his way into Alexandria, Octavian conveys the body of Caesarion in a cart and smiles as he puts on Pompey's ring. Octavian marches into the palace and finds Apollodorus dead on the queen's bed, suicide by poison. When he hears the news of Antony's death, he is filled with exultation,

knowing he is the undisputed master of the world. Octavian finds Cleopatra, now his prisoner, in her mausoleum. He is curious about this woman who was linked to such prominent Romans. She refuses to call him Caesar. Octavian proposes she rule Egypt as a province, on the condition that she first come to Rome in his triumph. Cleopatra sees Pompey's ring on his finger and realizes her son is dead. She extracts a lying promise from Octavian to allow Caesarion to rule Egypt and swears on her son's life to fulfill her side of the bargain. After the Romans depart, Cleopatra writes Octavian a note and gives her maids final directions. Eiras brings her a basket of figs, and as she places her hand in the basket, a concealed snake bites her. She calls out to Antony as she dies. When Octavian receives her last request to be buried at Antony's side, he and Agrippa rush to the tomb. There they find Cleopatra's body on the bier dressed in the fine golden gown she wore in her procession into Rome, with Eiras dead at her feet and Charmian dying. The Romans watch as a snake slithers away from an overturned basket of figs. Outraged, Octavian stalks out, but Agrippa angrily demands: "Was this well done of your lady?" With her final breath, Charmian replies: "Extremely well – as befitting the last of so many noble rulers."

Ancient Background

Joseph Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* explores the historical relations between the famous Queen of Egypt and the foremost men of Rome who sought alliances with her to establish their power during the turbulent transitional years of the late Republic. Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator was born in 69 BC, the third child of Ptolemy XII, King of Egypt, whose nickname was Auletes, "Flute-player" (Hughes-Hallett, 15–20). Cleopatra was a descendant of the first Ptolemy, a Macedonian Greek general who became ruler of Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC. Although her mother's identity is not known, Cleopatra's bloodline was probably mostly Greek, since the Ptolemaic rulers adopted the Egyptian royal practice of brother-sister marriage. According to the Greek biographer Plutarch (ca. AD 40s–120s), Cleopatra was not very beautiful, but her powerful charm was manifest in her musical voice, brilliant intellect, and exceptional character (*Life of Antony* 27, in Hughes-Hallett, 17). On coins she minted during her reign, Cleopatra's portrait reveals a strong, lean face with high cheekbones, hooked nose, and pointed chin.

When Cleopatra was born, the Ptolemaic Empire was tremendously wealthy but politically insecure. Much of its territories in the north and east had been swallowed by the growing power of Rome, and Egypt itself was at constant risk of annexation. In 59 BC, realizing his throne was threatened by both internal unrest and Roman expansionism, Ptolemy Auletes made a shrewd bargain with Rome, just as Cleopatra would later build her foreign policy on Roman alliances. For the steep price of six thousand talents – about the same as Egypt's annual state revenue – Ptolemy asked Julius Caesar (100–44 BC), Pompey the Great, and Marcus Licinius Crassus, the First Triumvirate, to proclaim his right to the throne of Egypt and declare him an official ally of Rome. But conspiracies against Ptolemy proliferated; his two elder daughters tried to seize his throne and were eventually executed. Following another payment of ten thousand talents, Ptolemy was restored to power by a supporter of Pompey's, the Roman general Aulus Gabinius, with the help of a young cavalry officer named Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony, born ca. 83 BC). Ptolemy died in 51 BC, naming in his will his third daughter, the 18-year-old Cleopatra, and her younger brother, 10-year-old Ptolemy XIII, as his joint heirs. But the beginning of Cleopatra's reign was marked by many difficulties and dangers. When she agreed to send Egyptian troops to support the Roman governor of Syria, her enemies at court accused her of political collaboration with Rome. By 49 BC, Cleopatra was forced to leave Alexandria in exile. The royal court was administered by Pothinus, an influential eunuch who was acting as the boy-king's regent and issuing edicts in Ptolemy's name alone as if Cleopatra were no longer co-ruler.

Rome was also in the grip of political unrest, as civil war broke out between Pompey and Caesar (Grant, 229–41). In 48 BC, Caesar defeated Pompey at Pharsalus in central Greece. When Pompey fled to Egypt in search of support, Pothinus, hoping to link himself to the winners, had Pompey decapitated right after he landed. Caesar arrived in Alexandria a few days later and was outraged when they presented him with Pompey's severed head. But Caesar, now 52 years old, needed money to pay for the costly civil wars, so he took up residence in the royal palace and prepared to resist any hostilities. Soon after, Cleopatra arrived in the palace, somehow eluding Pothinus' guards, to plead her cause with Caesar. The two became lovers, and Caesar took her side in the royal power struggle. He decreed Cleopatra and Ptolemy should rule jointly according to the terms of their father's will. At the end of 48 BC, probably on Pothinus' orders, the Egyptian general Achillas marched on Alexandria with an army of twenty thousand men. Caesar had to defend himself with his one small legion, along with the help of two more legions sent by Mithridates of Pergamum. Caesar crushed the Egyptian army and executed the eunuch.

Later, Ptolemy XIII fled and was found drowned in the Nile. At this point, according to the historian Suetonius, Caesar decided not to annex Egypt lest the governor of so rich and powerful a province be a threat to the central government in Rome (*Life of Julius Caesar* 35). Instead, the crown passed to Cleopatra and another younger brother, Ptolemy XIV, who became her dynastic husband, but from then on, Cleopatra was in effect sole ruler.

In the spring of 47 BC, Cleopatra was pregnant when Caesar left Egypt. Caesar stationed three legions in Alexandria, perhaps to remind her she owed her throne to Rome. Caesar spent the next year on successful foreign campaigns. In the fall of 46 BC, Caesar returned to Rome, where he celebrated four elaborate triumphs, including one to commemorate the Egyptian war. The Senate awarded him a dictatorship annually renewable for ten years, and set up a bronze statue to him on the Capitol. By this time, Cleopatra was in Rome with her infant son, whom she named Ptolemy Caesar, and nicknamed Caesarion, "Little Caesar." Although the child's name indicates his likely paternity, Caesar never formally acknowledged him in public (Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar* 52). Cleopatra remained in Rome for well over a year, and it is likely her influence aroused Caesar's increasingly autocratic ambitions (Grant, 236). In February 44 BC, Caesar obtained unprecedented power, as he was named *dictator perpetuus*, "dictator for life," by a subservient Senate stocked with his supporters. Coins were struck with his portrait, the first time in Roman history a living person appeared on the national currency. But a small group of sixty senators, led by Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus, were incensed by his excessive power and his unfailing popularity with the people, so they plotted to kill him. At a meeting of the Senate on the Ides (15th) of March 44 BC, Caesar was surrounded by a crowd of senators and stabbed repeatedly, and he bled to death under a statue of Pompey.

Immediately after Caesar's assassination, Cleopatra left Rome for Alexandria (Hughes-Hallett, 20–2). By the end of the year, her brother Ptolemy XIV was dead, perhaps on Cleopatra's orders. She elevated her son Caesarion to share her throne as Ptolemy XV, to guarantee she would reign alone, but also to symbolize her claim to Caesar's legacy of dominion over the entire Mediterranean world. For the next three years, Cleopatra governed Egypt in peace and prosperity, but foreign affairs soon became urgent. In Rome, the death of Caesar set the stage for another destructive civil war to determine what man would gain control, as factions formed and allegiances constantly shifted (Grant, 242–4). The Roman people were enraged by the loss of their benefactor, and rioted in the

streets against the senatorial conspirators. Realizing the danger, Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, fled to the eastern provinces to seek money and support. Two men contested for power in Rome: Mark Antony, Caesar's trusted officer and colleague in the consulship of 44 BC, thus by constitutional right the highest authority in Rome, and Gaius Octavius Thurinus (born 63 BC), Caesar's 18-year-old grand-nephew, who was named his son by testamentary adoption.

Although the ambitious and popular Antony, now about 40 years old, seemed on the verge of consolidating his position of supremacy at Rome, his plans were thwarted by the unexpected challenge of Caesar's teenaged heir, who now gladly took the name of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (Octavian). In 43 BC, the conflict between these two rivals was temporarily settled at the siege of Mutina in northern Italy, where they agreed to join forces with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, an ally of Caesar, to form the Second Triumvirate. To wipe out their political enemies, and to collect money for their campaign against Caesar's assassins, the triumvirs initiated a brutal series of confiscations and proscriptions. This included the murder of the great orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC), whose eloquent opposition to autocratic rule made him a martyr of the dying Republic.

Early in 42 BC, Antony and Octavian set out for the East to make war on Brutus and Cassius. As the wealthiest ruler in the eastern Mediterranean, Cleopatra received pleas for assistance from both factions, and again the security of Egypt hinged on choosing the victor in a Roman power struggle. She made gestures of support to both sides, intending to wait for the outcome of the war before committing herself. In the fall of 42 BC, at the battle of Philippi in Greece, Antony's legions first defeated Cassius; when Octavian lost to Brutus, Antony came in and crushed him. Both conspirators committed suicide, leaving the Caesarian avengers the undisputed masters of the Roman world. Since Antony was the main victor, he received the biggest share of the empire, assuming control of the eastern provinces, while Octavian took over Italy and the West.

Antony began to raise money from the rich cities of Asia for a projected war against the Parthian Empire, roughly the area of modern Iran and Iraq. This campaign enabled Antony to emulate the great general Alexander, and also to take up the legacy of Caesar, who had been about to launch such an expedition when he was assassinated. Like many Roman generals before him, Antony looked to the wealth of Egypt to fund his campaign. While it is likely Antony and Cleopatra met when he came to Alexandria in the cohort of Gabinius, they surely would have encountered each other during her long stay in Rome as Caesar's guest. In 41 BC,

Antony came to Tarsus in Cilicia where Cleopatra was due to arrive. Both pursued rational political interests, as each had something to gain from the other; Cleopatra wanted the security of Roman arms against her enemies, and Antony needed financial backing for his Parthian wars and his rivalry with Octavian. Cleopatra knew if she wanted a Roman alliance, she would have to pay for it, just as her father did. According to Plutarch, the queen put on a dazzling display of Egyptian wealth and sensuality as she sailed up the Cydnus River in a golden barge to meet Antony (*Life of Antony* 26, in Hughes-Hallett, 77–8). At Tarsus, Antony and Cleopatra became lovers and exchanged pledges of support. They spent the winter in Alexandria, where Antony, a notorious drinking enthusiast and lover of exotic luxury, enjoyed the opulence of the Egyptian court.

Back in Rome, Antony's brother, the consul Lucius Antonius, raised an unsuccessful rebellion against Octavian, so Antony had to leave Alexandria to settle things with his rival. Relations between the two men were seriously strained, and Octavian began to manipulate for his own gain the conservative Romans' sense of outrage and suspicion about Antony's liaison with Cleopatra. But in October of 40 BC, they reconciled and reconfirmed the division of the empire at the Pact of Brundisium. To seal the deal, Antony married Octavian's sister, the virtuous Octavia, who was conveniently a recent widow. At the same time, Cleopatra bore Antony a set of twins, a boy and a girl. For the next three years, Cleopatra remained in Egypt, occupied with governing her country, restoring the economy, and keeping peace (Hughes-Hallett, 22–4). While Octavian's propaganda machine accused her of rampant debauchery and corruption, the record indicates Cleopatra was an astute politician and a capable, energetic leader. She endeared herself to her people, who did not always approve of their Greek rulers, by being the first Ptolemy to learn to speak demotic Egyptian and practice the ancient Egyptian religion (*Life of Antony* 27, in Hughes-Hallett, 23). Under the expert fiscal management of Cleopatra's reign, Egypt had wealth enough to clear her father's debts, defray the costs of Caesar's civil wars, finance Antony's army, build a huge fleet in Alexandria, and still have a magnificent treasury for Octavian to plunder after her death.

Meanwhile, Antony lived with Octavia for two years in Athens, where he directed the consolidation of Roman authority in the eastern provinces. Antony and Octavian still did not trust one another but they remained nominal allies, mostly through the mediation of Octavia. In Rome, Octavian's political star was rising, as he shrewdly exploited the name of Caesar to achieve his ambitions. Although he suffered from poor health, and was utterly lacking in military skill, Octavian was possessed of

incredible willpower, political genius, and a ruthless ability to take advantage of his opponent's mistakes. In 37 BC, Antony postponed plans for his Parthian campaign to help Octavian with rebellions in Italy and renewed their alliance at the Treaty of Tarentum. Later that year, Antony returned to the East to secure his own power base and make final preparations for the invasion of Parthia the following spring. He sent Octavia, pregnant and with a baby daughter, back to Rome.

Antony went to Antioch in Syria, since he needed resources for the Parthian campaign, and summoned Cleopatra to meet him. There they resumed their sexual relationship along with their political alliance. In a public ceremony cementing their union, Cleopatra was granted extensive and rich territories in Syria, Cyprus, and Cilicia in return for her financial support. Although Octavian claimed Antony was seduced by the insatiable queen into handing over vast tracts of the empire, Antony's actions were consistent with his overall strategy of governing the eastern provinces through alliances with friendly client-kings, such as King Herod of Judaea (Hughes-Hallett, 24–5). In exchange for regaining control over much of what Ptolemaic Egypt had ruled at its height, Cleopatra outfitted Antony's legions and built him a fleet to protect his interests in the Mediterranean. In the spring of 36 BC, Antony set out with his army for Parthia, against Cleopatra's advice. The expedition was a disaster, due in part to the last-minute loss of support from King Artavasdes of Armenia. Antony lost twenty thousand men. Early in 35 BC, Cleopatra, who had just borne Antony another son, arrived with more money and provisions for the troops. When Antony heard the loyal Octavia was also on her way with reinforcements, he sent her a message ordering her to send soldiers and supplies, but she should return to Rome. Antony thereby signaled his intention to abandon his alliance with Octavian, and challenge him for primacy in the Roman world, with the help of his mistress-ally, the Queen of Egypt.

After the disgraceful dismissal of his sister, which he perhaps anticipated, Octavian had the personal justification to strike directly at Antony and Cleopatra. For the next five years, Octavian waged a vicious propaganda war to convince the Senate and the Roman people that Antony and Cleopatra intended to subjugate Rome to an Eastern Empire, ruled jointly from their imperial capital at Alexandria (Hughes-Hallett, 26–8). Although Antony's immense popularity made it difficult to cast him as an enemy of Rome, it was much easier to portray Cleopatra as a power-hungry foreign queen manipulating the doting Antony through sexual seduction and bribery. That spring, Antony and Cleopatra returned to Egypt to raise money

for future campaigns. Early in 34 BC, Antony marched East, conquered Armenia, and punished King Artavasdes for his earlier betrayal by hauling him back to Alexandria in a spectacular triumph. Shortly thereafter, in a ceremony known as the Donations of Alexandria, Antony granted additional territories to Cleopatra and her children, and recognized her as supreme overlord of all eastern client kingdoms. Antony also declared the 13-year-old Caesarion the rightful heir of Julius Caesar, which was not legally true, but posed an overt challenge to Octavian's claim of authority over the Roman world.

These proclamations indicate the extent of Antony and Cleopatra's aspirations: first to annex the vast eastern realms to Ptolemaic Egypt, and from there to govern both East and West, including Rome. The breach between Antony and Octavian instantly widened and rival factions solidified behind each man. The following year, in 33 BC, Antony and Cleopatra moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor to prepare their legions and fleets for war against Octavian. All year long, the men exchanged venomous propaganda attacks and in spring of 32 BC Antony formally divorced Octavia. That spring, Antony's supporters, including 300 senators, left an increasingly hostile city of Rome to join Antony in Ephesus. While they took his side in the rivalry with Octavian, they were alarmed by the implications of the Donations and objected to Cleopatra's presence at the war council. The queen refused to leave, insisting she controlled the fleet of 500 warships. Knowing they could not strike Octavian on Italian soil, Antony and Cleopatra sailed to western Greece and established their camp at Actium, intending to wait for Octavian to make the first move.

In Rome, a deserter from Antony's camp informed Octavian that Antony's last will and testament had been deposited with the Vestal Virgins. Octavian illegally extracted the will and read it to the Senate, allegedly confirming Antony's legacies to the children of Cleopatra, and directing that he be buried beside her in the Ptolemaic mausoleum at Alexandria (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 17). Whether genuine or a forgery, the will verified Octavian's claim of Cleopatra's ascendancy over Antony and gave Octavian his greatest propaganda victory. Capitalizing on popular outrage against Antony, but wanting to avoid the appearance of starting another civil war, in the winter of 32 BC Octavian declared war on Cleopatra. The following spring, Octavian's second in command, the brilliant admiral Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, set up a blockade at Cleopatra's bases along the southern Greek coast, cutting off her supply ships from Egypt. When Octavian landed with his army to the north, Antony and Cleopatra were trapped in the gulf of Ambracia.

Antony's camp was devastated by famine and plague, his troops were deserting, and his officers were in conflict among themselves. Canidius Crassus, Antony's chief military commander, argued against a naval engagement with Agrippa, and advocated marching north to face Octavian's army on land. Cleopatra opposed this strategy, perhaps because she did not want to abandon the costly fleet, but also to protect her position with Antony. Loading her treasure onto the royal flagship, Antony and Cleopatra decided to fight their way out by sea. On September 2, 31 BC, the battle of Actium took place, but historians dispute the actual events of the battle (Hughes-Hallett, 29–30). Cleopatra broke out of the bay with her squadron of sixty ships, and Antony managed to follow with a few of his ships, but the rest of the fleet was blocked by Agrippa. Several ships were sunk, and the remaining ships surrendered to Octavian. Antony's land forces, led by Canidius, were instructed to retreat overland to Asia Minor, but were overtaken by Octavian's troops and surrendered without resistance. Though it was not a spectacular engagement, Octavian's victory was complete (Grant, 245–6). Instead of a celebration, Octavian and Agrippa were forced to return to Italy to deal with mutinous legions and appease their demands for pay and land grants.

Antony and Cleopatra escaped with the treasure back to Alexandria (Hughes-Hallett, 31–2). In the next few months, Cleopatra raised more money and made an unsuccessful attempt to plan an escape route to India. She sent her son Caesarion away for safety, while throughout the East, her allies defected to Octavian. In the summer of 30 BC, Octavian arrived in Egypt, desperate for money to pay his troops. Cleopatra sent messages to him, hoping to dictate terms in exchange for financial support, and Antony offered Octavian a large bribe to let him retire from public life, but Octavian ignored them. When Octavian reached Alexandria in August, Antony's remaining legions surrendered. Cleopatra shut herself up in her mausoleum with her treasure and a few attendants. Antony stabbed himself, and was lifted into her monument, where he died in her arms.

When Octavian arrived at the mausoleum, he discovered Antony was dead and took Cleopatra into custody. He allowed her to attend Antony's funeral, but let it be known she would be kept alive to be taken to Rome in his triumph (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 17). Cleopatra sent a message to Octavian asking to be buried next to Antony, then committed suicide, along with her two maids. When the Romans found her, she was lying on her marble bier, dressed as the goddess Isis in cloth of gold. No one knows for certain how she died, whether from poison or snake bite. Octavian

honored her request for burial with her lover. Though Caesarion was seized and put to death, Octavian spared Cleopatra's three children by Antony, and paraded them in his triumph at Rome. The daughter, also named Cleopatra, was later married to Prince Juba of Numidia, and her two brothers lived with her at court.

Octavian annexed Egypt to Rome as a province, thereby ending the Greek Ptolemaic dynasty that had ruled Egypt for 300 years since the death of Alexander the Great. Cleopatra's enormous treasure made Octavian richer than the entire Roman state, and he handsomely rewarded his veterans. In his domination of the East, Octavian secured the future political leadership of the empire for Italy and Rome. In 27 BC, Octavian took the name Augustus Caesar, and with his unparalleled prestige and extraordinary financial resources, he began the task of reconstructing the Roman government under the Principate.

Background to the Film

The period of civil strife in the mid-first century BC, one of the most turbulent and well-documented eras of Roman history, has always fired the artistic imagination, "with its mixture of intrigue, violence, sex and politics" (Elley, 89). The final years of the Roman Republic offer an arresting gallery of real human characters and critical historical events ideal for epic cinematic portrayal: the dictatorship and assassination of Julius Caesar, the rivalry between his successors, Antony and Octavian, that gave rise to the Roman Empire, and in particular, the fascinating figure of the brilliant Egyptian queen who shaped the course of history. Ever since Octavian manipulated her image in his relentless propaganda wars against Antony, representations of Cleopatra in various times, cultures, and artistic media have shifted and changed in form, meaning, and purpose (Wyke, 74–5). In contemporary Roman poetry, Cleopatra was imagined as the monstrous "other," both foreign and female: she was a whore (Propertius 3.11), a crazed drunk (Horace *Odes* 1.37), and an animal-worshipping barbarian (Vergil *Aeneid* 8). The Augustan poets, and later historiographers like Plutarch and Suetonius, developed the image of Cleopatra as a depraved harlot, an alluring but sinister character who seduced Antony into surrendering his Roman manhood to a corrupt, effeminate Asia, and thus threatened to emasculate and destroy the entire Roman state. Octavian's war against Cleopatra was figured as a patriotic campaign to defend Rome from being swallowed by a voracious tyrant, so the defeat of

Egypt by Rome came to represent the superiority of West over East, male over female, and military order over decadent chaos (Hughes-Hallett, 36–69).

While accounts of Cleopatra and her interactions with Rome can be found in the works of several ancient authors, modern filmmakers have also been considerably influenced by one of William Shakespeare's most important and popular tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra*, published at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Though it relies closely on Plutarch's disapproving narrative in his *Life of Antony*, Shakespeare's drama also highlights the transcendent nature of the lovers' passion, and offers an ambivalent portrayal of a charismatic Antony and an enchanting, regal, even sympathetic Cleopatra (Wyke, 75–8). Over the centuries, the image of Cleopatra has gone through many other metamorphoses. To the Elizabethans of the English Renaissance, Cleopatra was a symbol of ideal love and the fragility of civilization (Hughes-Hallett, 132–59). In the discourse of nineteenth-century Orientalism, Cleopatra embodied the feminine East, an exotic and enchanting Asia or Africa inviting sexual and martial penetration by the masculine western empires intent on colonial domination (Hughes-Hallett, 201–24). The European Romantics cast Cleopatra as a murderous lover-queen in their masochistic fantasies of erotic violence (Hughes-Hallett, 225–51). The multiplicity of traditions for the representation of Cleopatra since antiquity reveals how the figure of the Egyptian queen has been appropriated for political, artistic, and ideological uses.

The early film industry reflected this diversity of structure and significance in portraying Cleopatra onscreen (Wyke, 79–97). One of the earliest cinematic versions of Cleopatra's story was a hugely successful silent film by Italian director Enrico Guazzoni, *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913). Though based on Shakespeare's play, the film depicts Cleopatra as an evil temptress more consistent with ancient Augustan propaganda or the man-eating "killer Cleopatras" of nineteenth-century Romanticism. The end of the film also goes beyond Shakespeare's plot to present an unambiguously vanquished Egypt coupled with celebratory images of Roman conquest, suggesting an Orientalist model of Cleopatra's inevitable defeat. The destructive sexuality aspect of Cleopatra emerges in the Hollywood production of J. Gordon Edwards' silent film *Cleopatra* (1917), starring Theda Bara. Although the last print of the film was destroyed by fire in 1951, several still photographs and a surviving script give a sense of this elaborate and controversial project. The film's external publicity entailed an association of the Egyptian queen with the "vamp" figure, the modern woman of the 1910s who drained men sexually, then dumped them.

Extra-cinematic commentary also suggested how Jewish actress Bara's personal biography was manipulated and reinvented in linking her to the role of Cleopatra as a racially exotic and treacherous "other" (Royster, 71–82).

In the 1920s and 1930s, the idea of the "new woman" entered the American consciousness, as middle-class women experienced new political, financial, and sexual freedoms. Soon Hollywood embraced a more desirable and familiar image of Cleopatra in the first sound version of the story, Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934). DeMille was famous for his stylish romantic comedies on contemporary social themes, and viewers have noted the modernity and humor of his *Cleopatra*, as though it were "a comedy of modern manners in fancy dress" (Wyke, 91). Claudette Colbert pouts prettily in the lead role like a glamorous sex kitten, purring the witty, often racy, dialogue and lounging on visually opulent sets. DeMille's cinematic interpretation of history presents the same simple confrontation that frames so many modern sex comedies of the 1930s: here, "masculine" Rome meets "feminine" Egypt in a grand amorous conceit (Elley, 93). Likewise, contemporary female spectators were encouraged to identify with this insouciant onscreen Cleopatra in their choice of fashion and make-up (Wyke, 98–9). At the end of the film, Cleopatra is comfortably restored to traditional femininity through her love for Antony, and the dangerous "new woman" is also safely contained. A decade later, when George Bernard Shaw's stage play (1898) was adapted into film, George Pascal's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1946), the mighty queen, played by Vivien Leigh with giggling petulance, is demoted to a foolish little girl, stripped of potency and peril (Hughes-Hallett, 252–65). These twentieth-century cinematic Cleopatras recall and reshape the earlier traditions for representing her beauty, sexuality, and power, and anticipate the celebrated incarnation of Cleopatra in Mankiewicz's film.

One of the most sophisticated and intelligent American filmmakers, Joseph L. Mankiewicz (1909–93) tackled many different creative roles during his career in Hollywood. He began in the late 1920s as a writer, and by the mid-1930s he was the producer of such superb films as *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) and *Woman of the Year* (1942). In the 1940s he took up directing, and had hit films with *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) and *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), for which he won both writing and directing Oscars. The next year, Mankiewicz took home twin Oscars for his most famous and admired film, *All About Eve* (1950), the wicked backstage chronicle starring Bette Davis in an Oscar-nominated performance. In the 1950s, Mankiewicz directed several remarkable films, including Sidney Poitier's first film, the racial drama *No Way Out* (1950); a scathing look at the film industry, *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954); and the smash musical comedy *Guys and Dolls* (1955). Mankiewicz's first film about the ancient Roman world was his faithful rendition of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1953), in moody black and white with actor Marlon Brando playing Antony. Another adaptation of a stage play was Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959), starring Elizabeth Taylor in an Oscar-nominated role. Mankiewicz was recognized for his gifts as a droll dialogue writer and an actor's director, who could draw the finest performances out of his stars. His final Oscar nomination came from the hit mystery thriller *Sleuth* (1972).

Making the Movie

In June of 1963, 20th Century Fox released their lavish, much-publicized version of *Cleopatra* with its stunning, all-star cast. At a cost of over $44 million, it was the most expensive movie ever made, and from the beginning it was plagued by costly production delays and personnel changes. When planning began in 1959, the studio originally intended a modest $2 million project, with only a few location shoots and principal filming to be done in London. But after Elizabeth Taylor fell ill with pneumonia and came near death, chilly Britain was abandoned in favor of the warmer climate of Rome, and the film's budget increased exponentially. Early in 1961, director Rouben Mamoulian quit, and the new director, Mankiewicz, began demonstrating his enthusiasm for making an epic on a magnificent scale. Bigger stars were hired for the male leads: Rex Harrison took the role of Julius Caesar after Laurence Olivier declined, and Richard Burton replaced Stephen Boyd as Mark Antony (Solomon, 2001a, 68).

The major challenge facing all cinematic attempts to portray the story of Cleopatra and her sequential affairs with Caesar and Antony is how to incorporate history into the narrative and allow the characters some recognition of their historical role. Directors must also decide "how to knit into a dramatic unity two relationships which were historically quite separate" (Elley, 93). Mankiewicz wanted to envelop the historical facts in a big concept: "The *Cleopatra* I have in mind is the story of a remarkably brilliant, ruthless woman who nearly made herself Empress of the then-known world, utilizing for her purpose the two strongest men in the world, both of whom failed her" (quoted in Elley, 93–4). Taylor, fresh from her lead actress Oscar for *Butterfield 8* (1960) and with an unprecedented $1 million contract, becomes the film's central pivot, around which Harrison and then Burton try to steer the imperial destiny of Rome.

The script, based on C. M. Franzero's book *The Life and Times of Cleopatra* (1957), balances the queen's two Roman relationships into two distinct halves. In the first part, Caesar is lured by the promise of Egyptian wealth, enchanted by the queen's charm and determination, and finally convinced by her dream of world domination. After Caesar's death, the plot hinges on Cleopatra's abiding political aspirations and Antony's rivalry with Octavian for control of the empire. Antony and Cleopatra's ambitions draw them together, and the attraction blossoms into the great love affair depicted in the second part. Critics note the first half of the film offers more compelling entertainment, due to stronger dialogue and more disciplined acting, as well as the rich onscreen chemistry between Taylor and the charismatic Harrison. The film's second part is noticeably diminished by a weak script and aggressive editing, and in their scenes together, Taylor and Burton exhibit a kind of guarded restraint not usually conducive to playing grand epic characters.

The real-life love affair between Taylor and Burton that began during shooting in 1961 no doubt affected their performances, as an extraordinary amount of publicity about *le scandale* (as Burton called it) accompanied the production of the film. The two stars, while married to others, engaged in a torrid and flamboyant affair that infuriated the Vatican and employed hundreds of *paparazzi* in Rome (Hughes-Hallett, 273–93). For two years, an avid public was inundated with images and reports of Taylor and Burton on the movie set, on the posh Via Veneto, on extravagant shopping sprees, in luxury hotels, cavorting in towels and swimsuits, in drunken brawls and other feats of extreme behavior. While filming, Taylor and Burton could not be persuaded to stop kissing at the end of a scripted embrace, no matter how many times the director yelled "Cut!" In the United States, congressmen demanded the shameless couple be refused entry into the country, and television host Ed Sullivan denounced them on his show for their "appalling" impropriety (Royster, 101).

However, the censorious outrage only enhanced the glamour and popular value of the film's two principal stars. As the liaison between Taylor and Burton became public knowledge, the scandal provided priceless free advertising to publicize the film. The historical love affair between Cleopatra and Antony was recreated in glossy film magazines, newspapers, and tabloids all over the world, and in press conferences the studio opportunistically linked the sizzling details of the modern affair to the ancient romance. Watching the lovers in the finished film is thus a complicated experience, both for contemporary viewers who were bombarded with detailed press accounts of the affair, and for later audiences familiar

with the now near-legendary *grand amour*. Nathan Weiss, the publicist for *Cleopatra*, noted upon the film's release: "Everybody, but everybody, will go to see this picture to say that they can see on screen what's going on off it" (quoted in Hughes-Hallett, 292). The opulence and decadence of ancient Rome and Egypt were reborn in the early 1960s on the streets of modern Rome, nicknamed "Hollywood on the Tiber." Because of this uniquely well-exposed conjunction between life and art, Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* had an unrivaled impact upon the public imagination.

Alongside the titillating parallel love story, the extravagant production values of *Cleopatra* dominate the screen. More than any other epic film, *Cleopatra* provides "a feast of costuming, art direction and production design" (Elley, 94). Like the sex scandal, the film's conspicuous expenditures were diligently reported in the press before its release. *Cleopatra* set a record for the enormous costs of its sumptuous sets and expensive costumes (Solomon, 2001a, 69–70). Cleopatra's outfits, including thirty wigs and 125 pieces of jewelry, cost the then-incredible sum of $130,000. Over twenty-six thousand costumes were required to equip the cast of extras in the battle scenes at Pharsalus, Philippi, and Actium, at a price of half a million dollars. Date palm trees were imported from California and trimmed with fresh palm fronds flown in daily from Egypt. Decked with purple sails and silver oars, the dazzling barge that brings Cleopatra to Tarsus was built to full size and cost over $250,000.

For Cleopatra's magnificent entry into Rome, the Forum was reconstructed on a massive scale in the Cinecittà studios, including the Arch of Constantine – a handsome anachronism, since it would not be built for another three centuries. The scene itself cost almost a million dollars to shoot. The procession, which lasts seven minutes and "might be the most spectacular pageant sequence ever filmed" (Solomon, 2001a, 74), includes chariots, soldiers, archers, performers, zebras and elephants, and an incomparable variety of movement and dance, brilliantly choreographed by the auspiciously named Hermes Pan. Taylor's gold dress, made with real 24-carat thread, was valued at $6,500. As the black stone Sphinx enters the Forum carrying the golden queen, looking like an Oscar statuette, Cleopatra offers a vision of Egyptian wealth and power to the Roman populace that mirrors the power and wealth of the Hollywood industry to stage such cinematic spectacles for the movie audience. The reaction shots of the various Romans – a proud Caesar, a fascinated Antony, the outraged senators, and a dispirited Calpurnia – reflect the range of public reactions to the publicity about the film's profligate spending and the reckless love affair between its two principal stars. The film's other epic sets are designed

Plate 10 *Cleopatra*. Mark Antony (Richard Burton) and Cleopatra (Elizabeth Taylor) vow never to forget their love for each other. Courtesy of 20th Century Fox/ The Kobal Collection.

with an elegant and authentic-looking minimalism, from the bright harbor at Alexandria built on the beach at Anzio, to the dark *opus sectile* floor tiles of the Senate house in Rome, to the luminous shadows of the royal mausoleum (Elley, 94). The film presents a splendid palette of colors to

code the various locales, as the warm golds and greens of Cleopatra's plush Egyptian palace contrast with the cool whites and blues of the austere Roman villas. Composer Alex North follows up his work in *Spartacus* (1960) with an Oscar-nominated musical score for *Cleopatra* that uses avant-garde harmonies scored for large string ensembles (Solomon, 2001b, 331). The rhythmic music evokes each of the three romantic protagonists on their intersecting epic journeys, until the various themes are woven together at the end.

Cleopatra conforms to epic convention with a grand beginning, where vibrantly painted titles dissolve into the opening frames of the film. North's score opens with a rousing version of the queen's theme, both pompous and playful, with an undercurrent of eastern sensuality suggested by the chiming of cymbals and the sound of high-pitched flutes. The first half of the film takes place between 48 and 44 BC, and focuses on the heroic struggle of the young Queen of Egypt to save her country from absorption into the expanding Roman Empire through her relationship with the ascendant Roman general, Caesar. The traditional opening voice-over sets up the first half of the film by highlighting the theme of civil war. A similar solemn narration warning of Romans fighting each other will recur later in the film at two significant points: before the start of the second half at the battle of Philippi, and again before the climactic battle of Actium.

> And so it fell out that at Pharsalia the great might and manhood of Rome met in bloody civil war, and Caesar's legions destroyed those of the great Pompey, so that now only Caesar stood at the head of Rome. But there was no joy for Caesar, as at his other triumphs. For the dead which his legions counted and buried and burned were their own countrymen.

The innovation of this scene allows Harrison as Caesar to come in immediately with his lines, as if continuing the prologue in his own harsh, clipped tones: "The smoke of burning Roman dead is just as black, and the stink no less. It was Pompey – not I – wanted it so." The disgust and exhaustion in his voice indicate the cruel toll exacted by the long course of civil war between Romans, and hints at Caesar's rising inclination to explore a new mode of securing power. British actor Harrison inhabits the role of Caesar with patrician confidence and worldly sophistication, expertly navigating a range of registers from no-nonsense military commander and imperious autocrat to debonair lover of Cleopatra and doting father to his young son. Polishing his craft in countless stage and screen appearances, Harrison was nominated for an Oscar for his performance

as Caesar, but is best known for his role the following year as Professor Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* (1964), his Oscar-winning reprise of the part he created on Broadway.

When Caesar arrives in Egypt, the scenes in Alexandria characterize him as a man of practicality and cleverness, as he defeats the expectations of the jaded Egyptians. Rather than bully his way through the crowd at the harbor, Caesar demonstrates his smiling, self-assured virility and a popular touch, in stark contrast to the sulking boy king, enthroned and surrounded by his bizarre retinue of eunuchs. Ptolemy strokes a cat on his lap, in a visual trope that becomes the universal symbol of the movie tyrant, such as Ernst Blofeld, the villain of several James Bond films, including *You Only Live Twice* (1967), or comic versions like Dr. Evil in the spy parody *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), or Dr. Claw in *Inspector Gadget* (1999). In *Cleopatra*, the unstable history of the Ptolemaic rulers is described early on in one of Caesar's passionate arguments with the young queen, as he reproaches her: "You, the descendant of generations of inbred, incestuous mental defectives, how dare you call anyone barbarian? . . . Daughter of an idiotic, flute-playing drunkard who bribed his way to the throne of Egypt – I've had my fill with the smug condescension of you worn-out pretenders, parading on the ruins of your past glories." She replies firmly: "It is the future that concerns me."

Cleopatra follows the tradition of earlier epic films by constructing an opposition in which Rome represents one pole, and here the other is Egypt (Fitzgerald, 24). This conflict is figured around the sexual tug-of-war between Caesar and Cleopatra. At first, Caesar is arrogant and in control, and Cleopatra icily rejects his initial amorous advances: "I promise you will not enjoy me like this." Only when she discovers the secret of Caesar's epilepsy do her emotions for him begin to soften (Elley, 94). Her protective urges are aroused by his honesty and vulnerability: "One day . . . the mob will laugh and tear me to pieces." The film suggests what began as a shrewd political seduction turns into genuine love, and offers a positive model of an alliance where masculine Rome is nurtured by feminine, maternal Egypt. Cleopatra highlights this association in the sultry promise she gives Caesar in bed, identifying herself with the fertile Nile River and vowing to give him sons. The likeness persists when Caesar later asks the Roman senators: "Have any of you here seen the Nile? Spare yourselves the journey – she carries it within her eyes." The Egyptian queen embodies Caesar's desire to establish a personal legacy of lasting imperial authority.

In *Cleopatra*, the heterosexual romances between the queen and her two successive Roman lovers become the clear and central focus of the narrative, with little exploration of the relationships between men. This emphasis recalls the romantic plot of *Quo Vadis* (1951), and shows a striking difference from toga films later in the decade, such as *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus*, where relations between men and their ensuing complications were prominently portrayed. The bipartite structure of *Cleopatra* seems to set up a contest between two men, a great father figure in the first part of the film and a son who struggles to live up to his example in the second (Fitzgerald, 46). But very little of Caesar's historical relationship with his most trusted general, Antony, is shown in the first part of *Cleopatra*, perhaps because of extensive cutting of early scenes establishing their bond and Antony's strong epic character (Solomon, 2001a, 71). Rather, Antony's early scenes show him suavely chatting up women in Rome to establish his reputation as a *bon vivant* and "ladies' man." In the few scenes the men share, it is not Caesar but Cleopatra who sways Antony with her sharp articulation of the will to power.

This lack of emotional background between the two men diminishes the film's later portrayal of Antony's rage and frustration over his inability to match Caesar's military and erotic conquests. The death of Caesar is presented as an event in Cleopatra's life, while Antony's reactions – his famous funeral speech and his response to the naming of Octavian as Caesar's official heir – are curiously downplayed. Several scenes foreshadowing the assassination all occur at Cleopatra's villa, including the wild storm and the murder of Titus, whose body is thrown over the garden wall as a warning. As Caesar leaves for the Senate, she tells him: "The world, except for you, is filled with little men." Cleopatra has a vision in the sacred oracular fire, allowing the audience to see her view of the murder and experience her horror at the loss of her lover and ally. In the scene where Cleopatra is about to leave for Egypt, Antony arrives unexpectedly, overwhelmed by the events of Caesar's death, but also confused about his feelings for her. Again the film takes Cleopatra's perspective, as she expresses bitter surprise at his emotions and all but dares him to come to Alexandria. Antony interprets this as an invitation and takes her perfumed scarf as a token of promise.

The second part of the film takes place between 42 and 30 BC, and follows Cleopatra's continuing struggle to maintain the security of Egypt. Antony assumes the dominant role in avenging Caesar's legacy at Philippi and the legions respond positively to him as they did to Caesar. The

beginning of the second half after the battle of Philippi against Caesar's assassins echoes the opening of the first part after the battle of Pharsalus, underscoring the theme of civil war and drawing a parallel between Antony and Caesar for the audience; this parallel will materialize in their respective liaisons with Cleopatra. In Alexandria, Cleopatra waits for the inevitable appeal: "Antony will need Egypt . . . Antony will need me." Welsh actor Burton, considered one of the world's finest actors, plays Antony with a mixture of furious passion and sardonic nonchalance, but falls short of tragic hero status due to the substantial editing of his scenes. Burton starred in *The Robe* (1953), and had the title role in *Alexander the Great* (1955), but after several Hollywood films, he achieved superstardom as King Arthur in the hit Broadway musical *Camelot* (1960), for which he won a Tony award. Although honored seven times with Oscar nominations, he never took home a statuette. Famous for his beautiful and distinctive delivery, Burton's rich, sexy voice sounds like whiskey poured on velvet. His Antony is charming but dissolute, bold but weak, and prone to bouts of self-pity mixed with drunkenness. Many scenes showcase his drinking, and he is rarely without his wine goblet in the second half of the film.

Antony's pride will not let him ask Cleopatra for support, an indication he desires her as a woman to be sexually conquered rather than as a political ally. For their meeting on the barge, Cleopatra devises a lavish, ingenious entertainment, where she plays the role of Venus, goddess of love, to Antony's Bacchus, god of wine. The scene evokes wedding imagery, with Cleopatra dressed all in white, as the couple sits at a head table, rather than the more accurate reclining on couches. Antony wears a sea-blue uniform in the "Greek" style, with leopard-skin accents, recalling the armor worn by Paris, the notorious Trojan lover of legend, a man who took another man's wife. Paris' act of stealing the lovely queen, Helen, suggests an analogy to Antony, who will now combat the ghost of Caesar to win Cleopatra at the "wedding" banquet. Cleopatra entices him with provocative statements: "There cannot be enough hours in the days of a queen . . . and her nights have too many." Yet she confronts him with his jealousy and ambition by wearing a necklace of coins struck with Caesar's portrait, and will only accept him when he proves his strength and autonomy. Cleopatra manipulates the spectacle by allowing her "double" to arouse an increasingly inebriated Antony, while the image of the mock-Cleopatra self-consciously plays on the dynamic between the actress Taylor and the film audience watching her in the role (Wyke, 106). Antony's invidious rage reaches a breaking point when he rips the gauzy pink veil around the queen's bed, and then yanks the collar of coins off her neck.

> Be braver than the bravest, wiser than the wisest, stronger than the strongest, still no Caesar! Do what you will, Caesar's done it first and done it better – ruled better, loved better, fought better! Run where you will, fast as you can, you can't get out, there's no way out – the shadow of Caesar will cover you and cover the universe for all of time! . . . Come to Alexandria whenever you like, you said. Now, tonight, I said, I would like to come tonight, to bow to the throne on which Caesar put you, to talk of a new treaty. Caesar's can't be improved, copy it! Of Caesar's son, of the dream you shared with Caesar that still fills your life, Alexander's design for a world to be ruled by you and Caesar! Where is Antony? Where is Mark Antony? Antony the great, the divine Antony? Here, he's here . . . one step behind Caesar, at the right hand of Caesar, in the shadow of Caesar.

With the consummation of their union, Antony attains some of Cleopatra's determination to challenge Octavian for the right to rule the Roman world. Antony's strength is temporary, however, and the scene where Antony is forced to kneel before Cleopatra to beg for an alliance marks the beginning of his collapse. While Cleopatra realizes Octavian is trying to set a trap for Antony, she is naturally jealous of his marriage to Octavia. But by exerting her power over Antony and humiliating him, she compels him into the subservient position he will occupy for the rest of the film. In a switch of conventional gender identities, Cleopatra is belligerent and uncompromising in her desire to wage war, but Antony just wants to live in peace and love (Elley, 88).

Antony's folly and loss of status are depicted before and during the battle of Actium. Even when he is roused to assert his command, Antony still follows Cleopatra's wishes against the advice of his worried officers. In these scenes, to illustrate his loss of reasoned authority, he is shown constantly drinking wine, in the war council and even during the battle itself. When Cleopatra's ship departs, Antony follows her blindly, oblivious to the men of his legions who invested him with his power as a Roman nobleman and general. Antony falls into a deep depression, knowing his love for Cleopatra has enslaved and emasculated him. The final reversal comes when they meet in the shrine of the deified Caesar, and with her encouragement, Antony reclaims his pride and decides to fight. This scene contrasts with the earlier meeting of Cleopatra and Caesar in the tomb of Alexander, and points to the futility of Antony's last stand against Octavian. At the end, when he believes she is dead, Antony again feels abandoned. Before he stabs himself, he says: "Once more it seems Cleopatra is out of reach, and I must hurry after – throughout life, and now beyond. One woman, one love. Nothing changes, except life into death . . . The ultimate

desertion: I from myself." As he dies in her arms, he acquires a sense of satisfaction in preceding her for once, instead of playing catch-up. "You and I will prove death so much less than love . . . we'll make of dying nothing more than one last embrace. A kiss . . . to take my breath away." Like a good romantic hero, Antony is restored to the masculine role by his tragic death.

British actor Roddy McDowall plays Octavian in "a splendidly ruthless and accurate performance, with a sure sense of the character's realization of his own victorious destiny" (Elley, 94). McDowall began his career as a child star in the 1940s, playing opposite Taylor in *Lassie Come Home* (1943), after which the two became lifelong friends. He played several roles in theater, television, and films, and later became famous as a sympathetic simian in *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and its numerous sequels. With his narrow, dour face and sinister composure, Octavian's severity is a clear counterpoint to Antony's amiability and expansive bluster. The antagonism between the two rivals is established in an early scene on the Senate steps, where the senators gossip about the birth of Caesar's son by Cleopatra. This event obviously threatens Octavian's position as the adopted son and heir of Caesar, with whom he never actually interacts in the film. When Antony questions him, Octavian's answers are detached and parsimonious. Antony snaps: "It's quite possible, Octavian, that when you die, you will die without ever having been alive."

Their rivalry is exacerbated in the second half of the film, when Antony receives military accolades, but the frail Octavian misses the battle lying sick in his tent. Aware of Antony's popularity, Octavian ingeniously claims the legacy and the name of Caesar for himself. During the time Antony is absent from Rome, Octavian uses the opportunity to smear him as an enemy and a doting pawn of the Egyptian queen. He snarls his accusations to the troubled senators: "For so many years, Antony has fed upon the crumbs that fell from Iulius Caesar's table." The film also makes clear the marriage with his sister Octavia is a cunning trap to cast Antony as a man who deserts a decent Roman wife for an "Egyptian whore." While *Cleopatra* presents a realistic portrait of Octavian as "one of the shrewdest politicians in the history of mankind" (Solomon, 2001a, 72), his role as the villain becomes unfairly inflated in the shocking scene where he viciously murders the old Egyptian diplomat, Sosigenes. In the end, Octavian's extraordinary reaction to the news of Antony's death, and his strange concern for Antony's honor, suggests a profound need for worthy adversaries in his drive to establish himself as the savior of Rome. In his meeting with Cleopatra, his ultimate foil, Octavian reveals a prurient

curiosity about the famous queen, her beauty and intelligence. She disdainfully refuses to call him Caesar to emphasize her connection with the "real" Caesar, and her loathing of him is palpable as she realizes he has killed her son. By portraying Octavian as a coward, liar, and murderer, the film suggests his instinct for self-preservation presaged his administrative genius.

In the title role, Taylor gracefully meets the impossible challenge of playing one of the most celebrated and complicated women in history. Cleopatra's many superlatives correspond to Taylor's own. One of the most astonishingly beautiful women in the history of cinema, Taylor's flawless face, striking violet eyes, and voluptuous figure are lovingly captured by the camera. Her remarkable beauty and stormy personal life, however, have overshadowed her considerable acting talents. As a gorgeous child star, Taylor shot to prominence with *National Velvet* (1944), and made a smooth transition to grown-up films, such as the memorable *Ivanhoe* (1952) and *Giant* (1956). She received three Oscar nominations in a row with demanding roles in *Raintree County* (1957), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), and *Suddenly Last Summer*, where she established a close rapport with director Mankiewicz. Taylor won her first Oscar playing a disaffected call girl in *Butterfield 8*. After she and Burton married in 1964, the famous couple starred together in several films, and she won her second Oscar for her brave performance as his vulgar wife in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966).

In *Cleopatra*, Taylor is both the best and the worst thing about the film. Her thin voice with its broad American accent contrasts unflatteringly with the crisp, theater-trained British cadences of her two male co-stars; after the film was finished, a dismayed Taylor offered to redub some of her weaker dialogue (Solomon, 2001a, 69). The extra-cinematic identification of Taylor's Hollywood star persona with the legendary Egyptian queen, in the sheer extent of their shared celebrity, power, and self-indulgence, both enriches and complicates the role (Wyke, 102–5). In the early scenes of the film, the Roman characters describe Cleopatra before the viewers can make their own judgment, much as the ancient Romans heard salacious propaganda about Cleopatra and the movie audience heard accounts of Taylor's scandalous offscreen activities. Rufio reports: "In obtaining her objectives, Cleopatra has been known to employ torture, poison, and even her own sexual talents, which are said to be considerable. Her lovers, I am told, are listed more easily by number than by name. It is said she chooses, in the manner of a man, rather than wait to be chosen after womanly fashion." In the scenes where Cleopatra's

majesty and power are displayed, Taylor is an imposing epic presence, and her exquisite looks are enhanced by the lush simplicity of her monochromatic gowns in orange, gold, and emerald green, designed by Irene Sharaff. Taylor effortlessly articulates Cleopatra's royal superiority when she informs Caesar's guards: "The corridors are dark, gentlemen, but you mustn't be afraid – I am with you." During the coronation scene, with her dark hair drawn back and under the pharaonic crown, Taylor's tracheotomy scar from her illness in Britain is clearly visible to the audience. These early scenes with the more disciplined Harrison are the most compelling in the film, since Taylor is "always at her finest when challenged" (Elley, 94). Yet critics note that Taylor is less successful in the scenes of subtle, genuine emotion that pervade the second half of the film, especially the love scenes with Burton leading up to her suicide. Still, given such tricky external circumstances and such a challenging character to play, Taylor capably fulfills the vast responsibility placed on her by the production with a magnetic, generous performance.

As a symbol of political power, the recurring image of Pompey's ring marks crucial points throughout the film. The ring was a gift to Pompey from his wife, Caesar's beloved only daughter, Julia, who died in 54 BC. As Caesar sadly tells Cleopatra: "She died trying to give him a son." The ring begins as an emblem of the familial bond between Caesar and Pompey, and thus the brutal civil war that shattered their bond is shown to be morally wrong, because it is a war between family members. The injustice of Roman fighting Roman is emphasized by the ring's first appearance together with Pompey's severed head, a grisly "gift," and perhaps an implied threat, from the Egyptians. In the early scenes in Alexandria, Caesar wears the ring on a long gold chain around his neck, displayed prominently against the hard metal of his breastplate, perhaps to remind him of the human cost of conquest. In a moment of anger, he hurls the ring across the marble floor. After the birth of his son, he dangles the ring above the infant, and gives it to him as a gift before he returns to Rome. "A good thing to remember, my son: what you will not let go, no one will take from you." In the tiny hands of Caesarion, the ring represents Caesar's autocratic ambitions and his hope of succession. After Caesar's murder, Cleopatra sets sail on the Tiber with Caesarion, and touches the ring around the neck of the sleeping child, as if to signify her plans to carry on Caesar's legacy. Finally, at the end of the film, the ring reappears. With Octavian threatening to invade Alexandria, Cleopatra gives the ring to young Caesarion before she sends him off in disguise. Later, as Octavian rides into Alexandria playfully caressing the ring, the audience sees a shot

of the dead Caesarion in a wagon behind him. This suggests the fateful ring sealed the boy's doom by allowing Octavian to identify, and then murder him. In the final scene in the mausoleum, Cleopatra sees the ring on Octavian's finger, and realizes her son must be dead. She steels herself for suicide, her dream of world unity now merely a trophy for Octavian.

Themes and Interpretations

Cleopatra became notorious for its scandal and extravagance. Although the film's immediate financial losses eventually cost the studio head and several others their jobs, by the end of the decade it had earned back most of its costs with a total domestic gross of $57 million. In the tradition of earlier epic spectaculars, *Cleopatra* was honored with nine Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, Musical Score, Lead Actor for Harrison, Film Editing, and Sound. The film won four Oscars, for Art Direction/Set Decoration, Cinematography, Costume Design, and Visual Effects. While *Cleopatra*'s financial tribulations have often been blamed for the decline of the epic film genre in subsequent years, the story was soon taken up again by Charlton Heston, who directed and starred in the lead role of a successful film version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1973). More recently, a feeble television miniseries, *Cleopatra* (1999), proved that the big screen medium and the casting of superstar actors in the roles of epic figures are essential requirements for such an epic tale of politics, love, and spectacle.

The film offers several angles of interpretation from the perspective of the political and social climate of the early 1960s. Perhaps in contrast to DeMille's kittenish version of Cleopatra, director Mankiewicz originally intended to portray his Cleopatra as a political visionary, a cosmopolitan woman of substantial experience and intellectual authority. The idea of a woman as a powerful and visionary political leader was particularly relevant at a time when the great Golda Meir was achieving prominence in the Middle East. After she worked to establish the State of Israel in 1948, Meir served her country as Minister of Labor (1949–56) and Foreign Minister (1956–65) before becoming Prime Minister of Israel in 1969. Meir was praised for her tireless dedication to her country and fierce devotion to her people, the same qualities Mankiewicz imagined for his Cleopatra.

The director also conceived of a Cleopatra who would express her vision of global unity using the contemporary rhetoric of the United Nations (Wyke, 100–1). Formed in 1945 as a response to World War II,

the United Nations was composed largely of allied countries from Europe, the Commonwealth, and the Americas, and was conceived as an organization of peace-loving nations uniting to prevent future aggression and to promote humanitarian causes. A Security Council of fifteen representative countries (five of them permanent) was appointed to ensure member nations would work together in close cooperation. But expectations for essential accord were soon defeated by the realities of the Cold War, which made it impossible to conclude global agreements for regulating the production of atomic bombs and the reduction of other armaments. Soon, comprehensive regional security alliances began to bypass the UN system, notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (or the Warsaw Pact) representing the Soviet bloc nations. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the United Nations was under constant scrutiny and criticism about its failure to resolve the continuing Cold War frictions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Americans hoped the election in 1960 of the young, progressive President Kennedy might bring an end to the Cold War, since by then the United Nations' power and influence were insecure.

Cleopatra was produced amidst the heightened geopolitical anxieties of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when President Kennedy exhibited his extraordinary resolve in a dangerous and tense military standoff with Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev over Russian nuclear installations on the island of Cuba. In June of 1963, the same month the film was released, President Kennedy delivered his famous Berlin Address, in which he referred to the inclusiveness of the ancient Roman world as a model for the present day: "Two thousand years ago, the proudest boast was *Civis Romanus sum* ["I am a Roman citizen"]. Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is *Ich bin ein Berliner.*" Although the commercial version of the film has been edited considerably, a few scenes suggest Mankiewicz's initial model of Cleopatra as "an early-day Kennedy" (quoted in Wyke, 101). Cleopatra first tries to persuade Caesar to stay in Alexandria by invoking the image of the famous general, Alexander the Great: "Alexander understood it – that from Egypt he could rule the world." At Alexander's tomb, the queen tries to convince Caesar to take up the great warrior's vision of world unity, and she imagines Egypt and Rome together ruling a unified world from Alexandria. "Make his dream yours, Caesar, his grand design. Pick it up where he left off. Out of the patchwork of conquest, one world, out of one world, one nation, one people on earth living in peace . . . the cloak of Alexander cannot be too heavy for Rome and Egypt to carry together."

Cleopatra's speech is cloaked in the fiery idealistic language of early 1960s political activism, made famous in the "I Have a Dream" speech given by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in August 1963. While Caesar is skeptical, Cleopatra is adamant about making the Greek Alexander's dream manifest through Rome and Egypt. She temptingly promises their son will be a symbol of this union, using Caesar's personal desire for an heir to sway him. The canny Caesar notes the skillful way she makes her pitch: "You have a way of mixing politics and passion . . . where does one begin and the other leave off?" But Caesar's death cuts short her dream of a united world empire, and the sight of Pompey's statue at his dying moment highlights the theme of civil war that will erupt between Antony and Octavian in the second half of the film. The feeling of unspeakable loss and despair would recur grimly a few months after the film's release with the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Cleopatra the visionary returns briefly in the final scene of her suicide, when she speaks of her dream: "How strangely awake I feel, as if living had been just a long dream . . . someone else's dream, now finished at last. But then now will begin a dream of my own, which will never end. Antony . . . Antony, wait . . ." As she dies calling his name, the visionary queen dreaming of world unity yields to the more romanticized figure of Antony's tragic beloved.

Like earlier epic films, *Cleopatra* offers a provocative view of gender issues within a changing American society. In the early 1960s, the American public was enchanted by its style-setting new First Lady, the young and glamorous Jaqueline Kennedy, who carefully constructed a sophisticated and vivacious atmosphere around the White House, and later associated her husband's brief administration with the legendary realm of Camelot. The handsome President was seductively serenaded on his birthday in May 1962 by actress Marilyn Monroe, the epitome of female Hollywood sexuality, who was rumored to be the President's mistress. As studio publicity and the press persisted in assimilating the actress Taylor to the character of Cleopatra, questions were raised about the shifting roles of women in the early 1960s, in particular about their sexual freedoms. With her extravagant and scandalous celebrity lifestyle, meticulously detailed in the media, Taylor was wrapped in all the reckless luxury and erotic glamour attributed to the ancient queen (Wyke, 102–5). Blurring the boundaries between the historical figure and the movie star was made easier by their respective sexual relationships with their lovers. Taylor's illicit affair with Burton became a reincarnation of Cleopatra's seduction of Antony, a delicious connection between real Roman history and a

modern sex scandal. When *Cleopatra* was being filmed, the raven-haired Taylor was already notorious in Hollywood as a "home-wrecker" for stealing Eddie Fisher from his wife, Debbie Reynolds, the quintessential "nice girl" blonde American star. So, *Cleopatra* advanced Taylor's star image as a "bad girl," a dangerous beauty, and a serial adulteress of legendary proportions.

At the same time, Taylor's persona as a modern-day Cleopatra put her at the center of fervent public debate about contemporary female sexual behaviors, making her "a useful reference point in the early 1960s for discussion of problems attached to the institutions of heterosexual monogamy" (Wyke, 105). When Professor Alfred Kinsey of Indiana University published his wide-ranging study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948), known as the "Kinsey Report," it became a popular bestseller. But just five years later, with the Cold War in full swing, fears about the dissolution of morality under the threat of Communism gripped the American public. The publication of Kinsey's second volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), which included his discovery that marital infidelity was rampant among middle-class American women, received an icy reception. Kinsey was accused of being part of the Communist conspiracy to undermine American family values, and lost his research funding in 1954. Yet the decade also brought conflicting messages about emergent sexual liberties. In December 1953, the publication of the first issue of *Playboy*, a soft-core pornographic magazine, was an immediate sensation, posting strong sales throughout the 1960s and generating a legion of imitators. By the early 1960s, the oral contraceptive for women was becoming available, and within a few years "the Pill" would facilitate the sexual revolution. The turbulent events and concerns of this transitional era could easily be linked to a lavish cinematic spectacle about sex and politics in antiquity.

Amid such public interest and controversy about sexuality, *Cleopatra* presents an image of aggressive female sexuality in the narrative of its title character and its female star. *Cleopatra* trains its camera lens on feminine desire and seductive beauty as the female becomes both the subject of the acquisitive gaze and the willing object of that gaze. While epic films such as *Ben-Hur* and *Spartacus* emphasized the exhibition of well-oiled nude male bodies, *Cleopatra* completely ignores the masculine physique in favor of the female, recalling the more explicit representation of the feminine form in *Quo Vadis*. In *Cleopatra*, the visual interest in the female body begins in the famous carpet episode. The viewer's first glimpse of Cleopatra comes as she tumbles to the floor, clad in a contour-hugging orange

gown that makes her look like a ripe fruit about to burst, and carrying a menacing gold dagger at her waist. Her initial interaction with Caesar demonstrates her intensity, imperiousness, and ability to both demand and persuade. "Shall we agree, you and I, upon what Rome really wants, has always wanted of Egypt? Corn, grain, treasure – it's the old story: Roman greatness built upon Egyptian riches. You shall have them, you shall have them all – and in peace. But there is only one way, my way. Make me queen." The camera lingers adoringly over the display of Taylor's body, its angles and curves, just as Cleopatra herself fashioned the spectacle of herself as queen, the goddess Isis, and the whole of Egypt. As Caesar remarks upon her coronation as sole Egyptian ruler: "Isis herself would surrender her place in heaven to be as beautiful as you."

Cleopatra exhibits her body as the corporeal manifestation of Egypt, exquisite, sumptuous, and fertile, and uses it to lure the Roman spectators. In an early scene, she purposefully creates and controls a spectacle in her luxurious quarters to titillate the lusty Caesar (Hughes-Hallett, 278). She whispers to her maids: "The Romans tell fabulous tales of my bath, and my handmaidens, and my morals." The film audience also expects to be teased by the spectacle. To heighten his sense of pleasurable conquest, Cleopatra allows Caesar to think he "breaks into" her apartment by force. Caesar bursts into her room, and finds her stretched out on a daybed, invitingly nude, as if waiting to be conquered. When her attendant sings the erotic verses of the contemporary Roman poet Catullus, Cleopatra intends it as a ploy to get a rise out of Caesar, and he complies by reciting some sexy Catullan verses from memory. Caesar is seduced by the bounty of Egypt, visually signaled by the richness of Taylor's flesh, and falls under her spell of sexual opulence.

Cleopatra also constructs her female sexuality through the trope of fertility and maternity. In another highly charged scene, Cleopatra and Caesar are in bed together about to make love, and she promises him a son. "I am the Nile. I will bear many sons. Isis has told me. My breasts are filled with love and life. My hips are round and well apart. Such women, they say, have sons." As she describes herself, Cleopatra takes Caesar's hands and places them firmly upon her body. The river image evokes her sensual nudity in the bath, and associates her with the abundance and life-giving properties of water. The combined image of sexuality and productivity recalls the "natural bath" sequence in *Spartacus*, where Varinia, nude and aroused, tells Spartacus she is pregnant. When Cleopatra uses the Nile River to describe her own fecundity, she again equates herself with Egypt. But her speech is carefully calculated to affect the childless Caesar in his

desire for sons, as she articulates his ambition for sole power through the concept of having a male successor (Elley, 95). Cleopatra also controls the spectacle of her child's birth to ensure he is accepted by Caesar as his legitimate heir. Even as she is in labor, Cleopatra gives her maid precise instructions to stage a mini-spectacle after the child is born by placing the infant ostentatiously at Caesar's feet. Cleopatra knows Caesar will be elated at the birth of his son, so she manipulates Roman custom to her benefit and that of the child. Later, in the triumphal entry into Rome, she portrays herself as Isis, the Egyptian mother goddess, with the child Caesarion at her side, clad in cloth of gold like the divine child, Horus (Hughes-Hallett, 83–4). Caesar is entranced by the image of himself manifest in his son: "See how unafraid he is!" Such a powerful and public image of dignified maternity was displayed by Jacqueline Kennedy in November 1963, as she walked slowly behind her husband's funeral cortege through the streets of the American capital, Washington, DC, holding the hands of her two small children. Cleopatra's awareness that the child represents Caesar's will to power is confirmed in the scene where Caesar instructs the boy how to be a "king," and especially how to get rid of his enemies. In the end, the film suggests Cleopatra's maternal love for Caesarion impels her towards noble suicide, since her grief for her son's murder causes her to lie to Octavian and arrange her own death.

While Cleopatra's relationship with Caesar in the film highlights her feminine sexuality through her procreative powers, the queen's liaison with Antony is presented as curiously sterile, with no mention of the three children the historical couple produced together. A provocative reversal of sexual identities between the weak, easily influenced Antony and the sexually and politically strong Cleopatra undermines the traditional cinematic characterization of "masculine" Rome and "feminine" Egypt (Elley, 88). The character of Antony is physically mobile, full of wanderlust, desirous of foreign luxuries, and he appears to "go native" wherever he is. As the film progresses, Antony's costumes become less Roman and more eastern in style, first Greek, then Egyptian, as if to imply his loss of Roman qualities. In the scene on the barge in Tarsus, when Cleopatra comments on the style of his uniform, he tells her: "I have a fondness for almost all Greek things." She replies: "As an almost all Greek thing, I'm flattered." Cleopatra represents the welcoming and exotic East that Antony wishes not only to conquer, but also to absorb.

The film offers other visual indications of Antony's transition from masculine Roman to feminized Easterner. When Cleopatra confronts him about returning to Rome to challenge Octavian, she finds Antony naked in her bath, soaking in milk and attended by maids. The scene characterizes Antony as feminine in his enjoyment of delicate luxuries, vulnerable in his nudity, and emasculated in his lack of interest in war. Antony's feminizing bath recalls the "deviant bath" scene in *Spartacus*, where Crassus is bathed by Antoninus and expresses his sexually ambivalent proclivities as he tries to seduce the slave boy. Antony's sexual migration in the second half of the film is emphasized by the bath scene, and closely precedes his separation from Cleopatra and his collapse under pressure from Octavian. At the end, Octavian's legions take over Cleopatra's palace, and several Roman soldiers are shown reveling in her bath, perhaps a cinematic signal of their corruption. Octavian, however, the virtuously masculine Roman, does not go near the bath.

In the final scene, Cleopatra reveals her skill in controlling the spectacle of her beauty, brilliance, majesty, and divinity. By designing the tableau of her death, she contributes to the creation of her own legend, just as the film *Cleopatra* participates in the same image-making activity. The ability of spectacular and public death to define and create the mythology of political heroes was especially significant in the violent 1960s, with the assassinations and funerals of President Kennedy in November 1963, his brother Robert F. Kennedy in June 1968, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968. The audience of *Cleopatra* takes the visual perspective of the Romans as they come rushing into her mausoleum. A snake slithers away from an overturned basket of figs. After the exchange between Agrippa and the dying maid, Charmian, the film's final voice-over echoes it back as a narrative quotation, while the camera pans back over the Roman's shoulder and through the dark open doors of the tomb: "And the Roman asked, 'Was this well done of your lady?' And the servant answered, 'Extremely well – as befitting the last of so many noble rulers.'" As a painted image is superimposed over the film scene, Cleopatra proceeds into legend, just as she planned.

CORE ISSUES

1 How does the film depict the theme of civil war, between Caesar and Pompey, and between Antony and Octavian?
2 How does the film portray Cleopatra as the sexually and politically powerful woman? Is this image of female empowerment consistent within the film?
3 How does the film present the three main characters, Cleopatra, Caesar, and Antony, and their relationships with each other?

4 How does the film use the spectacle of Egypt and the Egyptian queen to put the contemporary audience in the role of Romans watching the epic film?

5 How did/does the external publicity about the movie star Taylor and her affair with Burton affect the film?

Chapter 6

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1966)

Something for everyone . . . a comedy tonight!

Director:	Richard Lester
Screenplay:	Melvin Frank and Michael Pertwee
	Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart (play/book)
	Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics)
Produced by:	Melvin Frank for Quadrangle Films
Running Time:	100 minutes

Cast

Pseudolus	Zero Mostel
Lycus	Phil Silvers
Hysterium	Jack Gilford
Erronius	Buster Keaton
Hero	Michael Crawford
Senex	Michael Hordern
Miles Gloriosus	Leon Greene
Domina	Patricia Jessel
Philia	Annette Andre

Plot Outline

Pseudolus, the household slave of an upper-class Roman family, is a wily, clever fellow always looking for ways to obtain his freedom, even if it involves lying, cheating, and gambling. His master is the noble Senex, a

For Bart

Warrior, Mentor, Hero

BIG SCREEN ROME

Monica Silveira Cyrino

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