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[REVIEW]

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Review of Miryana Dimitrova, *Julius Caesar's Self-Created Image and Its Dramatic Afterlife* (London et al.: Bloomsbury 2018) (= Bloomsbury Studies in Classical Reception), pp. x, 236. ISBN: 9781474245753, £85 (hb), in: thersites 8 (2018), 151-157.

"IT is impossible not to become what others believe you are", said Thornton Wilder's Julius Caesar, as reported by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his novella *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*.[1] This quotation, not necessarily historically accurate, may well correspond to the relationship between Caesar's self-constructed image from his Commentaries and its reception in British drama. This relationship is discussed by Miryana Dimitrova in her book Julius Caesar's Self-Created Image and Its Dramatic Afterlife, published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2018. The volume looks into Caesar's narration of his achievements and his character traits as described in his Commentaries, and then compares these descriptions with those by Lucan, ancient historiographers and several modern dramatic texts, in order to show different ways in which Julius Caesar still matters today.

In the Introduction (pp. 1-28) to her book, Dimitrova highlights the propagandistic purposes of the Commentaries and presents her nine case studies: Thomas Kyd's translation of Robert Garnier's Cornelia, William Alexander's The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, John Fletcher's and Philip Massinger's The False One, the anonymous Caesar's Revenge, George Chapman's Caesar and Pompey, Jasper Fisher's Fuimus Troes, Nicolo Haym's libretto of Händel's Giulio Cesare in Egitto, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, and Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra. The author shows the importance and popularity of Caesar and his Commentaries in Great Britain since their publication in the late 16th century, and points to the theme of her book: their use as a "sort of a Caesarean repository for themes, imagery and qualities" (p. 4). On the same note, ancient historiographers and Lucan are framed as "important intermediators" between Caesar's self-created image and the plays (p. 14).

In the first chapter, entitled 'I Am He', Aspects of Caesar's Self-Representation in the Commentaries (pp. 29-66), the author analyses Caesar's personal traits and his role as both the author and the protagonist of his texts. Caesar's self-ascribed Roman qualities, "celerity, rationality and benevolence", are the main points of Dimitrova's interest. They are contrasted with the barbaric defects attributed by Caesar to his enemies: technological inferiority, "lack of organization, slowness and irrational conduct, especially anger" (p. 33). The concept of Caesar's celeritas is described using different examples, such as the migration of the Helvetii, the crossing of the

[1] G. Garcia Marquez, *Memorias de mis putas más tristes* (Barcelona, 2015).

Rubicon, the Nervii attack and the battle of the Sabis. Additionally, examples of Caesar's technical ingenuity and his swift and decisive military projects, realized even during night-time, are provided as examples of his efficiency and superiority over nature and his enemies.

A large portion of the chapter demonstrates how Caesar as author skilfully elaborates the virtues of his character 'Caesar' in order to actually improve his own public image. In this interplay between the narrator's and character's voice Caesar develops the dramatic potential of the Commentaries and through his dramatic portrayal he intends to win over public approval for his political and military actions.

Without a strong final conclusion, like most of the scholarship on that matter, Dimitrova discusses the reception of the Commentaries by Caesar's contemporaries. She emphasizes their dramatic aspect and suggests that they were received largely as dramatic texts. In the final section of the chapter she makes a comparison of the depiction of Caesar's traits in the Commentaries and in Alexandrian War, African War, and Spanish War. The works of Caesar's contemporaries are treated as the first in the "process of reassessment and partial demystification of the Caesarean image" suggesting they offer a "more realistic depiction of Caesar" (pp. 62, 65).

The second chapter, entitled Efficient Benevolence, the Shadow of Hubris and an Eastern Infatuation (pp. 67-114), starts "with an overview of Caesar's reception in antiquity and then proceeds to explore the transmutations of efficiency and mercy of Caesar in plays" (pp. 67-68). In this chapter Dimitrova presents three categories of Caesar's dramatic portrayal. In the first category, the two closet plays (Kyd's and Alexander's) depict a superficial, rhetorical Caesar, lacking action. They emphasize Caesar's mercy, or rather hubris and cruelty, as viewed by his enemies. The second category comprises plays presenting a problematic Caesar that shows a wide range of character traits and "ensures a deeper emotional appeal" (p. 74). Here belong the anonymous Caesar's Revenge and the works by Fisher and Chapman, who "present Caesar as a fully developed dramatic character with his celerity and mercy appositely incorporated in dialogue and action" (p. 78). As the third category, Dimitrova singles out Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, which, through the voice of different characters in the play, presents the complexity of different sides of Caesar's personality.

However, I argue that the remaining works by Fletcher and Massinger, Haym and Shaw may constitute a fourth category since they, as Dimitrova

points out, depict Caesar's celerity, efficiency and benevolence with regards to his relationship with Cleopatra. Starting from Fletcher's and Massinger's depiction of Cleopatra's subversion of Caesar's authority and virility, and finishing with Shaw's image of Caesar as Superman, Dimitrova shows how Caesar's relationship with Cleopatra is useful for different dramatic representations of his personality. In The False One the emphasis is on Cleopatra's comic subversion of Caesar's authority due to his infatuation. Haym follows a similar line but subverts Caesar's authority less and depicts his infatuation in a more positive perspective. Shaw depicts Caesar's and Cleopatra's relationship less centrally, and Cleopatra's subordination of Caesar is only a short episode that does not stand in the way of Caesar's authority and military projects.

The third chapter, entitled 'For Always I Am Caesar': Performative Actualization of Caesar's Self-Styled Image and Illeism as a Marker of Self-Institutionalization (pp. 115-154), analyses more closely the portrayal of Caesar's aforementioned character traits and their performativity in the dramatic works. Following Goffman's view of performativity and J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts, Dimitrova presents the dramatic and performative aspects of Caesar's triumphs and of other important occasions for his self-institutionalization, such as the refusal of the royal crown on the feast of Lupercalia. She starts the chapter "by looking at Caesar's public appearances in the works of ancient historiographers" and then looks at "Caesar's self-institutionalization in drama" (p. 118). The dramatists adopt Caesar's self-institutionalization strategies, as reported by the ancient sources, in order to portray his character traits in their own works. Kyd's Cornelia, Alexander's The Tragedy of Julius Caesar and the anonymous Caesar's Revenge use illeism to "accentuate his individual achievements and mettle", while Fuimus Troes uses it to undermine these qualities (p. 118). Chapman, Fletcher and Massinger raise the relationship between illeism and Caesar's public self-institutionalization especially with regards to his clementia, while in Händel the use of the third person is constrained to Caesar's public speaking and regards his "valour and benevolence" (p. 138). Finally, Shakespeare's and Shaw's plays are singled out as examples of more complex works. The emphasis in these plays is not on self-institutionalization itself, but on Caesar's performativity where the public and private personae overlap.

In the fourth chapter, entitled Transhistorical and Quasi-Divine: Caesar Connecting the Threads of Time (pp. 155-192), Dimitrova describes how the dramatists present Caesar as a heroic figure, a super-man, able to "transcend temporal boundaries" (p. 157). Lucan subverts Caesar and depicts him as demonic, witch-like, "defined by furor and irrationality" (p. 160). His supernatural Caesar, "capable of superseding the flow of ordinary time", is most visible perhaps in Kyd's Cornelia (p. 158), where the dramatist draws also on Caesar' mythological origins, as self-proclaimed by Caesar and reported by ancient writers. Caesar's great ancestry is evoked in Alexander's and Fisher's work as well.

The anonymous Caesar's Revenge and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar transgress time by introducing the image of Caesar's ghost: the former in the traditional context of the revenge play, and the latter in relation to Brutus's genius. Shaw lets his Caesar dominate time only up to a certain point, as he constrains Caesar with the awareness of his ageing. His Superman is more humane and, in fact, as Dimitrova reports, even autobiographical. On the other hand, the remaining works focus rather on Caesar's more humane aspects than on his mastery of temporal laws. Similarly to the previous chapter, here Cleopatra plays a great role: she takes part in a temporary and comical subjugation of Caesar's power (thanks to his infatuation) but does not endanger Caesar's overall more positive portrayal.

In the Epilogue (pp. 193-202), the most important findings of the research are reiterated: Caesar's strategies for his self-institutionalization, the role of Lucan and ancient historiographers in developing Caesar's public image, and finally, the connection between the depiction of Caesar's character in the Commentaries and in the dramatic texts. Curiously, the book finishes with descriptions of other noteworthy and controversial adaptations of the works discussed in this book, thereby offering to scholars additional cases for consideration in this context.

Despite the challenge of analysing so many heterogeneous case studies spanning over different historical periods with their particular literary, cultural and socio-political frameworks, Dimitrova manages to clearly connect her research data and implement her analyses into different chapters coherently and without repetitions, building her interpretation gradually. This book, therefore, contributes to both the existing corpus of studies on Caesar's Commentaries and of the works on the (dramatic) reception of Julius

Caesar. While providing a precise insight into the portrayal of specific aspects of Caesar's character in the Commentaries, and their confrontation with Caesar's portrayal in the works of Lucan and ancient historiographers, Dimitrova offers a fresh view on the understanding of the reception of Caesar's personality in his own lifetime and in the immediate future. What is more, by comparing these strategies of imagining Caesar with his reception in the dramatic texts from different historical periods, but all British, this book gives a new perspective into the trajectory of Caesar's reception in British literature, and that may be one of the greatest contributions of this study.

Admittedly, as the author points out in the introduction to the book, her work may be associated with that of Domenico Lovascio, who in his publications deals with some of these case studies, though from a different perspective, looking at the "interconnections between the texts [...] and the themes of regicide and political referentiality" (p. 23).[2] Dimitrova also discusses these themes, but unlike Lovascio, she does it in relation to "more abstract categories, such as performativity and relationship with temporality", and she also discusses case studies that are not analysed by Lovascio: Fuimus Troes, Giulio Cesare, and Caesar and Cleopatra (p. 23-24). Therefore, the studies by both authors complement one another.

Finally, Dimitrova points to some newer controversial cases of Caesar's multimedia and dramatic receptions in Great Britain and abroad, like Deborah Warner's (2005), Gregory Doran's (2012) or Phyllida Lloyd's (2012) productions of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, or Jegg Goode's Romeo and Julius (Caesar) from 2004. In the future, looking into some of these works, it would be valuable to examine what Caesar means to different people in diverse cultural and socio-political contexts today.

[2] See, for instance D. Lovascio, *Un nome, mille volti: Giulio Cesare nel teatro inglese della prima età moderna* (Rome 2015).

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