The Fatale Monstrum and the Nasty Woman: Gendered Political Representations of Cleopatra VII and Hillary Rodham Clinton

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Honors Thesis

THE FATALE MONSTRUM AND THE NASTY WOMAN:
GENDERED POLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CLEOPARTRA VII AND
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

by
Emma Baker

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements
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ABSTRACT

THE FATALE MONSTRUM AND THE NASTY WOMAN: GENDERED POLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CLEOPATRA VII AND HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

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This thesis examines the use of gender expectations in representations of two historically significant and politically powerful women: Cleopatra VII and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Though their situations were in some ways quite different, each of these women crafted her public image carefully, using both masculine and feminine gender expectations to represent herself as a powerful, capable leader and as a strong, caring mother. Their political enemies similarly drew on both masculine and feminine gender norms in order to represent these women both as dangerous, emasculating, monstrous figures who had to be conquered and as weak and incapable of leadership. The similarities in these uses of gender expectations and stereotypes in the formation of the public images of these two politically powerful women despite their different cultures and eras suggests that western civilization still represents powerful women today in much the same way it did two thousand years ago.
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To my mom, Jenny: thank you for teaching me to love learning, for raising me with a passion for art and literature, for surrounding me with stories about strong, complicated, interesting, and amazing women long before I realized I was a feminist, and for ten years ago suggesting that maybe I should study Latin. Thank you for encouraging me to study what I love, reassuring me when I am overwhelmed, and always loving me no matter what.

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1. Introduction

Historically, women in positions of power and influence tend to generate controversy. Cleopatra VII, the last queen of Ptolemaic Egypt, is one of the most famous and informative examples. A famously strong ruler, she dealt with “negative press” and the associated threats to her position from the very beginning of her reign. The most notable hostile propaganda against her can be traced back to efforts by Octavian (later known as Caesar Augustus) to represent her and her relationship with Mark Antony as a threat to Rome and its empire. Interestingly, modern women who seek positions of power often face similar resistance. This became especially evident in an American context during the presidential campaign of 2016, when, for the first time, a woman became a viable presidential candidate. Although Hillary Clinton ultimately lost the presidential race, because she was the first woman to come so close to obtaining the highest office in American government, she serves as a particularly illuminating example of the effect of gender biases in the realm of politics and power.¹ An examination of the political propaganda generated by these two women and their opponents can provide valuable insight into how we view and interact with women in powerful positions today.

Using Cleopatra VII and Hillary Clinton as case studies, this paper examines how gender expectations can influence the construction of a female leader’s public image—both as it is presented by the women themselves and by their opponents. Through a

¹ There are, of course, other significant women political leaders in the modern day: Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, Theresa May, and Jacinda Arden are just a few other well-known, contemporary examples. For the purposes of this paper, I will be studying Clinton in particular to examine these issues of gender bias in politics in a specifically American context. The fact that Clinton made gender issues a central element of her 2016 presidential campaign (as will be discussed in detail later in this paper) and that she ultimately lost the election to an opponent who could be considered the epitome of toxic masculinity also make her a particularly interesting comparandum because her situation specifically highlights the dangers women may face in seeking politically significant offices today.
comparative analysis of aspects of their respective careers, I will demonstrate how, historically, explicitly gendered and sexual negative political propaganda has manipulated public perception of influential women, and how that historical trend continues to have consequences today, contributing to the hostility that is still directed at women who occupy (or seek to occupy) positions of power. Cleopatra and Clinton both represented themselves as strong, masculine women, but they simultaneously utilized feminine gender expectations by emphasizing their roles as mothers, complicating the images they created for themselves, or having those images complicated for them by the realities of the traditional, male-dominated power structures within which they were forced to operate. Their political opponents turned these gendered images against them, simultaneously characterizing the two women as suspicious and sexually dangerous, because they acted masculine, and diminishing them as insignificant and powerless because they acted feminine. By comparing and contrasting the ways in which these women represented themselves and how they were portrayed by their political enemies, this paper explores not only the parallels between them but also the implications for persisting perceptions of women in politics.

2. Theoretical Context

Admittedly, there are significant differences between Cleopatra and Clinton. These two women lived millennia apart, on opposite sides of the world, in vastly different cultures. However, modern gender roles and stereotypes have been heavily influenced by ancient classical cultures, including the Hellenistic world Cleopatra lived in and the Roman world she fought against. The continuity between ancient and modern gender

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2 Exactly what is meant by “masculine” and “feminine” will be fully discussed below.
expectations has long been recognized by feminist scholars such as Simone De Beauvoir, who drew on a plethora of historical examples to illustrate that “When [women] have intervened in the course of world affairs, it has been in accord with men, in masculine perspectives,” and Mary Beard, a feminist classical scholar who recently published two lectures addressing the connection between the ancient and modern tendency to silence women in power. Consistent with this historical pattern, Cleopatra and Clinton both engaged with and conformed to this male perspective and combated real and symbolic attempts to silence them as they filled, or sought to fill, traditionally male political roles. Because modern Western culture owes so much to the Classical world, ranging from art and literature to political ideals and gender conceptions, to name a few, a study of Classical figures can provide unique, relevant insight for our world today.

2.1. Gendered Expectations and Views

Gender expectations have obviously changed and developed over the millennia, and even today there is some debate over what exactly constitutes “gender.” For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term “masculine” to refer to traits, actions, and roles that have historically been perceived as being primarily associated with men—traits such as independence, leadership, confidence, assertiveness, decisiveness, ambition, strength, sexual drive, violence, intelligence, and courage. The term “feminine” will primarily refer to traits, actions, and roles typically associated with women—nurturing, caregiving,

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softness, patience, sensitivity, emotion, delicateness, intuition, and dependence.\textsuperscript{6}

Feminism, another important term within this discussion, is notably different from these two genders; the ideology/movement of feminism emphasizes justice and equality for women while celebrating and affirming womanhood.\textsuperscript{7} While feminism is focused primarily on women, it is not inherently gendered in terms of the masculinity and femininity described above: depending on the situation, an individual may advance the feminist ideology through a feminine approach (demonstrating emotions and nurturing) or through a masculine approach (highlighting leadership and intelligence). In fact, because masculinity is generally ranked above femininity, a “liberated” feminist may act in ways that are traditionally coded masculine.\textsuperscript{8} This distinction is particularly significant in an examination of Clinton’s use of gender expectations, because she has often gone out of her way to emphasize that she is a feminist, but she has represented that ideology in varying masculine and feminine terms. Though Cleopatra was certainly not engaged with the modern feminist movement, she likewise used both feminine and masculine roles in her self-portrayal as queen, showing a clear knowledge of the implications of each.

My analysis of both Cleopatra’s and Clinton’s portrayals is informed in part by the works of film theorist Laura Mulvey and feminist theorist Judith Butler. Mulvey introduced the concept of the male gaze and argued that within film “women are simultaneously looked at and displayed” passively, while men actively view women as sexual objects.\textsuperscript{9} She further argued that female spectators may then identify with the

\textsuperscript{6} Shaw and Lee, pg. 121.
\textsuperscript{7} Shaw and Lee, pg. 9.
\textsuperscript{8} Shaw and Lee, pg. 124.
“masculine ‘point of view’” represented in films and, consequently, the passive role of femininity.\textsuperscript{10} Mulvey’s theory, however, is based on psychoanalytic theories which treat phallocentrism as innate to humanity.\textsuperscript{11} Butler, on the other hand, conceives of gender as a cultural idea which is constructed within the limits imposed by that culture and its language.\textsuperscript{12} My research will draw on elements of Mulvey’s theory in connection with Butler’s to examine how a culturally-constructed political “male gaze” has affected women in the public view who have occupied traditionally male positions and, consequently, who have essentially had to construct a combination of masculine and feminine genders within their self-representations.

2.2. The Double Bind

Because political offices in general, and especially executive roles, are seen as inherently masculine positions,\textsuperscript{13} women who seek to occupy those positions must grapple with the masculine expectations that accompany them and reconcile those expectations with the feminine roles they are traditionally expected to fill. In modern studies of voters’ attitudes toward female governors, scholars have found that even when a woman is perfectly qualified for the job, voters tend to doubt whether she would actually be “tough” enough to handle the work required of a government executive. However, those same studies have shown that when women exude an aura of confidence and assertion, in other words, when they prove to be tough enough, they are often

\textsuperscript{12} Judith Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} (New York: Routledge, 1990), pgs. 7–9.
\textsuperscript{13} Caroline Heldman, Meredith Conroy, and Alissa R. Ackerman, \textit{Sex and Gender in the 2016 Presidential Election}, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2018), pgs. 18-20, 22-23.
perceived as “aggressive” or “bitchy”: voters expect female candidates to be “likeable”—“compassionate, nurturing, nice, womanly”\textsuperscript{14}—aligning with stereotypically feminine qualities which tend to clash with perceptions of masculine leadership. This “double bind,” as it is called,\textsuperscript{15} forces women such as Clinton to walk a very fine line between masculinity and femininity if they want to be perceived as qualified, relatable, serious candidates with the potential for real success.

Although Cleopatra lived in a rather different cultural milieu, it is reasonable to suppose that she had to combat a similar sort of double bind, especially in light of the continuity between ancient and modern gender roles discussed above. Although women in Hellenistic Egypt did, broadly speaking, have greater autonomy\textsuperscript{16} than women in certain other ancient societies,\textsuperscript{17} they still did not have full political rights:\textsuperscript{18} the world of politics remained squarely the domain of men. Although many Hellenistic queens did control their own resources and use their wealth for many of the same activities as men—

\textsuperscript{15} Kathleen Hall Jamieson, \textit{Beyond the Double Bind} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Jamieson defines and discusses five distinct yet interconnected “double binds” with which women have been forced to grapple and discusses how Hillary Clinton (then the first lady) has dealt with all of them. The two binds she describes which are most applicable to this paper are “Womb/Brain” and “Femininity/Competence.” For the purpose of simplicity, this paper will refer to these binds together simply as the “double bind” since they largely overlap in the cases discussed here.
\textsuperscript{16} The concept of autonomy is considered quite problematic within modern feminist discourse, largely due to the many possible definitions and uses of the term (see Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, “Introduction: Autonomy Refigured,” in \textit{Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self}, edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pgs. 3–31). In this case, autonomy simply refers to Ptolemaic women’s opportunities to manage varying elements of their own lives, including economic/business affairs, marriage, religion, and domestic affairs. Though these women were still living and operating within a patriarchal world, they were afforded greater personal liberties than modern readers might expect of women in the ancient world based on knowledge of women’s status in other ancient cultures, such as classical Athens (see Sarah B. Pomeroy, \textit{Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra} (New York: Schocken Books, 1984) for greater detail about women’s cultural, personal, and political status in Ptolemaic Egypt).
\textsuperscript{17} Stacy Schiff, \textit{Cleopatra: A Life} (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), pg. 24; Pomeroy, pg. xviii.
\textsuperscript{18} Pomeroy, pg. 46.
sometimes even hiring armies\textsuperscript{19}—their presumed role was generally more private: ideal queens demonstrated piety toward the gods and their parents, wisdom, virtue, and exercised a significant influence on their husbands,\textsuperscript{20} but they were rarely expected to function as more than consorts. Truly independent ruling power was, on the whole, a singularly masculine prerogative. As a Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra had to operate within this framework, including the expectation that her brother-corulers would hold the superior position.\textsuperscript{21} For Cleopatra to claim the position of primary—effectively sole—ruler, she had to work directly against the expectation that her brothers would each subsequently be the primary ruler and that she would function as a potentially influential but ultimately subservient queen consort. Defying that pattern effectively required her to function as both king and queen, masculine and feminine—a double bind not so different from the one within which female leaders must operate today.

3. Historical Context

Before delving into an analysis of Cleopatra’s and Clinton’s own gendered public images, it is vital to understand the situations within which they operated. Though the two women dealt with some similar challenges in terms of their political goals and the complications brought on by their gender, their situations also had many differences. Politics are obviously affected by many complicated, intersecting factors, and gender is only one aspect of any given political situation—obviously Cleopatra, Clinton, and every other female leader throughout history have made many political decisions, including those related to public image presentation, based on considerations that go beyond gender

\textsuperscript{19} Pomeroy, pgs. 15-16.
\textsuperscript{20} Pomeroy, pgs. 11 – 14.
\textsuperscript{21} Pomeroy, pg. 12.
expectations—though, as I argue, gender is an important element. The gender norms and expectations of each society are also affected by many of the other relevant social and political issues of that culture, so the effects of gender norms cannot be removed from the wider cultural context and events which shape those expectations. As such, the choices these women made in using gender expectations to shape their public images much be analyzed within their unique historical situations.

3.1. Cleopatra’s Situation

A little over 2000 years ago, the eighteen-year-old Cleopatra rose to the throne of the last independent Hellenistic kingdom—Egypt. Her new kingdom was already full of turmoil: her father, Ptolemy XII Auletes, had been driven out of the kingdom after surrendering Cyprus—a significant province—to the Romans, and when he returned to retake the throne with Roman support he had Cleopatra’s older sister, Berenice IV, who had risen to power in his absence, put to death. Cleopatra was apparently instated as queen alongside her father, but soon after his death she came into conflict with her younger brother, Ptolemy XIII, and his advisors and fled Egypt. She was later reinstated as queen alongside her youngest brother, Ptolemy XIV, by Julius Caesar. She soon had a son by Caesar, Ptolemy Caesar, or Caesarion, who eventually replaced her brother as her co-ruler. After Caesar’s death, she attempted to support the Second Triumvirate in

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23 Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.11.
24 Cecilia M. Peek, “‘She, Like a Good King’: The Early Career of Kleopatra VII” (dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000), pgs. 1 – 6.
25 Appian, *Civil War*, 2.84.
their war to avenge Caesar,²⁹ leading her to meet and begin a long-term relationship with Caesar’s “right-hand-man,” Mark Antony.³⁰ With him she eventually had three children.³¹ When the political situation between Octavian and Antony, and Rome and the eastern Mediterranean, grew more tense, Octavian declared war on Cleopatra,³² allowing him to fight his rival without formally beginning another Roman civil war. After she and Antony were defeated at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, they fled to Egypt,³³ where they each eventually committed suicide.³⁴

Due to the tenuous political circumstances surrounding the beginning of her reign and continuing throughout, Cleopatra’s primary goal in the presentation of her public image had to be the secure maintenance of her royal power. The rarity of truly independent queens in the Hellenistic world complicated her rule, so she needed to present to her subjects an image of strength, and she often accomplished this through purposefully gendered iconography. Because Ptolemaic rulers governed both Greco-Macedonian and Egyptian peoples, Ptolemaic kings and queens drew on symbols and images from both cultures, essentially translating ideas from one tradition to another through these symbols.³⁵ In the creation of her own public image, Cleopatra followed the Ptolemaic practice of utilizing iconography from both traditions, and she issued official images—such as coins and religious dedications—that followed the convention of both Greco-Macedonian and Egyptian representations of royalty, particularly in regard to the

²⁹ Appian, Civil War 4.59, 61, 63, 74, 5.8.
³⁰ Appian, Civil War 5.8-9.
³¹ Plutarch, Life of Antony 36, 54.
³² Plutarch, Life of Antony, 60.
³³ Plutarch, Life of Antony, 68.
³⁴ Plutarch, Life of Antony, 76-86.
gendered expectations of those image types. This strategy enabled her to demonstrate her strength to her people and reinforce her power as a ruling queen.

Cleopatra’s carefully gendered approach to conveying her own strength ultimately proved a double-edged sword. Powerful women in the Classical world were often perceived and portrayed by their contemporaries as threatening and suspicious,\(^\text{36}\) and Cleopatra is no exception. After she was defeated at Actium, her history was written by her conquerors—Roman poets writing in celebration of Octavian’s victory used some of the same gendered ideas she had previously drawn on, now turning them against her. Instead of a strong monarch, the Romans represented her as a dangerous, sexual monster and a symbol of the conquered eastern world, objectifying her as a trophy and depriving her of recognition as a formidable figure in her own right.\(^\text{37}\) Their poetry is indicative of how such gendered images were directly turned against a powerful woman in the classical world in order to discredit her. Later writers such as Shakespeare followed the portrayals presented by her enemies; as a result, she is best known today for her love affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and even in many modern treatments she is judged significant primarily because of her relationships with famous Roman men\(^\text{38}\) and portrayed primarily as an exotic seductress.\(^\text{39}\) This lasting portrayal is very much at odds

\(^{36}\) Beard, pgs. 58-79.
\(^{37}\) These representations will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.
\(^{38}\) Peek, “‘She, Like a Good King,’” pgs. vi-vii.
\(^{39}\) Beyond Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, a few examples of these more modern treatments include Jean-André Rixens’ 1874 painting *La Mort de Cléopâtre*, Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s 1963 film *Cleopatra* (starring Elizabeth Taylor), Katy Perry’s “Katya Patra” parody in her “Dark Horse” music video (see Katy Perry, “Katya Perry - Dark Horse (Music Video Trailer),” YouTube, Feb. 13, 2014, accessed Aug. 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwqiKh1twTM, 0:22), and the Tocca perfume *Cleopatra*, which is described as a “fragrance that evokes your powers of seduction” (see Tocca, “Cleopatra,” Sephora, accessed Aug. 5, 2020, https://www.sephora.com/product/cleopatra-P54900#:~:text=Fragrance%20Description%3A%20Cleopatra%20is%20a,warm%20embrace%20of%20vanilla%20musk.). These examples, along with many other artistic, literary, and musical adaptations, all represent Cleopatra as the exotic, opulent seductress, the dangerous and tragic Egyptian queen, the icon of
with the image she sought to convey: that of a powerful, independent ruler—the equal of a king—defending and advocating for the interests of her country in the face of Roman incursion.

3.2. Clinton’s Situation

Separated from Cleopatra by 2000 years and over 5000 miles, Hillary Rodham Clinton has faced remarkably similar challenges in her own life as a female public figure. Already involved in politics by the age of 17, she attended college and law school during the late 60s and early 70s, placing her initial political and legal experience squarely in the context of second-wave feminism. By the time of her husband’s 1992 presidential campaign, third-wave feminism was already emerging as a new ideology, and it continued developing until it was a large part of the political and social context surrounding her own presidential bids. As a feminist herself, Clinton necessarily had to deal with both the expectations of the evolving feminist ideology and the controversy that surrounded it. The tension between feminism and certain gender expectations formed a unique stage for her as a modern political woman, in some ways quite distinct from the challenges faced by many earlier female political leaders.

threatening female sexuality. This modern legacy is based primarily on Roman portrayals of Cleopatra (which will be discussed in detail later in this paper) and has very little in common with her own self-representation.


41 Where second wave feminism focused largely on equality between men and women with the goal of breaking down barriers and allowing women into traditionally male spaces and roles, third wave feminism emphasized differences and contradictions within identities. Second wave feminism has been described as attempting to challenge the male/female dichotomy which places women as the “other,” while third wave feminism attempts to deconstruct such categorizations by emphasizing women’s experiences in a way which embraces the “otherness” of women from men and highlights differences and diversity as strength (see Shelley Budgeon, *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pgs. 4-5). The contradictions between these two ideologies required Clinton to balance two similar yet fundamentally different approaches to women’s roles.
Despite the significant differences between Clinton’s situation and that of earlier female leaders such as Cleopatra, the need to display and balance both masculine and feminine characteristics in order to confront the “double bind” is quite similar. Throughout Clinton’s long public career, particularly as the first lady and as a presidential candidate, she was deemed “inauthentic,”\(^{42}\) largely because authenticity is judged based on gender expectations\(^{43}\) and Clinton has often directly resisted traditional gender norms.\(^{44}\) In part because of this clash between expectations and her own actions, she has needed to carefully balance the image she presented in order to appear as a powerful woman who is able to accomplish whatever needs to be done while still being perceived as authentic and trustworthy, especially as she campaigned for the presidency in 2008 and 2016. During these two campaigns, as well as during her husband’s first presidential campaign of 1992,\(^{45}\) Clinton seemed to vacillate between masculine and feminine self-portrayals: in 2008 she generally tended to emphasize her masculine qualities, but in 2016 she seemed to switch gears, emphasizing instead her femininity. As her gendered image fluctuated, her political opponents often responded by adapting the positive gendered representations she (and her team) designed and turning them against her. These gendered attacks have often been explicitly sexist, either representing her as an emasculating threat or as irrelevant and incapable. Such attacks were especially

\(^{43}\) Parry-Giles, pg. 12.
\(^{44}\) Parry-Giles, pg. 14.
\(^{45}\) Clinton’s political career has obviously spanned several decades, and the gendered nature of her public image has developed in many ways over that time, leading to an abundance of situations which could be discussed. In this paper, I will focus primarily on her husband’s 1992 presidential campaign and her own 2008 and 2016 presidential campaigns because these situations demonstrate the importance and dangers of dealing with gender norms in seeking an executive position, whether as a symbolic/influential figure (as the first lady) or as the president herself.
prominent during the 2016 presidential election, when Clinton’s opponent, Donald
Trump, characterized her as a “nasty woman” and his supporters compared her to
classical monsters such as Medusa, placing her squarely among other women who have
been demonized for their power and ambition. While her opponents described her as the
epitome of evil, Clinton emphasized her combined masculine and feminine
characteristics as a strength when she portrayed herself as a champion of women’s rights,
fighting not only for her own success, but for the success of every woman who dares to pursue ambitious goals.

4. Masculine Representations

The concept of the double bind is especially important in considering Cleopatra
and Clinton’s masculine portrayals because these are the situations in which they directly
defied their accepted positions. A queen consort is not supposed to take on the image and
role of a king, nor is a domestic hostess/political wife supposed to seek the position of
Commander in Chief, yet both these women did purposefully pursue those roles that were
supposedly not meant for them. They could have been reasonably expected to act merely
as female leaders in their appropriate spheres, but they would have then been
considered incompetent in issues of more serious leadership. In order to effectively
contend with the stereotypical expectations that otherwise would have forced them into a

46 Beard, pg. 78.
47 Each of these attacks will be addressed more explicitly later in the paper.
48 Beard, pg. 16, addresses the fact that while proper ancient women were (broadly speaking) expected to
remain silent on public matters, they could on occasion speak out on serious issues that directly affected
women. The same idea can reasonably be applied to positions of leadership—a woman who acts as a social
leader of other women but does not step outside of that boundary will likely not be viewed as either a
serious leader or a serious threat. However, once she steps into the realm of broader politics, she will not be
viewed as a capable leader without displaying the very masculine characteristics that lead her to be viewed
as a threat, thus forcing her into the double bind.
49 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 23.
quite limited sphere of influence, a masculine public image was a necessity. This type of image, however, opened them both up to gendered attacks from enemies who tended to portray them as emasculating threats.

4.1 Masculine Representations of Cleopatra

As outlined above, Cleopatra’s reign was one of constant tumult due to her early conflict with her brother and his advisors and the steady growth of Roman power in the eastern Mediterranean. These struggles were in part her own fault: she was not content to follow the standard expectation that she would hold power primarily in connection with and in support of her husband(s), instead insisting on overshadowing her younger brothers/co-rulers from the start of her reign.⁵⁰ Although this did lead to resistance by her young brother’s advisors and her expulsion from her own kingdom, it also ultimately led her to rule Egypt independently for a time and to be remembered as the most significant member of her dynasty. Because of this unique situation as an essentially independent queen⁵¹ it was vital that she create an image for herself that exemplified strength and royal power to demonstrate that she could preserve the kingdom, even in the face of constant internal and external threats. However, creating a public image that would support the acquisition and maintenance of this independent power required Cleopatra to engage directly with and defy expected gender roles not only in her practical actions but also in her visual representations.

⁵⁰ Peek, “‘She, Like a Good King,’” pgs. 3–18 demonstrates that Cleopatra’s father likely approved and directed this strategy in order to maintain Egypt’s independence from Rome and the Ptolemaic dynasty’s continued power within the kingdom.

⁵¹ Though she did always have a male co-ruler, she consistently sought to rule independent of any male oversight—civil war with her first brother and his advisors prevented the two of them from ever truly governing Egypt together, and her second brother conveniently died as soon as he was old enough to pose any real threat, after which point her nominal co-ruler was her own quite young son.
Cleopatra’s emphasis of her own power, however, did ultimately set her up as a threat to Rome. Hers was the last independent Hellenistic kingdom, and it was only a matter of time before Rome conquered Egypt. After that annexation, Cleopatra, as the ruling queen of a conquered kingdom and an overly independent woman who had supposedly corrupted the good Roman Antony, was presented in Roman poetry in a negative light in order to glorify Augustus. This tendency is quite in line with the artistic and literary conventions of the time, as Augustus promoted art that celebrated him as the new leader of Rome and the bringer of peace. Cleopatra’s characterization in this poetry, however, is particularly masculine, conveying important ideas about the damage she caused by stepping out of her proper role as a woman.

4.1.1. Her Own Efforts

An important method by which Ptolemaic rulers propagated their images as ruler was through official coinage, a particularly effective method, as Ptolemaic Egypt operated under a closed monetary system, which ensured that no foreign coinage was circulated and therefore the rulers could control what images their subjects saw. As coins were commonly handled by the general population, they were an effective medium by which rulers could disperse their desired image to a significant number of their subjects.

53 Cecilia M. Peek, “The Visual Rhetoric of Cleopatra’s Early Coin Images” (tentative title), (unpublished article, 2018), ms. pgs. 4–6. Cecilia M. Peek kindly allowed me to read her work in progress and refer to it for this paper.
Like her predecessors, Cleopatra placed her portrait on official coinage to spread her visual image to her subjects; however, Cleopatra’s use of coin images was somewhat unique because of the gendered nature of her iconography. Beginning early on and continuing throughout her reign, Cleopatra issued coins featuring her own image with traditionally masculine Ptolemaic iconography. Traditionally, Ptolemaic queens had been featured on official coins in two scenarios: either they were featured beside and subservient to their husbands as the living queen consort or they were depicted alone, young, and idealized (often posthumously) as a deified ruler. Cleopatra’s coins are unique because, in most cases, her image fits into neither of these categories. Cleopatra represents herself alone and unadorned with the trappings of deity: rather than donning the veil, scepter, and stephane, or crown, of deified Ptolemaic queens, Cleopatra wore only the diadem—a thin band tied around the head that was the primary symbol of royal power (fig. 1). This image directly imitated that of Ptolemaic kings. By presenting herself to her subjects with a distinctly masculine image, Cleopatra emphasized her right to rule independent of her siblings and asserted her masculine power as a ruling queen.

Figure 1: Bronze coin of Cleopatra VII. The Trustees of the British Museum, image 31794001, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/31794001.

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Due to the need to appeal to the loyalties of her Egyptian subjects as well as the Greco-Macedonian ones, Cleopatra also issued official representations of herself using traditional Egyptian iconography. These images, like the Greek ones found on coins, were purposefully gendered. One important example is an Egyptian stele from quite early in her reign featuring Cleopatra making an offering to the Egyptian goddess Isis (hereafter referred to as the Louvre stele), dated July 2, 51 BC. In this image (fig. 2), Cleopatra is represented as a traditional Egyptian pharaoh—bare-chested, wearing a triangular kilt, and the combined crown of upper and lower Egypt.

![Figure 2: Stele of Cleopatra VII Offering to Isis, with inscription, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Égyptiennes, E. 27113. Image from Bianchi, cat. 78.](image)

Such an image was not entirely unprecedented for an independent female ruler: many years earlier, Hatshepsut had similarly represented herself with nearly identical masculine iconography—though many of these images were later erased or relabeled with the
cartouche of her husband, Thutmose II. Likewise, Cleopatra’s own sister, Berenice IV, who had seized control of Egypt in their father’s absence, issued similarly masculine Egyptian-style images of herself. Though these earlier queens were not always ultimately successful in maintaining their rule, their precedent nevertheless establishes that Cleopatra was by no means unique, nor was she overstepping in presenting herself in this fashion, even at the very beginning of her reign. Rather, by following in the tradition of earlier Egyptian queens who also represented themselves as pharaohs, Cleopatra was firmly asserting her right to the throne with a message directed especially toward her Egyptian subjects. This appeal through their traditional iconography marked Cleopatra as much more than a queen consort: as in the coins discussed above, the Cleopatra of the Louvre stele is an independent pharaoh, ruling her own kingdom in her own right. This contributed to her overall projected image as an independent ruler—an image that visually and practically contradicted the gender roles with which she was expected to comply.

4.1.2. Her Opponents’ Efforts

The Roman poets Horace, Propertius, and Vergil, who were patronized by Maecenas (a member of Augustus’ inner circle), all included in their poetry celebrations of Augustus’ victory over Cleopatra at Actium. Each of these three poets specifically characterized Cleopatra (at times) as a masculine figure in a way that glorifies Augustus.

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Horace described Cleopatra as “nec muliebriter” (unwomanly), “ferocior” (rather fierce), “non humilis” (not humble), and possessed of “ausa” (daring) and “fortis” (courage). Propertius likewise characterized her as “ausa” and as wishing to bring Rome “in sua regna” (“into her rule”). He asked what was the good of overthrowing the legendary tyrant Tarquin the Proud and founding the Republic “si mulier patienda fuit” (“if a woman must be endured”). Similarly, Vergil said that in the midst of the battle “regina...vocat agmina” (“the queen calls her forces”). This language all follows a masculine pattern: though still clearly labeled as a woman and a queen, Cleopatra was described in masculine terms, as a military leader, and even compared to a dangerous, legendary oppressor of Rome. This gendered characterization transformed Cleopatra into not a strong kingly ruler but a terrifying and unnatural threat against Roman freedom.

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58 Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.22.
59 Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.29.
60 Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.32.
61 Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.25.
63 Propertius 3.11.41.
64 Propertius 3.11.32.
65 Tarquin the Proud was the last Roman monarch. His reign and legendary overthrow and the subsequent foundation of the Roman republic are detailed in Livy 1.49-60 (esp. 57-60). The leader of the rebellion against him, Brutus, vowed that there would never be another king in Rome (see Livy 59.1), and this commitment to the freedom and preservation of the republic was still taken quite seriously in the first century BC: Caesar’s assassins hearkened back to that earlier Brutus in their justification for killing a political leader whom they believed was trying to claim royal authority (see Cassius Dio 44.8.1-13.1), Augustus deliberately avoided similar accusations by presenting himself as a refounder and restorer of the republic (see Zanker pg. 101), and he and his successors never claimed the title of rex (king) despite essentially holding absolute power. Propertius’ reference to Tarquin the Proud thus set Cleopatra up as comparable to one of the most dangerous, oppressive tyrants in Roman history, suggesting that she threatened the freedom of Rome itself.
66 Propertius 3.11.47-49.
Some of the masculine language used by these poets to describe Cleopatra is specifically sexual: these terms set her up as the dominant sexual figure, essentially emasculating Octavian’s rival, Mark Antony, and threatening to emasculate the Romans themselves. Horace’s Cleopatra commanded men who are described as “turpium”68 (“foul, shameful”)—a sexualized term sometimes used to describe genitalia69—and Propertius said she is “famulos inter femina trita suos”70 (“a woman who grinds with her servants”)—also using a verb with vague but broad sexual connotations.71 Propertius’ “si mulier patienda fuit,”72 discussed above, also employed a verb that can be used sexually73 and directly played on a phrase used to describe men who are sexually penetrated.74 In Horace, her death was described as her having “combiberet”75 (“drunk in”) the venom of the snakes that bit her. This characterization used yet another verb with a masculine, sexualized connotation: though Cleopatra is literally being penetrated by the snakes’ fangs, seemingly placing her in the feminine sexual position, she performs the sexualized act of drinking, essentially acting as a personified phallus.76 These terms and phrases all characterized Cleopatra as a dominant sexual figure, a woman who acts sexually upon others (particularly men, whom she commands as a ruler and military authority), rather than the passive recipient of sexual action. Even when she was penetrated in her death, Horace characterized her as still claiming the dominant sexual

68 Horace, Carmina 1.37.9.
70 Propertius 3.11.30.
71 Adams, pgs. 183, 185.
72 Propertius 3.11.47-49.
73 Adams, pgs. 189-190.
75 Horace, Carmina 1.37.28.
76 Adams, pg. 139.
role. The threat she posed, then, is one of domination in not only a political but also a frighteningly personal sense: emasculation, particularly at the hands of a woman, was the ultimate disgrace, and such a sexual threat had political implications.77

The later biographer Plutarch followed a similar pattern in his characterization of Antony as an emasculated Roman. In his biography, Antony was a drunken mess when Cleopatra was not around,78 suggesting that he could only act according to his own desires when he was not under her sway,79 and he followed a poor battle strategy at Actium due to Cleopatra’s influence.80 Plutarch characterized Antony’s relationship with Cleopatra as αἰσχρός81 (shameful) and described Cleopatra as a jealous lover (even faking grief to manipulate Antony82), a warmonger,83 and a coward.84 Though his characterization of Cleopatra does correspond to female stereotypes of a dangerous seductress, his purposeful literary emasculation of Antony as a man ruled by women85 ultimately conveyed the same threat seen in the earlier poems: Cleopatra was such a significant threat because she had moved beyond her proper womanly place by sexually ruling men.

Because of the Roman ideological connection between politics and sexuality,86 Cleopatra’s gendered role in these poems as a woman who had both politically and sexually stepped into a realm meant for men set her up as an unnatural danger not only to

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77 Miller, pg. 123, notes to Propertius 3.11.47-48, 49-50.
78 Plutarch, Life of Antony 51.
79 Antony was elsewhere characterized as constantly drunk (see Cicero, Philippics 2).
80 Plutarch, Life of Antony 62-63, 66.
81 Plutarch, Life of Antony 36.3.
82 Plutarch, Life of Antony 53.
83 Plutarch, Life of Antony 56.
84 Plutarch, Life of Antony 63.
86 Miller, pg. 123, notes to Propertius 3.11.47-48, 49-50.
Rome but also to the world. Horace demonstrated how Cleopatra’s movement out of a feminine role is unnatural when he referred to her as a “fatale monstrum” (“fatal monster”). The term *monstrum* has been linked to the words *prodigium* and *portentum*, both of which were Latin terms describing something monstrous and unnatural, an unexpected occurrence with religious overtone, a portent that required removal in order to correct the natural order of the world and preserve the *pax deorum* (peace of the gods). It has also been interpreted as a reference to mythical monsters who need to be conquered to restore order, setting Augustus up as the conquering hero. Similarly, Vergil referred to Cleopatra’s Egyptian gods as “*monstra*” and labeled her relationship with Antony as “*nefas*” (“abominable”), while Propertius described her union with Antony as “*obsceni,*” a term which can have both a sexual connotation (“lewd” or “impure”) and a more portentous one (“evil omen”).

By comparing her to monsters, of the sort that feature in the myths of heroes like Perseus, Theseus, and Herakles, the Augustan poets seem to assert that Cleopatra is a violation of nature. Mythical monsters were conquered to make the world safe for human life and to establish (or restore) civilization and order. This implied comparison sets Augustus up as the conquering hero and Cleopatra as the hydra, the minotaur, the gorgon. She becomes thereby an inhuman beast. When these terms are considered in connection

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87 J. V. Luce, “Cleopatra as Fatale Monstrum (Horace, Carm. 1. 37. 21),” *The Classical Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1963): 252.
88 This was an important element of Roman religion which required that the gods be kept content in order to preserve harmony in the world. For a discussion of prodigies and the threat they could pose to the *pax deorum*, see Jerzy Linderski, “Roman Religion in Livy,” in *Livius: Aspekte seines Werke*, edited by W. Schuller (Konstanz, 1993): 53–70.
89 Luce, pgs. 253-254.
91 Propertius 3.11.31.
with the sexualized and gendered language discussed above, they suggest that the Egyptian queen, by assuming a traditionally masculine role, has not only sexually threatened Roman masculinity but has also directly violated the social, religious, and natural orders. Their narratives, then, featured Augustus as the civilizing leader, forcing the hubristic foreign queen back into her proper place as a woman and thereby restoring the correct order of the world. Though Cleopatra’s efforts to present herself as a proper king using standard royal masculine iconography were a quite understandable and potentially effective strategy from her own position, that independent masculinity set her up as a direct threat to Roman social norms. The ultimate, unfortunate result was her characterization as a sexually and politically unnatural monster within Augustan propaganda, contributing to her enduring negative legacy.

4.2. Masculine Portrayals of Clinton

Like Cleopatra, Clinton has had quite understandable reasons to present herself politically with masculine characteristics, especially when campaigning for the presidency. However, some elements of her self-representation as a strong, independent individual were more implicitly than explicitly masculine, illustrating the complications of a woman presenting as masculine without pushing socially accepted boundaries too far. Both her implicit and explicit masculine self-portrayals, though, were turned against her by her political enemies, who represented her as an emasculating threat to her husband and to the nation—not too different a situation from Cleopatra’s fate.

4.2.1. Her Own Efforts

During her husband’s 1992 campaign, Clinton presented herself as an independent feminist, emphasizing aspects of her personality that implied masculinity.
This was apparent in statements where she defended her choice to be a career woman. When her husband was running for president and his opponents questioned her career choice, she defended her decision, saying, “I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was pursue my profession.”

Earlier, when she was questioned about her husband’s extramarital affairs, she had declared, “You know, I’m not sitting here, some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette,” asserting her ability to choose her own course of action regardless of her husband’s decisions. There is nothing explicitly masculine about these assertions; however, they play into a stereotypical masculine/feminine dichotomy which separates the careerwoman from the homemaker and minimizes the idea of the unfailingly loyal wife as a “little woman.” The comments have generally been framed through a primarily feminist lens and have been considered distinct from Clinton’s later explicitly masculine self-representation.

However, although the feminist nature of these comments is undeniable—and important—they still represent a masculine self-image because they indicate Clinton’s tendency to portray herself as confident, assertive, and independent—all stereotypically masculine traits. Clinton’s implicit, rather than explicit, masculinity is here used to promote her feminism.

Clinton’s implied masculinity was also directly alluded to by her husband during his campaign, particularly when he said that his presidency would be a “buy one, get one free” deal for the American people—he represented his wife’s identity as a well-informed

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94 Parry-Giles, pg. 25.
95 Hence the important distinction between “feminist” and “feminine.”
and politically active potential first lady as a positive aspect of his campaign. Many interpreted his statement as implying a kind of co-presidency in which both Clintons would be equal partners, a suggestion which he later adamantly denied. However, the idea of the Clintons as partners within the presidency continued to persist.\textsuperscript{96} By representing Hillary as an equal within their partnership, Bill seemed to promote her to a masculine status as a fellow politician, and the ongoing concern over a Clinton co-presidency indicates that the equal nature of their relationship was apparent to the American people. Ultimately, however, Bill was running for president—not Hillary—and the eventual outcome of the situation was the reinforcement of her femininity as she assumed the role of the lesser partner.\textsuperscript{97}

In her 2008 campaign, Clinton presented herself in a more explicitly masculine manner: no longer was she a political wife with the potential to encroach on her husband’s authority\textsuperscript{98}—now she was a potential commander in chief in her own right, and the double bind required that she prove herself a more capable leader than her male opponents. On the campaign trail, she declared, “I’m a fighter, a doer and a champion, and I will fight for you.”\textsuperscript{99} As a general overarching strategy, her campaign emphasized her resilient nature as a “tough-as-nails fighter who would never give up,”\textsuperscript{100} whether in the battle for the presidency or in any fight for the American people. Her supporters caught on to this masculine image and promoted it themselves, though sometimes in odd

\textsuperscript{96} Parry-Giles, pgs. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{97} This shift and its further implications will be discussed in greater detail below.
\textsuperscript{98} The implications of this idea will be discussed below.
\textsuperscript{100} Dittmar and Carroll, pg. 66.
ways—at one of her rallies, a local union leader declared that he supported Clinton because she possessed the “testicular fortitude” necessary to be president.\textsuperscript{101} Clinton responded to this rather cringe-worthy comment, “I do think I have fortitude, women can have it as well as men!”\textsuperscript{102} Even in her 2016 campaign, while promoting a much more feminine image overall, Clinton still drew on this earlier masculine portrayal, especially in the online video announcing the beginning of her campaign, when she confidently asserted, “Everyday Americans need a champion, and I want to be that champion.”\textsuperscript{103} The emphasis on masculinity in her first campaign, however, did not ultimately have the desired effect—some speculate that by accentuating her unemotional masculine strength, Clinton may have undercut her own campaign by not appealing enough to her feminine side. The end result was that many perceived the emotions she did show as inauthentic and “calculated.”\textsuperscript{104} The negative effect of Clinton’s masculine demeanor points to the disadvantage faced by women who seek political power: because she was determined enough to fight for the position, she was not considered fit to hold it.

Clinton has also visually presented herself as masculine in her appearance by making the pantsuit her signature clothing item. While she has been expected to appear feminine in her clothing and makeup—a necessity she expressed aversion toward in her most recent memoir, \textit{What Happened}—choosing to wear clothing that is more similar to


\textsuperscript{103} Hillary Clinton, “Getting Started | Hillary Clinton,” YouTube, Apr 12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uY7gLZDmn4&feature=youtu.be, 1:45-1:48.

\textsuperscript{104} Dittmar and Carroll, pg. 68.
masculine styles seems to imply that she wants to reduce the difference between herself and her male colleagues, that she wants to assert that she is like them. In *What Happened*, she commented on her choice of clothing, calling it a “uniform” that suggested that she was “different from the men but also familiar.” The idea of uniformity seems to suggest steadfastness and strength—both traditionally masculine traits contrasted against stereotypically feminine unpredictability. Especially in the 2016 election, when she broadly presented a more feminine—though still somewhat balanced—image through her rhetoric, this uniform could help deal with the threat of the double bind by serving as a constant visual reminder that Clinton, even as a woman who cared about so-called “women’s issues,” was the equal of any man.

4.2.2. Her Opponents’ Efforts

Clinton’s political opponents took advantage of her deviation from traditional gender norms in order to portray her as dangerous. News media, particularly during her husband’s campaign and tenure as president, tended to paint Clinton as “an unruly feminist,” using her “Tammy Wynette” and “cookies and tea” comments to frame her as being both anti-motherhood and anti-womanhood. By setting up her apparent masculinity as being not only un-feminine but anti-feminine, media outlets reinforced the masculine/feminine gender dichotomy and sent a clear message: opposition to gender norms would not be beneficial for women functioning in the political realm. Interestingly, Clinton did shift her self-portrayal during her husband’s campaign to appeal to traditional standards of femininity. When she did, the complaints about her involvement in her

105 Clinton, pg. 88.
106 Parry-Giles, pg. 19.
107 Parry-Giles, pgs. 36-37.
husband’s campaign and future presidency began to dissipate, indicating that her reversal of gender expectations was likely a key factor in the general disapproval she attracted.

Clinton’s enemies also tended to frame her apparent masculinity as detrimental to not only herself but also her husband. News media during Bill’s campaign often discussed the so-called “Hillary Factor,” which “served as an umbrella term for what the press and the Republican opposition dubbed as her negative attributes” and which focused on the purportedly negative effect that Clinton would have on her husband’s campaign as a politically active wife. This possible damage to her husband was also represented as potentially threatening the presidency and country: at the 1992 Republican Convention, there were repeated jokes about Clinton’s role as an outspoken, uncontrollable, “cocandidate.” Although lighthearted, such rhetoric suggested that her governmental role as an unelected but highly involved political wife could not be reined in by the people. This threat that her masculinity brought to both her husband and her country reeks of the same emasculatory power attributed to Cleopatra.

That emasculating threat was again alluded to during Clinton’s 2008 campaign with the sale of a political gag gift: a “Hillary nutcracker” (fig. 3) that cracked nuts between Clinton’s thighs. The packaging features the slogans “Stainless steel thighs!” and “Cracks toughest nuts!” as well as the question “Is America ready for this

108 Parry-Giles, pg. 52.
109 Parry-Giles, pg. 33.
110 This negative effect was a legitimate threat, considering that her feminist independence had indeed been a relevant factor when Bill lost his reelection campaign in the Arkansas gubernatorial election of 1980. See Gil Troy, Hillary Rodham Clinton: Polarizing First Lady (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pgs. 29-34.
111 Troy, pg. 54.
112 Dittmar and Carroll, pg. 67.
“Nutcracker?” The masculine image and emasculating threat conveyed here is more apparent when compared to the slightly more feminine 2016 version of the Hillary nutcracker (fig. 4), which wears pink instead of the 2008 blue, features a facial expression that could easily be termed a resting bitch face instead of 2008’s energetic smile, and includes the slogan, “No more nuts in the White House.” While the 2016 nutcracker is ready to replace men completely, the 2008 version directly threatens to harm them and their masculinity while questioning whether America can handle that danger.


Though these nutcrackers are marketed as political satire which could appeal to anyone who appreciates that type of humor, regardless of political affiliation, they carry a specifically sexual allusion that is absent from similar satirical products like toilet bowl
cleaners (which feature both male and female politicians). The most comparable products are the similarly marketed “Corkscrew Bill” and “Corkscrew Donald,” both of which feature large, phallic corkscrews protruding from their groins, emphasizing their masculine virility. The emasculating implications of the Hillary nutcracker were emphasized in 2007 when Tucker Carlson (then hosting the MSNBC show Tucker), commenting on the nutcracker, said, “when she comes on television, I involuntarily cross my legs,” implying that Clinton’s emasculating power extended well beyond her husband and presidential competitors. The overarching message conveyed by Clinton’s opponents in regard to her apparent masculinity was that it was a threat to her own political success, her husband, and her country itself. As she worked to convey the message that she was indeed “tough enough” to lead the country, that image of strength was warped to argue that she was, in fact, too tough for America.

Though Donald Trump’s criticism of Clinton during the 2016 election was focused on her femininity, some of the sexist depictions of Clinton promoted by Trump supporters represent her as strong and dangerous by comparing her to a classical monster—Medusa. One particular image parodying Benvenuto Cellini’s statue Perseus with the Head of Medusa replaced the faces of Perseus and Medusa with Trump and Clinton (fig. 5), representing her as a dangerous monster and him as a conquering hero—not unlike the implications suggested by Augustan poets writing about Cleopatra discussed earlier. One version of this image presents the statue from an angle that

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114 Beard, pg. 78.
emphasizes Perseus/Trump’s sword, which covers and protrudes from his groin so as to recall the penetrative sexual symbolism of weapons. This image presents a strong, hypermasculine Trump as the hero saving America from the dangerous monster Clinton, playing into the idea that women who overstep their natural bonds are monsters who must be conquered for the good of society.

![Image](https://www.redbubble.com/i/canvas-print/Perseus-Beheads-Medusa-by-EyeMagined/22918216.5Y5V7)

**Figure 5: Trump and Clinton as Perseus and Medusa. Image by EyeMagine, from RedBubble.**

5. Feminine Representations

The double bind, obviously but unfortunately, has two sides: while a man can be tough, brash, and altogether ungentlemanly and still be a fitting candidate for leadership positions, a strong, tough, capable woman must also be relatable and “likeable” in order to be considered electable. Demonstrating the masculine traits of leadership is not sufficient for a woman to be considered a trustworthy leader unless she can effectively balance those traits with the femininity she is likewise expected to display to be deemed a
trustworthy woman. Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze\textsuperscript{115} is especially important in this regard, because while political women (like political men) must, in a sense, “perform” in all parts of their public image creation, the presentation of traditionally feminine traits connects them more directly with the passive feminine object of viewing. When women politicians must subject themselves to this political male gaze, women citizens evaluating them, especially as candidates, may be subsequently pushed into the position of the masculine viewer, leading them to access women candidates through a masculine evaluation. The precise nature of this male gaze does, however, vary by the broader cultural context; where Cleopatra’s feminine representations were influenced by the concept of goddess worship and an established ancient pattern of treating women as trophies signifying conquered peoples, Clinton’s feminine representations dealt directly with the consequences of the modern feminist movement and its implications for traditional femininity. Despite these differences, both women did choose (albeit necessarily) to represent themselves through a feminine lens, potentially opening themselves up to criticism along the same lines.

5.1. Feminine Representations of Cleopatra

Cleopatra’s public image would have been quite incomplete if it were limited to primarily masculine portrayals, though those were of course necessary in providing a complete image of her political role. In a world where goddess-worship was a regular part of religious observance and where most of her queenly predecessors had compared themselves to goddesses in their official propaganda,\textsuperscript{116} Cleopatra could draw directly on the authority and power of feminine divinity to reinforce her royal power. In this effort,

\textsuperscript{115} See pgs. 4-5 for an overview of this theory.

she purposefully utilized feminine iconography and expectations to support her position as queen by emphasizing her role as a mother. The ability to produce an heir is a uniquely feminine facet of ruling a country and can serve to secure power by ensuring the continuation of dynastic power. In Cleopatra’s case, the birth of her son Ptolemy Caesar (Caesarion)—purportedly the child of Julius Caesar—provided an opportunity to highlight this aspect of her rule. Her efforts to emphasize this allowed her to mark herself as an independent, kingly ruler who could control and defend her people and simultaneously as a queen who could produce an heir, guaranteeing the future security of her kingdom.\textsuperscript{117} As with the masculine elements of her public image, she utilized both Hellenistic and Egyptian iconography (sometimes apparently in combination) to connect herself to the significance of mother goddess figures in both traditions. Interestingly, the feminine representations created by her enemies completely avoided all such connections to goddesses, instead using feminine stereotypes to portray their conquered enemy as a powerless trophy, a mere symbol with no authority to pose a true threat.

5.1.1. Her Own Efforts

Cleopatra’s Hellenistic feminine iconography was primarily conveyed through coins, especially in her efforts to remind her people that she had birthed an heir. A particular coin from Cyprus features Cleopatra holding the infant Caesarion (fig. 6); here, Cleopatra’s iconography is decidedly feminine, imitating earlier Ptolemaic queens.

This intentional identification with feminine norms demonstrates how Cleopatra purposefully complied with gender expectations to secure her power as a ruler. By emphasizing her unique female ability to ensure the continuance of her dynasty, she reinforces her position as the independent ruler of an independent kingdom.\textsuperscript{118} The presence of Cleopatra’s infant son on this coin is particularly noteworthy. The image of a mother and son on coins as joint rulers was uncommon,\textsuperscript{119} but the presence of Caesarion served as an essential reminder to Cleopatra’s subjects that she had borne a son, thereby ensuring the future of her dynasty and their country.\textsuperscript{120}

Cleopatra’s and Caesarion’s joint image on this coin also may be a Greek adaptation of a traditional Egyptian image—that of the goddess Isis nursing the infant Horus. The god Horus was especially important in Egyptian religion and mythology as the god of kingship and the rightful king of Egypt\textsuperscript{121} and was often represented as a

\textsuperscript{119} One other example can be found on a Seleucid coin featuring Cleopatra Thea (a descendent of the Ptolemies) and her son, Antiochus VIII, in which the queen is featured as the senior ruler. See Thonemann, fig. 8.10., pg. 151.
divine infant—usually the child of Isis and Osiris.\textsuperscript{122} The iconography of Isis suckling Horus was quite common in Egyptian artwork at the time\textsuperscript{123} and was sometimes adapted in a style that combined Greek and Egyptian iconography.\textsuperscript{124} Although this imagery would have little inherent meaning to a Greek audience, it could be an attempt to convey the message of the Egyptian symbol to her Greek subjects: \textsuperscript{125} by featuring herself and her child as Isis and Horus, Cleopatra elevates herself above even her now-deified ancestresses and emphasizes Caesarion’s rightful claim to the throne as her son. This iconographic merge allows the image on this coin to simultaneously convey the same message to both Greek and Egyptians audiences, providing a clear reminder to her subjects of her feminine power as queen and mother.

Elsewhere in Egyptian-style artwork, Cleopatra also specifically portrays herself in connection with her son, often conveying the same message and often presenting that message in a specifically religious context. One such image that represents Cleopatra’s role as a mother was a relief on the wall of a birth temple that Cleopatra had built at Hermonthis to commemorate the birth of Caesarion (fig. 7). This image depicts the birth of Horus, assimilating Caesarion with the infant god,\textsuperscript{126} while Cleopatra, depicted giving birth, is labeled “Mother of Ra” instead of “Isis.” This deviation from the traditional myth removes the mythical father, Osiris, from the story, implying the removal of Cleopatra’s

\textsuperscript{122} Wilkinson, pg. 132.
\textsuperscript{123} Wilkinson, pg. 146.
\textsuperscript{125} Koenen, pg. 29.
\textsuperscript{126} Maria Wyke, “Augustan Cleopatras: Female Power and Poetic Authority,” in Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus, edited by Anton Powell (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), pg. 102.
own brother-husband-king from any legitimate power and emphasizing the independent power of Cleopatra and her son.127

Figure 7: The birth of the child-god Harpre ("Horus-the-Son") before Amun-Re, the goddess Nekhbet, and Cleopatra VII. Image from Bianchi, pg. 35, fig. 9.

Other Egyptian images depicting Cleopatra with traditional feminine iconography feature her with an adult, masculine Caesarion portrayed as a pharaoh engaged in worship toward the gods. These include two separate images on the walls of a temple to the goddess Hathor at Dendera (figs. 8 & 9) where Cleopatra wears as a headdress the horned sun disk associated with Isis128 and Hathor129 and stands behind her son as they worship. These bas-reliefs echo traditional images of a pharaoh with his queen130 emphasizing Caesarion as the rightful ruler of Egypt while casting Cleopatra essentially as queen consort.

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127 Peek, “‘She, Like a Good King,’” pg. 84.
129 Wilkinson, pg. 143.
130 For an earlier Ptolemaic example of a similar image, see Relief of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II or III making an offering, 170-116 BC, image and commentary in Beyond the Nile, edited by Jeffery Spier, Timothy Potts, and Sara E. Cole (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018), pgs. 173-175.
Although these images place her in a traditionally inferior position, they highlight the power of her young son—effectively an extension of her own power. These images convey a message of the proper nature of Cleopatra’s authority as mother to the son who
would ensure the future and the security of her kingdom. Though the message is slightly different from the representations of her as a goddess, these images still emphasize her powerful feminine role as a mother. As in the case of the Cypriot coin discussed above, in these Egyptian images, Cleopatra seems to represent her femininity as a unique and divine strength, one which other rulers (kings) did not share.

5.1.2. Her Opponents’ Efforts

Though Augustan poetry does tend to characterize Cleopatra in relatively masculine terms (a mere woman would not be a worthy threat to Rome or Octavian, after all), at times these poets do represent her in feminine terms, using her gender to deprive her of all ability and individuality, effectively objectifying her as a trophy of Octavian’s victory. In the middle of Horace’s Ode, Cleopatra is described as someone possessed by *furor*¹³¹ ("rage," which can be interpreted as feminine, irrational fury with a specifically sexual nature¹³²) and as a dove pursued by a hawk or a hare pursued by a hunter¹³³—images that suggest weakness and helplessness and are almost sympathetic. She is also "*impotens*"¹³⁴ ("powerless") and "*ebria*"¹³⁵ ("drunk"), and her mind is "*lymphatam*"¹³⁶ ("mad"). Propertius describes her as a "*meretrix regina*"¹³⁷ ("harlot queen") and her tongue as "*sepulta mero*"¹³⁸ ("buried with wine"). These terms create an image of a powerless, sloppy, drunken harlot—certainly not a powerful, imposing queen who could legitimately threaten Octavian and Rome, nor the divine mother-goddess of Cleopatra’s

¹³¹ Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.12.
¹³⁴ Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.10.
¹³⁵ Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.12.
¹³⁷ Propertius 3.11.39.
¹³⁸ Propertius 3.11.56.
own feminine self-representations. Even as they depicted her as an emasculating threat to Rome, these poets simultaneously presented Cleopatra as a woman void of any legitimate power and capability.

This poetry also objectifies Cleopatra through the removal of her identity: in the poetry of Horace, Propertius, and Vergil, she is a nameless “regina”\(^\text{139}\) (“queen”), “femina”\(^\text{140}\) (“woman”), and “Aegyptia coniunx”\(^\text{141}\) (“Egyptian spouse”). The nearest she comes to receiving an actual name is when Propertius labels her “una Philippeo sanguine adusta nota,”\(^\text{142}\) (“the one disgrace burned on Philippian blood”), referring to the Ptolemaic claim of descent from Philip II of Macedon,\(^\text{143}\) the father of Alexander the Great; this connects her to a familial identity, but it limits that identity to a distant connection to a famous male relative while denying her any right to the name by labeling her a disgrace to the family. These literary representations emphasized Cleopatra’s identity as a woman\(^\text{144}\) while depriving her of any individual identity and drawing on gender stereotypes\(^\text{145}\) to place her in the role of a symbol of the conquered eastern world rather than the role of a human enemy. This strategy effectively relegated her to the position of a symbolic object that stood as a trophy, depriving her of recognition as an individual and a formidable figure in her own right.

\(\text{139}\) Horace, *Carmina* 1.37.7; Propertius 3.11.39; Vergil, *Aeneid* 8. 696, 707.
\(\text{140}\) Propertius 3.11.30.
\(\text{141}\) Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.688.
\(\text{142}\) Propertius 3.11.40.
\(\text{145}\) Wyke, pg. 103.
The literary transformation of Cleopatra into a type of a conquered woman functioning as a trophy with no identity of her own completes the poetic Augustan narrative discussed earlier in which Cleopatra functions as a monster whom Octavian conquered. The concept of women functioning as trophies can be traced back to the earliest Panhellenic literature: Homer’s *Iliad*. The plot of this foundational Greek epic begins with conflict between great Greek warriors over their individual claims to the women they have taken captive as symbols of their victories. The two women at the center of this conflict, Briseis and Chryseis, have names that are usually interpreted as patronymics: these women, whose role in the plot is to serve as symbols of men’s victories and bargaining chips in men’s conflicts, are not allowed any identity beyond those of their fathers. The Augustan poets’ emphasis on Cleopatra’s femininity casts her in a similar role by removing her identity and agency. Once Octavian has conquered the dangerous, emasculating monster Cleopatra, he then claims the impotent, nameless, vanquished queen as the trophy of his victory. The difference between this narrative and the messages of royal, divine power conveyed by Cleopatra’s own representations of herself is stark.

5.2. Feminine Representations of Clinton

Where masculine and feminine representations of Cleopatra often worked hand-in-hand to promote images of regal divinity or monstrosity, Clinton’s feminine representations often originated reactively, as damage control after poor reception of her masculine portrayals. Her husband’s 1992 campaign required her to implement lessons regarding her gender public image which she had painfully learned earlier while dealing

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with gubernatorial politics in Arkansas, and the feminine theme of her 2016 campaign was in part a correction to her overly masculine 2008 campaign. In 1992 she did receive some female-oriented criticism, but after she chose to reemphasize her femininity the gendered critiques to which she was subjected were reduced. On the other hand, in 2016, Clinton was the object of many gendered attacks from her opponent, Donald Trump. Gender functioned as a central element of both her campaign and his attacks against her, making that election especially interesting in the ways that Trump subjected Clinton to the male gaze and in the ways they both interacted with the double bind.

5.2.1. Her Own Efforts

Part of the irony of Clinton’s implied masculinity during her husband’s first presidential campaign is that she did generally convey the image of a feminine, supportive wife,\textsuperscript{147} despite the independence that led her to be labeled “the first feminist first lady.”\textsuperscript{148} She had previously learned to reshape her public image as a stereotypical, supportive political wife when her husband was fighting for the Arkansas governorship,\textsuperscript{149} and in 1992 she had to repeat that process after he was criticized over her independence. Though 1992 was termed the “Year of the Woman,” the feminist movement was full of conflict as the second and third waves clashed in their goals and ideologies,\textsuperscript{150} making Clinton’s overt feminist independence politically dangerous. Emphasizing her own femininity and stepping more fully into the traditional role of a supportive political wife ultimately proved a successful strategy for dealing with this complicated situation.

\textsuperscript{147} Troy, pg. 4.  
\textsuperscript{148} Troy, pg. 5.  
\textsuperscript{149} Troy, pgs. 30-31.  
\textsuperscript{150} Troy, pgs. 42-43.
Clinton’s feminine self-representation during this time highlighted her independence as connected directly to so-called “women’s issues” and emphasized that she was not a threat to her husband. This approach is best described in a comment by James Carville, one of Bill Clinton’s political staffers: “Mrs. Clinton is exactly the kind of woman we need in America. She’s a strong woman, she is supportive of her husband. She’s got her own career and her own ideas.”151 This image attempts to walk a very fine line: Clinton is strong with an independent career, but she chooses to support her husband. The implication is that strong and independent (and thus potentially masculine) women are needed, but only if they make the correct choice to devote themselves to their husbands and families, thereby filling a feminine role. This is in direct contrast to the message that Clinton chose her career over her family, as was suggested by critiques of her “cookies and tea” comment. Another of Bill Clinton’s political consultants, Paul Begala, later described their reaction to that comment as follows:

As soon as I heard that, I thought, “People are going to take that out of context. They're going to suggest she doesn't care about stay-at-home moms.” So I went up to her and I told her that. I pulled her aside, and I said, “You know, Hillary, you've got to go restate this. People are going to think that's an attack on stay-at-home moms.”

And she had the most wounded and naive look on her face. It is—to think of all she's gone through since then, it's hard to imagine. She had no idea that that might be taken out of context. She said, “No one could think that.” She said, “I would have given anything to be a stay-at-home mom.

151 James Carville, CBS Evening News, Sep 25, 1992, qtd. in Parry-Giles, pg. 36.
My mother was a stay-at-home mom. I just didn't have a choice because Bill was making $35,000 a year and we needed to support the family.” I said, “I know that.” And she said, “Oh, you worry too much.” I mean, it was unimaginable to her that that would be a firestorm. I was certain it would be. I had been doing this for a while. So she went back out and tried to clean it up, but it was too late.152

The later emphasis on Clinton’s support of her husband seems to be an attempt to “clean up” her “firestorm.” By the end of her husband’s campaign, she had softened her discussion of policy to focus on women’s and children’s issues and discuss concerns more than specific recommended solutions.153 In his speech accepting the Democratic Party nomination, Bill’s only reference to Hillary was a short discussion of the work she had done to help children and families, noting that she had taught him to care about children,154 presenting her as a woman whose primary concern was the care of children and whose greatest influence on her husband was limited to that sphere. Because public concerns that she was anti-family did indeed pose a threat to her husband’s campaign, the promotion of Clinton’s identity as a loyal, supportive wife was especially important; if her masculine traits couldn’t be eliminated, they needed to be framed as feminine to counteract the message that she posed a threat to her husband’s masculinity.

153 Troy, pgs. 60-61.
Beyond making her masculine traits more acceptable through a feminine application, Clinton adopted a feminine visual image. Bill’s campaign consultants recommended that Hillary shift to a lower profile while they promote Bill as an individual candidate, and, as one presidential historian put it, “Hillary Clinton dutifully traded in her power suite for an apron and challenged Mrs. Bush to a chocolate-chip-cookie-baking contest.”155 The campaign promoted “images of the new Hillary…as the silent and adoring spouse gazing approvingly at her candidate husband or hanging out at a Bingo game with Tipper Gore,”156 reaffirming her role as a soft and relatively passive feminine supporter of her more masculine husband. After he received the Democratic Party nomination and after he won the election, she appeared in photographs with him (figs. 10 & 11), literally “gazing adoringly” at him.


155 Troy, pg. 54.
156 Parry-Giles, pg. 40-41.

Such images strengthened the rhetorical message that her independence was not a threat to her husband or the country because all her energy and focus was directed toward her husband and family. These feminine depictions of Clinton essentially asserted that she was an ideal first lady because she was a strong woman who chose to hang back and support her adored husband rather than stand in the spotlight herself.

In more recent years, Clinton has shifted her use of gender in the formation of her public image to represent herself in a very specifically feminine light. Particularly during the 2016 presidential election, Clinton emphasized her femininity as a part of her campaign, arguing that her identity as a woman made her an ideal champion for the interests of women and children. Her official website tells the story of a young Hillary who was inspired by her mother’s difficult upbringing to dedicate her energy to
improving the lives of children and who began her career focused on that goal, presenting her as someone who had always concentrated primarily on the central approved concern of women—the care and well-being of children. She made other so-called “women’s issues,” such as paid maternal and family leave, child care, and equal pay, central themes of her campaign and asserted that her identity as a woman specifically qualified her for the presidency. In the video announcing the beginning of her campaign, she declared, “when families are strong, America is strong.” That, coupled with her reference to her role as a grandmother in the epilogue to her 2014 memoir *Hard Choices*, led news media to label her new campaign persona “grandmother-in-chief.” Clinton adopted that persona with full enthusiasm; her Instagram bio simply states, “Doting grandmother, among other things.” The message of such a simple public assertion is clear: you know who Hillary Clinton is, you know her from many different roles and accomplishments, and your opinion of her could be as varied as the many identities she has held, but out of every accomplishment for which she could be known, her most prized role is that of a grandmother. She is a mother who raised a child, who is now a young mother raising her own child. Her personal and political legacy is family. This emphasis on Clinton’s own family further solidified her political persona as

159 Dittmar, pg. 17.
a woman who was running specifically to help women and who understood the issues that were important to women. Rather than a woman who could also do what men could do, she was a woman who cared about and fought for the issues which men forgot.

Clinton also emphasized her femininity visually during the 2016 campaign, again highlighting her role as a mother and grandmother. On the day of the 2016 election, she (or her account manager) posted an image of her hugging a young girl (fig. 12). Both Clinton and the girl were smiling and had their faces turned down in a soft, feminine expression.

![Figure 12: Photo of Clinton Hugging a Girl. Hillary Clinton (@hillaryclinton), Instagram, Nov 8, 2016, https://www.instagram.com/p/8MkkQEpzs4q/](https://www.instagram.com/p/8MkkQEpzs4q/)

The choice to represent herself in a maternal light, especially right before the moment of either victory or defeat, suggests that her goal in running was tied to this young girl, young women throughout America, and her own grandchildren. Through the image, she seems to say, “I am doing this for you.” This image perfectly matches her words in earlier
speeches, when she referred to her hopes that her granddaughter would have every possible opportunity.\textsuperscript{163} By painting herself as a mother and grandmother who fights and sacrifices for the future women of America, Clinton portrayed herself as undeniably feminine and represented that femininity as a strength.

5.2.2. Her Opponents’ Efforts

Criticism of Clinton during her husband’s 1992 campaign seems to have been broadly more masculine-focused than feminine, but some feminine attacks against her did exist. At times she was criticized for having essentially betrayed feminism to support her husband\textsuperscript{164}—perhaps not an entirely unfounded claim, considering that she did indeed let up on her independent, feminist rhetoric when it proved detrimental to his campaign. She was also accused of trying to become president through marriage.\textsuperscript{165} This idea added an interesting feminine twist on the more masculine concepts of her functioning as a co-president or even controlling her husband by presenting Clinton as one of many women throughout history who gained power through their connections to powerful husbands, sons, and other male relatives. Of course, the uniquely feminine criticism of her appearance was consistent enough that Clinton herself joked that putting on a headband or changing her hair would be sufficient to distract from news of any real political consequence.\textsuperscript{166} Though such feminine attacks were not the central element of anti-Hillary rhetoric—since her feminist rejection of certain feminine ideas was her primary

\begin{footnotes}
\item[164] Troy, pg. 57.
\item[165] Troy, pg. 57.
\item[166] Troy, pg. 55.
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offense—the ones that did exist still clearly devalued her as incapable and effectively worthless.

Unlike in 1992, attacks against Clinton in 2016 were often explicitly gendered. While Clinton worked to create a positive image of femininity for herself during that campaign, her opponents were busy using that same femininity to craft a picture of weakness and ineptitude. The use of feminine stereotypes against Clinton was especially common in attacks made by Donald Trump during the 2016 general presidential election. Trump had constantly emphasized his own hypermasculinity during the Republican primary, and his attacks against Clinton similarly questioned whether she was “man enough” for the position. During their second debate, he constantly followed her around the stage, standing behind her to emphasize the difference between their physical statures, and throughout all three debates he consistently interrupted her far more than she did him, matching a trend in which women’s voices are regularly devalued. Rather than engaging in political disagreement and critique of policy, Trump focused on physical intimidation, emphasizing his manhood to prove his superiority as a presidential candidate. This tactic engages directly with the double bind by highlighting Clinton’s lack of masculinity and resulting apparent inability to perform such a masculine job as leading the country. It also played into the male gaze by emphasizing Trump’s position and very existence—and therefore his point of view—as dominant, attempting to force Clinton into a position of subservience and submission.

167 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pgs. 43-45.
168 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 38.
169 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pgs. 125-126.
170 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pgs. 124, 126.
As part of his use of gendered intimidation in discrediting Clinton, Trump at times resorted to sexist insults. One particularly memorable gendered insult Trump hurled at Clinton was during their third debate, when he referred to her as a “nasty woman” (ironically having stated not long before that “no one respects women more than [he]”\textsuperscript{171}) while interrupting Clinton’s comments on raising taxes for the wealthy, which included a reference to Trump’s own tax evasion.\textsuperscript{172} His use of an insult in response to a factual claim (instead of merely responding with “facts” of his own) and the specifically gendered nature of the insult both suggest that Trump is indicating that a woman who dares to challenge a man does not belong in a proper political discourse. In his view, her gender directly disqualifies her from the position of the presidency. Clinton, at this point, was presenting a fairly masculine persona, in part demonstrated by the way she held her ground and persisted in making her points despite his interruptions, making the gendered nature of his insult even more striking: when she displayed competence and strength, he countered by abusing her gender.

In addition to using gendered insults and emphasizing his own masculinity, Trump explicitly referred to Clinton’s gender while directly arguing that she was incapable of performing the job of the president. When he argued that the “woman’s card” was the only card she had to play and asserted that less than 5% of people would vote for her, if Clinton were male,\textsuperscript{173} Trump simultaneously represented Clinton as

\textsuperscript{171} Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 126.


unqualified for the presidency and as unfairly advantaged due to her gender.

Immediately after this statement, Trump argued that Clinton was not strong enough to deal with difficult international situations\textsuperscript{174} (an odd claim, considering her background as Secretary of State), saying “both that Clinton was benefitting from her gender and that her gender made her too weak for the presidency.”\textsuperscript{175} Political media tended to support his claims: though much of the media coverage during the campaign season was negative about both candidates’ qualifications, it supported Trump’s claims that Clinton lacked the necessary qualifications. Due to his utter lack of political experience and her possibly being the most qualified presidential candidate in the modern day,\textsuperscript{176} this equalizing approach effectively highlighted Trump and portrayed him as qualified and Clinton as underqualified. Research on female candidates, however, “indicates that Clinton actually would have received more of the vote if she were a man,”\textsuperscript{177} demonstrating that Trump’s gendered insult and the media’s support was not only sexist but also completely unfounded. Like Trump’s other gendered attacks, the assumption and assertion that gender politics was Clinton’s only chance at victory drew directly on the stereotype that women are unable to handle important political issues.

The “woman’s card” situation highlights the central contrast between Trump’s and Clinton’s approaches to her femininity. In a victory speech of her own, Clinton responded to this sexist and highly gendered attack and declared “Well, if fighting for women’s health care and paid family leave and equal pay is playing the woman card, then

\textsuperscript{174} Hagen and Swan.
\textsuperscript{175} Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 120.
\textsuperscript{176} Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 104-105.
\textsuperscript{177} Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 119.
deal me in.”

She later repeated this refrain at the Democratic National Convention and on Twitter. This response characteristically highlighted her femininity and her attention to women’s issues as a strength. This series of events is a clear example of how Trump emphatically used Clinton’s gender as a negative aspect of her identity—one which simultaneously disqualified her as a presidential candidate and gave her an unfair advantage in the race—while Clinton emphasized her gender as a key reason why she should be the next president. The negative and positive aspects highlighted here play directly into the double bind discussed earlier: Trump was leaning on the association of femininity with weakness while Clinton was relying on the connection between femininity and compassion and humanity.

Trump and his supporters also drew attention to Clinton’s gender with regard to her physical appearance. After their second debate, Trump stated that he “wasn’t impressed” with Clinton’s appearance, relegating her to the position of a sex object whose function was pleasing men and placing himself in a position of power as the judge of her value—a direct application of the male gaze. Trump’s campaign cochair, Sam Clovis, compared Clinton’s physique to Trump’s, painting Trump as admirably

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180 Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton), “‘If fighting for affordable child care and paid family leave is playing the woman card, then deal me in!’ — Hillary,” Twitter, July 28, 2016, accessed July 13, 2020, https://twitter.com/HillaryClinton/status/758862140694331393.
182 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 123.
athletic. Clinton was also demonized by Fox News and other conservative news outlets both for smiling and for not smiling; she was characterized as “smug,” “not very attractive,” “stern, angry, joyless,” and “shrill.” Trump’s supporters wore buttons and t-shirts featuring slogans like “Hillary sucks, but not like Monica” and “Life is a bitch, don’t vote for one,” which even some Republicans condemned as anti-woman. This emphasis on Clinton’s physical appearance plays into gender expectations in which women are required to look attractive, sexy, and appealing to men in order to have value. It also demonstrates the double bind, as Clinton was termed “‘bitchy’ or unlikeable” when she didn’t appear happy and accommodating but was “smug” or “shrill” when she did smile. These expectations were unbalanced between the genders, and Clinton’s opponents clearly used that inequality in order to create a negative impression of her on the basis of her gender.

Where Clinton sought to balance masculine strength with feminine compassion, particularly highlighting her femininity as a unique strength in itself, Trump drew on his already hypermasculine persona to essentially out-man a woman, emphasizing her femininity to highlight the contrast between them in such a way as to make him seem as superior as possible. The double bind and male gaze were both directly in effect in this situation: as Clinton attempted to walk the fine line between masculinity and femininity, she was forced into the subordinate position of the feminine by comparison to the

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184 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 121.
186 Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman, pg. 128.
hypermasculinity of her opponent. Though Clinton faced the challenge of combatting the double bind at many points during her political career, the uniquely gendered dynamic of the 2016 election particularly highlights the virtual impossibility of her situation.

6. Implications

Despite the obvious differences in their situations, Cleopatra and Clinton have dealt with far more similar challenges than might be immediately apparent. Though their political situations and cultural contexts were quite different, both women were faced with the complications which gender expectations brought to their positions and had to engage with those expectations as they chose how to represent themselves to the public. Where Cleopatra wore the diadem, Clinton wore the pantsuit. Where Cleopatra was a mother-goddess, Clinton was a potential grandmother-in-chief. The similarities persist when considering the tactics of their enemies: where Cleopatra might sexually rule and even penetrate Roman men, Clinton could break the nuts of the men who belonged in the White House, and where Cleopatra was a harlot queen fleeing her conqueror as an animal flees a hunter, Clinton was a nasty woman lacking the strength and qualifications to lead a country. Cleopatra was transformed from a king and mother-goddess to a monster and trophy; Clinton, the first feminist first lady, could have been the first female president, adding that authority to her ongoing fight for the interests of women and children, but instead she became Medusa, violently (perhaps even sexually) defeated by hypermasculinity. These similarities suggest that the challenges women are facing in specifically political battles have not changed much in the last 2000 years.

Interestingly, their opponents never seemed to address the motherly images Cleopatra and Clinton created for themselves. In Cleopatra’s case, this may be because
the Romans idealized motherhood. Augustus especially emphasized the importance of marriage and childbearing through instituting laws that rewarded women for having children. Additionally, Cleopatra’s feminine self-portrayals drew directly on goddess iconography, appealing to a religious realm in which the feminine was highly respected. Clinton’s situation was obviously quite different: goddess worship is obviously not a part of mainstream western religion, and one consequence of the modern feminist movement is that today motherhood is at times viewed by some as inherently inferior to a traditional career, while other women may rush to defend their choice to become mothers in response. Still, the negative feedback Clinton received after her “cookies and tea” comment and her later attempts to emphasize her role as a mother and grandmother demonstrate the persistent importance of motherhood in current ideas about femininity. The absence of commentary on these motherly images by Cleopatra’s and Clinton’s opponents suggest that these specific feminine portrayals could not be easily twisted to reflect negatively on either woman.

In a world where America still cannot manage to elect a woman president, the lingering question remains whether we have, will, or even can overcome our misogynistic cultural heritage, especially in regard to our attitudes toward women leaders. Cleopatra in some ways had an advantage over Clinton in that Hellenistic Egypt was quite comfortable with the concept of queens existing and holding at least some authority—as long as her king could not resist her power, it was reasonable for her to hold authority as a queen regent. On the other hand, an American first lady is expected to function almost solely as a figurehead, as demonstrated by the public outrage over the suggestion of a

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Clinton co-presidency, even when Bill made it clear that he would still be the president and have the final say on any issue. Despite the accusations against her, Clinton could not become president through marriage. However, despite the slight boost Cleopatra may have received from a society where queens and goddesses were afforded legitimate power—if still subservient to their male counterparts—the tragedy of her situation is that her legacy was defined not by her efforts to rule and preserve her kingdom but by the slander of her enemies. Though her name is well-known today, her story is limited to the Augustan narrative: she is a sexual temptress, a seductress who commands both admiration and horror at once.

While Clinton’s story is perhaps more broadly familiar due to her recency, her candidacy does not appear to have truly changed the public conception of the presidency: a political memo in the New York Times in early 2019 quoted Terry Schumaker (who worked on both Clintons’ campaigns) as saying, “She made it possible for people to envision a woman being president” and asked, “did some voters resist a woman or this woman?” Clinton’s example as a potential president and her role in raising such questions is especially important in regard to the six women Democratic primary candidates in the 2020 election; although the horizons for women’s political achievement seemed wider than ever, Joe Biden is the clearly presumed Democratic nominee at the time of this writing—another elderly, white, male career politician. Perhaps Mary Beard was correct in her somewhat revolutionary statement: “You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male; you have to change the structure. That means

188 Peek, “She, Like a Good King,” pg. vi.
thinking about power differently.” Cleopatra and Clinton both certainly thought about power differently, combining multiple approaches of power through a combination of different gender norms. Still, neither was ultimately successful.

This paper is, admittedly, quite limited in its ability to address the questions it explores, as it focuses on only two examples of female leaders, albeit quite significant ones. However, the many parallels between Cleopatra and Clinton do demonstrate that women today may face the same type of sexist challenges in seeking political office as they did 2000 years ago. As they worked within a masculine (and restrictive) power model and navigated public perceptions of power, Cleopatra and Clinton, for their part, both tried to create a public perception that somehow satisfied the gendered expectations surrounding political power by posing as strong, “masculine” leaders, but simultaneously highlighting the power inherent in the reality of their womanhood. The examples of these two women demonstrate that politically ambitious and powerful women must still contend with accusations that they are either “too strong” or “too weak,” “too masculine” or “too feminine.” A woman who holds political power must be strong but gentle, tough but likeable, but is never allowed to simply be.

190 Beard, pgs.
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