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The Emperor's Caesar: Napoleon III, Karl Marx and the *History of Julius Caesar*

Abstract: In 1865, Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, published his *History of Julius Caesar*. The book was a sweeping appropriation of the legacy of Caesar, who was conscripted in Napoleon III's battle to rebuild the glory of France. Napoleon's *Caesar* attracted notice not so much as a narrative of the ancient past, but as a heavily symbolic statement of national and imperial intent. It was designed to validate – to audiences around the world – Napoleon's personal power, his imperial system, and his ambitions for France. Reactions to it were filtered through discourses of nationalism, from America to Germany. For Walter Bagehot (1889 [vol. 2]: 440), “Julius Caesar was the first who tried on an imperial scale the characteristic principles of the French Empire as the first Napoleon revived them, as the third Napoleon has consolidated them.” This chapter explores the grand ambitions of this unique history and its reception across the world – particularly in Karl Marx's *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*. The legacy of Caesar became an intensely contested battleground, following the publication of Napoleon's work – but the *History of Julius Caesar* ultimately became a marker of the limitations, rather than the extent, of the Emperor's power.

Early in 1865, a strange and remarkable book was being talked about across the world. The first volume of the *History of Julius Caesar*, written ostensibly by Napoleon III, Emperor of the French,¹ began to attract the attention of editors, scholars, politicians and revolutionaries, from Paris to Hawaii. Few works of ancient history have ever provoked such an outburst of fascination: *Caesar* was debated across a dozen nations, in five-column notices and impassioned pamphlets.² Napoleon's work compelled, not just as a narrative of antiquity, but as a heavily symbolic statement of national and imperial intent. As Walter Bagehot (1889 [vol. 2]: 440) put it: “Julius Caesar was the first who tried on an imperial

1 Napoleon III (1865, transl. Wright). The English-language edition of the work will be the one most frequently used here, since this article focuses principally on its reception in Britain and the United States. While fascinating, the question of the authorship of the *History of Julius Caesar* is not my key focus. Speculation, in some quarters, was certainly considerable, but there is little hard evidence. See *The Pall Mall Gazette* (11 March 1865, p. 3): “The Paris papers have not yet offered any serious criticism on the Emperor's *Life of Caesar*. They have been content with paragraphs about the ‘latitude’ accorded to them; while rumour has been busily engaged tackling the names of Renan and others to the august author's literary labours.”

2 Cf. Anonymus (1871), Marx (1898), Rogeard (1865a), and *The Standard* (London, 6 March 1865, p. 3).

scale the characteristic principles of the French Empire as the first Napoleon revived them, as the third Napoleon has consolidated them.” The ancient world and nineteenth-century nationalisms collide kaleidoscopically in the *History of Julius Caesar* – both in its ambitions, and in its receptions: from America using Caesar to come to terms with the assassination of Lincoln, to Marx concluding that “the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past but only from the future” (Marx 1898: 18), this work was read through webs of local discourses on nation, power and identity. In March 1865, the Emperor’s *Caesar* was quite simply a sensation (*Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, London, 12 March 1865, p. 8):

“The book [the first volume of the *History of Julius Caesar*] which has been so long and so eagerly looked for throughout Europe is at length before the world, and lies upon critics’ tables in every city where there is an organ of public opinion, or a vehicle for the diffusion of learning. Time after time has this work been announced – reports of its progress have been eagerly caught up. We have heard of the august author’s secretaries at work in various notable libraries. His aides-de-camp have studied Caesar’s battle grounds, and his learned ambassadors have laboriously examined Roman remains. Neither time nor money has been spared. Imperial Caesar has been treated in an imperial manner. (...) It is not too much to say that at this moment the volume lies on the table of every thoughtful man in Europe. The emperor has, in a day, brought his mind in direct contact with all the active intelligence of his age.”

As the *Cleveland Morning Leader* pointed out, “(f)or months – we might say for years – this work has been talked about, vaunted and extolled in Parisian circles” (*Cleveland Morning Leader*, Cleveland, Ohio, 22 January 1864, p. 3). In France, it was said that “the Emperor’s ‘History of Julius Caesar’ is the only topic of interest” (*Berrow’s Worcester Journal*, 4 March 1865, p. 3), while “most of the Paris and London papers give considerable prominence to (...) the Emperor’s ‘History of Julius Caesar’” (*The Hampshire Advertiser*, 4 March 1865, p. 7). From as far away as Ohio, it was reported that “Napoleon’s preface to the life of Julius Caesar was published in all the London journals. The Pope ordered its immediate examination when published” (*Daily Ohio Statesman*, Columbus, Ohio, 14 March 1865, p. 3). It was scrutinised as “the history by which the greatest man of his age has elected to be judged as a statesman, as a thinker, and a writer” (*Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 12 March 1865, p. 8):

“The men who look with jealousy and with mistrust at the awful power over the world’s destinies which lies in the hands of Louis Napoleon, have read this short preface [to *Julius Caesar*] with breathless impatience, in the hope of getting out of it something like a clue to the political system on which the writer has acted; and, more important still, to the system on which he is likely to act in the future.”

Napoleon III as historian was, by design, very difficult to separate from Napoleon III as statesman; this was evident from the circumstances surrounding the publication of *Julius Caesar*. In London, *The Standard* remarked that the Emperor had invested his work “with something of the dignity of a state paper, by selecting the columns of the *Moniteur* [*Le moniteur universel*, the official newspaper of the French government] for its first promulgation before the volume itself was given to the world” (*The Standard*, London, 6 March 1865, p. 3). The interest which his work had attracted had been fanned with no small care not only by the imperial author but also by the machinery of his state (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 12 March 1865, p. 8):

“That care which was given with ungrudging labour to the original French edition, has been given under the eye of the emperor himself, who is master of our language, to the sumptuous English edition. (...) The pains which have been bestowed on the production of a fair English edition of Napoleon the Third's great work, have been given, through the offices of Napoleon's ambassadors, on German and other foreign editions.”

The Emperor and his *Caesar* had the world's attention.

Competing ideologies of nation and identity found passionate voice in the debates over Napoleon's *Julius Caesar*. When this work was published, the legacy of Caesar became, across the world, an intensely contested battleground in contemporary politics. Most current work in classical reception studies takes a broad diachronic perspective, and a relatively limited geographical frame: for instance, Hall and Macintosh's work (2005) on British encounters with Greek tragedy between 1660 and 1914, or Cook and Tatum's recent study (2010) of African-American engagements with the ancient world over the last two hundred years. Here, that methodology is reversed: engagements with *Julius Caesar* from many different contexts, but from within a very tight temporal frame, will be examined.

Napoleon's work offers a promising test-case for this approach, and its potential rewards: few works on the ancient world, in this period, appeared simultaneously in several countries, let alone in several languages – or attracted such sustained scrutiny from such diverse quarters.³ Its receptions are inherently trans-national in their scope: British newspaper articles were reprinted in America, reports from *Le moniteur universel* were dissected in Britain – while Louis

³ For the purposes of this article, I am principally interested in engagements with the *History of Julius Caesar* outside academic discourses – since the questions at the heart of this volume, on nationalism and the ancient world, come to the fore in more explicit and revealing ways here.

Auguste Rogeard's diatribe *Les propos de Labienus* which was banned in France was promptly reprinted and translated in the United States (Rogeard 1865b). National debates over *Julius Caesar* had many points of connection – and often contain very similar strains of enthusiasm and scepticism for Napoleon's text. However, despite these similarities, *Julius Caesar* was received through multiple very different, specifically national frames: from the United States recovering from the Civil War, to Britain looking warily across the Channel at Napoleon's power. Each had a very different perspective on the question of what was at stake in summoning Caesar.

For Napoleon III, the legacy of Caesar was a key force in his battle to restore the glory of France. His reign was marked by the intensity of its nationalistic rhetoric – and the scale of his ambitions: through the campaigns of the Crimean War, and the diplomacy of the Paris peace conference of 1856, he rebuilt France's power within Europe. Domestically, he spent heavily on infrastructure and education – authorising Haussmann to transform Paris, and encouraging large-scale industrial expansion. The ancient world was ever-present in his nationalism. After the Crimean War (October 1853 – February 1856), when addressing the returning French army in Paris, he cast himself in a classical role: "Soldiers, – I come to meet you, as the Roman Senate of old came to the gates of Rome to meet their victorious legions" (*Illustrated London News*, 12 January 1856, p. 42).

Julius Caesar was, for Napoleon, an obvious figure to conjure with as part of this rhetoric. The place of Caesar in French political discourse had, of course, been assured during the first French Revolution – where amidst a rhetoric which drew heavily on Rome, Bonaparte channelled Caesar's example time and again (*The Standard*, 6 March 1865, p. 3):

"The motive [of Napoleon III for writing this *History*] was easily to be divined by any one who had given even a passing attention to the beginnings of the first French Revolution, and to the way in which the leaders in that portentous movement, whether the original fanatics, or the most ferocious of the subsequent tyrants, referred as their example to Gracchus or Brutus or Cato, as the champions of real liberty, and the personifications of honest patriotism. Rogues as some, monsters as others of the overthrowers of the ancient monarchy of France were, they fancied, or professed to fancy, that they were reproducing the events of early Roman history."

Certainly, as Nicolet (2009) explores, Napoleon III's relationship with Caesar was a long-standing one – as was his admiration of Roman imperial power. And Napoleon made no secret of it. "The present Emperor [Napoleon III], a quarter of a century ago", remarked *The Standard* (6 March 1865, p. 3), "when certainly no one in the world but himself expected to see him in his present position –

showed his own sympathy (...) in his 'Idées Napoléoniennes', where he enumerates Caesar and Napoleon among the chief apostles of progress in the world's history, and hints at more than one point of resemblance between the French and the Roman Revolution." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, 5 March 1865, p. 4) points out: "So far back as 1840 he was as ardent an admirer of Caesar and Imperialism as he is now"; though when seeking to gain power in France, this admiration was carefully downplayed: "Louis Bonaparte did not insist on his admiration for the Caesars being proclaimed to the French people. An idea then prevailed that he admired Brutus as well as Caesar" (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 March 1865, p. 4).

As Richter has argued, after Napoleon came to power in France – and particularly after his coup in 1851 – there was an intense debate over what kind of regime this should be called: "contemporaries had to choose among such neologisms as 'Bonapartism', 'Caesarism', 'Napoleonism', and 'Imperialism'" (Richter 2004: 86). The question of what was at stake in these terms – even whether they should be seen as inherently positive or negative – was very much up for debate (Richter 2004: 87):

"Concepts such as Bonapartism and Caesarism tended to be used pejoratively as denoting illegitimate forms of dominion by theorists of diverse views: royalist, reactionary, conservative, republican, liberal, and anarchist. However, there were many others who used Bonapartism and Caesarism in positive senses to characterise that mode of rule or type of leader that, in their view, alone could resolve what they saw as the political and social dilemmas of the century. Among them was Auguste Romieu, who in 1850 wrote *L'ère des Césars*. (...) Other positive characterisations of such regimes claimed that they represented (...) the recognition by the masses that they need to be led by exceptional leaders or elites."

In 1865, the meaning of Caesar in contemporary French politics was vigorously contested by both supporters and opponents of Napoleon's regime. Napoleon's text should be seen as intervening in – and attempting to set the terms of – this existing debate. In Paris, indeed, even before *Julius Caesar* was published, Caesar seemed to be everywhere (*Cleveland Morning Leader*, 22 January 1864, p. 3):

"There are persons who see in this self-imposed literary task [Napoleon's *Julius Caesar*] a far-reaching ambition on the part of Napoleon III. (...) It is a great subject of much remark in Paris that the busts of Caesar are counterparts of those of Napoleon the Great. In the present Napoleon's study there are two busts, the one of the Roman general Caesar, the other of the great Corsican, and you cannot tell one from the other. (...) The Parisians say that Napoleon III has placed the Caesar-like statue of Napoleon the Great upon the Colonne Vendôme with an eye to business, as it will be a capital advertisement for his long promised 'Life of Caesar.'"

The statue in question – which sat high atop Place Vendôme, in the heart of Paris – was of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was in fact the third such statue which had sat atop the Colonne Vendôme: the first was melted down and turned into a statue of Henri IV during the Bourbon Restoration; the second, of Bonaparte in modern dress, was erected by Louis-Philippe; the third, this classicising statue of Bonaparte, was commissioned by Napoleon III to replace it.

Yet Napoleon was nothing if not an intellectual magpie: while Caesar dominated the Place Vendôme, one of his old adversaries was also being resurrected to serve the Emperor's regime. Vercingetorix, the leader of the Gauls against Caesar, was defeated in 52 B.C. at the Battle of Alesia. In the early 1860s, while *Julius Caesar* was taking shape, Napoleon sponsored a series of large-scale excavations on the site of the ancient battlefield. In 1865, the same year as *Julius Caesar* was published, a 35-foot tall statue of Vercingetorix was erected there. Vercingetorix bore – down to his flowing moustaches – a suspicious resemblance to Napoleon III himself.⁴ On the base of the statue were verses which could be understood far more easily in Napoleon's France than they could in Vercingetorix's Gaul: "La Gaule unie, formant une seule nation, animée d'un même esprit, peut défier l'univers."

The period between 1862 and 1865, when Napoleon wrote *Julius Caesar*, was close to the high-water mark of his power. By the time it was published, the cracks in his ambitions were beginning to show: McMillan argues that this was a period when Napoleon "discovered that he was less than ever able to shape events to his will" (McMillan 1991: 100), and that "(b)y 1865, Napoleon was also having to contend with a variety of domestic problems, notably the revival of political opposition in the country and in the Legislative Body" (McMillan 1991: 102). A few short years later, having embarked upon the disastrous Franco-Prussian War, the Emperor was captured at the Battle of Sedan, in July 1870. Two days later, he was deposed. *Julius Caesar* was written when all things seemed to be within his grasp. And it proved to be a work of almost limitless ambition.

The *History of Julius Caesar* appropriated Caesar in the most sweeping manner possible. It was designed to validate – to audiences around the world – Napoleon's personal power, his imperial system, and his ambitions for France (Napoleon III 1865 [vol. 1]: xv–xvi):

4 On this statue, see Endl (2003) who argues: "Diese Vercingetorix-Statue war mithin weniger Nationaldenkmal als vielmehr ein persönliches Projekt Napoléons III." (Endl 2003: 58).

“When provinces raise up such men as Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon [Bonaparte], it is to trace for peoples the path they are to follow, to mark a new era with the stamp of their genius and to accomplish the work of several centuries in a few years. Happy the people that understand and follow them, woe to those who ignore and oppose them! (...) In fact, neither the murder of Caesar nor the captivity [of Bonaparte] of St. Helena have been able to destroy radically two popular causes overthrown by a league concealed beneath the mask of liberty. Brutus by killing Caesar plunged Rome into the horrors of civil war; he did not prevent the reign of Augustus, but he rendered possible those of Nero and Caligula. The ostracism of Napoleon by coalesced Europe has not prevented the Empire from resuscitating; and yet, how far we are from the settlement of great questions, from the appeasement of passions, from the legitimate satisfaction given to peoples by the first Empire! Thus every day since 1815 has this prophecy of the captive of St. Helena [Bonaparte] been verified: ‘How many struggles, how much blood, how many years will yet be required that all the blessings I wished to confer upon mankind may be realised.’”

Napoleon casts himself as the Augustus to Bonaparte's Caesar – the master-builder who transformed Rome (Paris), the patron of the arts, the consolidator of Roman (French) power across the known world. Just as Caesar's nephew assured the greatness of Rome, so Bonaparte's nephew would assure the greatness of France. As his readers recognised, this work, ostensibly one of ancient history, was in fact a full-throated expression of Napoleon III's belief “in a political system that confides the happiness of a whole generation of men to the genius of one, and at the same time entrusts to this single brain the progress of the world” (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 12 March 1865, p. 8).

Julius Caesar's defence of the imperial system – and its own author's power – could hardly have been more vehement: “What can be more erroneous, than not to recognise the pre-eminence of those privileged beings who appear in history from time to time like luminous beacons, dissipating the darkness of their epoch, and throwing light into the future?” (Napoleon III 1865 [vol. 1]: xii). A few pages later, one reads: “When Providence raises up such men (...) it is to trace out for people the path they ought to follow; to stamp with the seal of their genius a new era; and to accomplish in a few years the labour of many centuries” (Napoleon III 1865 [vol. 1]: xv). The author's agenda was unmistakable (*The Standard*, 6 March 1865, p. 3):

“We see plainly enough the inference intended to be drawn, that all those who desire the advance of civilization recognize the principle that it is to be secured by now following the doctrines of Napoleon, and that no professor can be as competent to enunciate and expound those doctrines as (...) the present French Emperor.”

Napoleon III sought to define the meaning of Caesar to the world – and to define himself as one whom the world should (or, rather, must) follow. But to what extent could this agenda, and this interpretation of the past, be imposed upon his readers – even with the resources of an empire at his disposal? Would his *Julius Caesar* find acceptance? Will this ultimately be the story of an imperial history, a narrative to rule all others, shaping past and present according to Napoleon's will – or of an over-imperial claim upon the past, built upon unsteady foundations?

In Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, much of the initial press coverage of *Julius Caesar* was dotting. Not only did some correspondents embrace its intellectual project – the legitimization of Napoleon III's power; they also embraced its appropriation of the ancient past (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 12 March 1865, p. 8):

“Both Caesar and Napoleon [Bonaparte] (...) cut the civil difficulties of a republic with their conquering swords. They were both, according to Napoleon the Third, the warriors for the ‘final triumph of good.’ They were the true soldiers of liberty, and the assassination of Caesar, and the banishment of Napoleon, were the work of a league that disguised itself with the mask of liberty. We cannot refuse to follow out this argument which the third Napoleon lays before us. (...) The second [French] empire we are bidden to regard as established to consummate all the good which Napoleon the First desired to do for mankind – in other words, Napoleon the Third is the fourth safe landing-stage humanity has had to rest upon. (...) We take this life of Caesar, moreover – this ripe fruit of a great mind – as something that will live to the writer's lasting honour. It is its author's explanation of the proper conduct of human affairs according to his light. It is his apology for himself, drawn from the lives of three heroes who have preceded him. After years of patient labour, he now sets forth, with his wonted courage, the standard by which the living generation and posterity are to judge him.”

That ‘judgement’ was not slow in coming, from other quarters. While *Julius Caesar* was greeted with respectful admiration by some, this was by no means universal. In Britain, for many, the parallels which Napoleon III drew between ancient and contemporary events did not stand up to scrutiny: “The spurious or superficial parallel by Caesar and Napoleon is one with which we were familiar in schoolboy themes, and does not need to be impressed upon us now. But we would advise the Imperial biographer not to push that parallel too far” (*The Hampshire Advertiser*, 11 March 1865, p. 7). Napoleon exhibited a relentless admiration for anything or anyone admired by Caesar himself – down to the reptilian young Roman Catiline, dubbed a man of “great and generous ideas” (Napoleon III 1865 [vol. 1]: 395). As *The Standard* (6 March 1865, p. 3) remarked, “Caesar's present biographer is prepared to estimate every person and action of the time as good or bad, just as he or it was approved or opposed by his hero.”

For many, this simply turned his history into a hagiography. Others followed Napoleon's historical parallels to their logical conclusion – and saw dark times ahead for France, if the later history of Rome was to be its guide (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 March 1865, p. 4):

"But, argues Louis Napoleon, though Brutus and Cassius killed Caesar, and though associated Europe chained Napoleon to an ocean-girt rock, that did not prevent the empires which these heroes founded from being restored. The Roman empire was restored by Augustus, and the French empire by the nephew of Napoleon. This we admit; but, then, so much the worse, we contend, for Rome, and probably for France. The Roman emperors enslaved and demoralized the Roman people, so that Italy became the easy prey of the Northern barbarians. (...) Let us hope that the French empire is not destined to prepare for France and the French people the fate which the Roman emperors prepared for Italy and the Italians, though the historical parallel drawn by Louis Napoleon may lead us to expect the counterparts of the Roman Neros, Caligulas, Domitians, and Heliogabali (*sic*) as rulers for the French people, as well as the counterparts of the first Bonaparte and his cold-blooded and politic nephew."

Napoleon III's decision to summon the ghost of 'the first Bonaparte' alongside that of Julius Caesar was understandable from the point of view of domestic French politics – where an appeal to the memory of France's triumphs under Bonaparte had long been central to his political rhetoric. Bonaparte, of course, played very differently in Britain. A rather prickly patriotic pride cut through many British responses to *Julius Caesar* – with Napoleon's statement of imperial intent calling forth an equally nationalistic response: "the *Kelso Mail* observes that the parallel between Julius Caesar and Napoleon Buonaparte, drawn by the Emperor of the French, is not so striking as the difference between them: for Caesar conquered Britain and Napoleon didn't!" (*Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 18 March 1865, p. 6). Napoleon III's providential model of history – where the fate of the world rested in the hands of a few exceptional men – came in for particular criticism. "He cannot but admit", remarked *Reynolds's Newspaper* (5 March 1865, p. 4), "that the Duke of Wellington was a product of Providence as well as Napoleon Bonaparte, and that the Isle of St. Helena [where Bonaparte was imprisoned] was raised up for a beneficent or divine purpose as well as the Isle of Corsica [where Bonaparte was born]."

Many in Britain read the Emperor's *Caesar* as a troubling – even threatening – statement of national intent. *Aut Cæsar aut nullus*, a pamphlet by Joseph Phillips published in 1865, saw in Napoleon III the appetites of a second Caesar (or perhaps a second Bonaparte) – and an ambition fixed on Britain. Affecting to listen in on the Emperor's thoughts, Phillips (1865: 16) imagined Napoleon dreaming of conquest: "When all the world is nearly in my hands, I'll bring it all to bear against Great Britain." Napoleon III's text did not succeed in dominating

its readers – and his claim on Caesar, far from being received with universal respect, was turned back on the imperial author by many in Britain.⁵

In France, sceptical voices were soon equally loud: “with the exception, of course, of the semi-official organs, the French press is unanimous in protesting against the apotheosis of Caesarism in the Emperor’s Preface [to *Julius Caesar*]” (*The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 9 March 1865, p. 3). And French doubts about Napoleon’s project were widely reported – commanding considerable attention in both Britain and America. *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, for instance, translated and printed an extended article by M.E. Forcade, from the *Revue des deux mondes*, on *Julius Caesar* (*The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 7 March 1865, p. 7):

“We will make our confession boldly: this religious sentiment in politics and this worship of great men meet in us resolute Protestants and determined unbelievers. (...) In raising history to the height of a religion, and of an authoritative religion, having infallible organs in great men, was not the Emperor afraid of committing an anachronism? Is it not in an opposite direction that all the tendencies of our age tend? (...) This apotheosis of great men and these judgments launched against nations seem to us incompatible either with philosophy or historical justice. (...) Were the Romans who withstood Caesar guilty for remaining faithful to the best traditions of their country and for being ignorant of the secrets of the future? When Vercingetorix and his Gauls combated the conquering foreigner with that chivalrous perseverance which moves us even now – were they guilty for not having penetrated the decree of destiny against their race?”

One of the most notable French critiques of *Julius Caesar* was *Les propos de Labienus*, a pamphlet by Louis Auguste Rogeard, which purports to be a dialogue between Titus Labienus and a friend. Labienus was an orator and historian under Augustus, known for his outspoken views and inflammatory rhetoric. He committed suicide after his works were burned, by order of the Senate (another Titus Labienus was, conveniently, a lieutenant of Julius Caesar who turned against him – but this work is set under the reign of Augustus, after the death of

5 This was, however, by no means a new rhetorical strategy. An 1855 pamphlet by William Pinch on *The Sufferings of Royalty; or Human Greatness a Fallacy* argued that Julius Caesar, far from benefitting the people of Rome, actually did them untold harm: “There was not one Roman throughout the empire whom he did not injure in the highest degree, for he robbed him of his liberty, which is the greatest blessing to mankind” (Pinch 1855: 29). Addressing Napoleon III directly, Pinch urged him to look for a very different model for his new empire: “The decline and fall of the Roman empire, then mistress of the earth under tyranny, proves how soon a mighty empire established by freedom becomes a sodden trunk. (...) May you, Sire, in consolidating the throne of France, the throne of your Dynasty, found it on constitutional freedom” (Pinch 1855: 3).

this Titus Labienus).⁶ The French police seized the first edition of the pamphlet, but it was reprinted, copied and translated numerous times, as far afield as the United States. Rogeard's Labienus appears to be discussing the memoirs of 'Augustus', but the actual target is clear (Rogeard 1865a: 16):

"L'effort impuissant et désespéré qu'il fait pour sauver quelques débris de sa réputation naufragée, cet effort suprême pour raccrocher son honneur à une dernière branche qui va casser, cette dernière lutte de César avec l'opinion qui l'écrase, a je ne sais quoi de lugubre et de comique comme la dernière grimace d'un pendu. (...) César était si sale, que le bourreau n'en eût pas voulu; il se débarbouille un peu pour embrasser la mort. Et il demande des lecteurs! l'insolent! des lecteurs pour César! à quoi bon!"⁷

While responses such as Rogeard's attracted trans-national interest, they were grounded in pre-existing national French discourses: in France, the figure of Caesar, while highly contested, was strongly associated with the regime of Napoleon III and "the recognition by the masses that they need to be led by exceptional leaders or elites", as Richter (2004: 87) puts it. Many British authors sought to separate Caesar from Bonaparte and Napoleon III⁸ – maintaining Caesar as a positive model, while disassociating him from the two Napoleons. By contrast, in France, the connections between the three figures were far more strongly established – and firmly embedded in national discourse – due in great part to the rhetoric of the first French Revolution, and of the present regime. As Richter (2004: 100) argues, even so prominent a figure as Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) avoided confronting this comparison head-on: "Apologists of the Second Empire followed the lead of Louis Napoleon, who wrote a book on Julius Caesar, in seeking to vindicate his regime. Their attempts to legitimate the regime were phrased for the most part as tendentious theories of Caesarism. (...)

⁶ On Labienus, see esp. Seneca, *Contr.* 10 praef. 4–8 and Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 1.5.8 and 4.1.11.

⁷ See Guthrie's English translation (Rogeard 1865b: 20): "The impotent and desperate effort he makes to save some few morsels of his shipwrecked reputation, this supreme effort to hang his honor on a last branch, which is about to fall, this last struggle of Caesar with public opinion, which is crushing him, has something lugubrious and comical about it, like the last grimace of a hanged man. (...) Caesar was so filthy that the executioner would not have liked to touch him, and he has scrubbed himself up a little to embrace death. And he asks for readers! the insolent wretch! Readers for Caesar! What for?"

⁸ Cf. *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (9 March 1865, p. 3): "There are in greatness and genius degrees; and Caesar in both was so many degrees above Bonaparte, that no parallel can be instituted between the victim of Roman conspirators and the prisoner of St. Helena whom Napoleon III would put on as a high a pedestal, with the palpable object of taking a stand beside him himself."

Tocqueville rejected such comparisons between contemporary France and late Republican Rome as intrinsically misleading and playing into the hands of Louis Napoleon and his apologists.” In France, rather than attempting to separate Napoleon III from Julius Caesar, critics of the Emperor’s work turned their fire, instead, on his Roman model.

This can be seen not only in Rogeard’s pamphlet, but also in an article written by George Sand (1804–1876) for *L’univers illustré* of 11 March 1865.⁹ Sand, the celebrated and reviled French novelist and social critic, had an uncomfortable relationship with Napoleon’s regime – and used her response to *Julius Caesar* to speak of the failings of rulers both past and present. Sand’s Caesar represents power without morality, contempt for his fellow-men, and the end of all that was good in the Roman Republic (*L’univers illustré*, 11 March 1865, p. 1):

“Quand Jules César apparut dans le monde, les grands jours de la république finissaient. La conquête avait corrompu les conquérants, l’anarchie régnait à Rome. (...) L’ambition de César c’était l’énergie politique, le développement de l’agitation sociale à tout prix; l’ordre et le désordre, la paix et la guerre, les réformes enchevêtrées aux abus, tous les biens et tous les maux, plutôt que la dissolution de la Rome matérielle et l’extinction de sa vitalité. (...) L’idéal moral lui manque absolument, il méprise profondément les hommes, et c’est pour cela qu’il est pratique, il sait se servir d’eux.”

In America, responses to *Julius Caesar* were sharply different. They drew, once again, on a range of sources from across the world – with Rogeard’s pamphlet circulating widely in both French and English editions (Rogeard 1865a and 1865b), and British newspaper articles critiquing the Emperor’s Latin reprinted and annotated.¹⁰ But in April 1865, just a few days after *Julius Caesar* was published, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated – and the aftermath of that event, along with the chaos and hardship brought by the aftermath of the Civil War, shaped responses to Napoleon’s text. Some readers welcomed Napoleon’s reassurance that legacies did not die with leaders; that death did not prevent Caesar’s ideas from reshaping the world (*The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, Honolulu, 27 May 1865, p. 4):

“What will be the effect of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination upon the Nation? (...) When Brutus and his fellow-assassins smote down Caesar in the Senate at Rome, they supposed that with Caesar’s death Caesar’s influence would no longer be felt. They were disap-

⁹ Sand’s authorship is confirmed by *The Pall Mall Gazette* (11 March 1865, p. 3).

¹⁰ An article from *The Pall Mall Gazette* on *Julius Caesar* was reprinted in *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia, 11 July 1866, p. 7).

pointed. Caesar disappeared, but, exclaims Cicero, 'All the acts of Caesar's life, his writings, his words, his promises, his thoughts, are more powerful after his death than if he were still alive.' So I trust, and doubt not, it will be with the life, writings, words, promises, thoughts of Abraham Lincoln."

Napoleon's work still received a frosty reception from most quarters in America. "The press of this country", remarked the *Virginia Daily Intelligencer*, "loudly proclaims that the author of the 'Life of Julius Caesar' has tortured history for the purpose of producing false ideas, the monarchical idea, which is condemned by the conclusive example of the Republic of the United States" (*Daily Intelligencer*, Wheeling, Virginia, 1 April 1865, p. 1). Some, however, stood up to defend *Julius Caesar*. One of the loudest voices in the press belonged to the *Courrier des États Unis*, a French-language newspaper published in New York. In an editorial translated by the English-language press, the editor of the *Courrier* defended Napoleon's work and his imperial system – and asked whether, during the Civil War, the United States might not have fallen under the power of a Caesar-like figure (*Courrier des États Unis*, quoted in the *Daily Intelligencer*, 1 April 1865, p. 1):

"Let us look back a few months, let us remember the time previous to the capture of Atlanta. (...) Can we be sure that gradually and slowly the Constitution would not have fallen under the heels of a successful military leader, who would have made a foot-stool of it to reach the highest office in the land? (...) Because the American republic has lasted ninety years, that is no reason why it should be better or more eternal than monarchies, which have existed for more than ten centuries."

The Emperor and his Caesar, in other words, hit literally close to home, for many in America. The impact of Napoleon's text at a time of such deep national unease was certainly markedly different than it had been in Britain or France. Caesar, here, was not a character of the past, as in Britain, or a character of the present, as in France, but for some Americans, one potentially lying in wait in the future – a threat. As a Congressman – Mr Brooks of New York – later put it: "We are now repeating the history of Augustus and Julius Caesar, and the Government is now passing from a republic to a despotism. (...) When we shall have lost all our liberties, some future Napoleon, yet unknown, will rise up from the chaos and rescue the country from anarchy through a military despotism" (*The Charleston Daily News*, 13 March 1867, p. 1).

The most revolutionary – and the most enduring – reading of this debate, however, came not from America, but from Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx's *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (1852) has become so famous that Carver (2004: 103) could ask: "Would Louis Bonaparte be much remembered now if it weren't for Karl Marx?" While Napoleon III saw the course of history as

shaped by the actions of a few great men, Marx (1898: 15) took an antithetical view: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” Where Napoleon sought to portray himself as Augustus reincarnate, Marx (1898: 15) only saw a small, undignified echo: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”

Most significantly, for Marx, Napoleon’s project was inherently flawed: no valid comparison could be made between political circumstances in the ancient and contemporary worlds, because the economic structure of contemporary society was so different. As Carver (2004: 124) remarks, “(i)n Marx’s view, Caesarism is passé in the modern world. (...) It is finished because of the complications of class politics in a modern commercial age, and because of the complexities of the political structure of representative democracies.” Or as Marx (1898: 9) himself acidly put it: “With so complete a difference between the material, economic conditions of the ancient and the modern class struggles, the political figures produced by them can likewise have no more in common with one another than the Archbishop of Canterbury has with the High Priest Samuel.” The Emperor’s *Caesar* was a fevered fantasy: utterly disconnected from the realities of the contemporary world. France, haunted by the ghost of Caesar, was in danger of running entirely mad: “The nation feels like the mad Englishman in Bedlam who thinks he is living in the time of the old Pharaohs and daily bewails the hard labor he must perform in the Ethiopian mines” (Marx 1898: 17).

Marx was far from alone in seeing bathos at the heart of Napoleon’s text. This grand narrative had been announced with such pride: “Imperial Caesar has been treated in an imperial manner”, as *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* (12 March 1865, p. 8) put it. Yet this was no imperial history. Its claims upon the ancient past were greeted, across the world, with little reverence and great scorn. Napoleon’s *Caesar* wore only the “guise of history” (*The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 1 March 1865, p. 2) – and few were convinced. This is perhaps less surprising when the general fragility of nineteenth-century claims on the classical past is considered: whether we examine British officers portraying themselves as ancient heroes in the Crimean War (and being greeted with laughter), William Gladstone’s interpretations of Homer (which were roundly scorned),¹¹ or

11 Cf. Richardson (2013: 174–176).

Napoleon III's Caesar, it is clear that power and prestige offered little support in establishing a hold upon antiquity. Napoleon's *Caesar* was, for some, a demonstration not of the author's claim on trans-historical greatness – but rather of the base, sad uses to which the past may be put. The Emperor's *Caesar* cheapened both the Emperor and Caesar (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 March 1865, p. 4):

“The dust of Alexander serving as a barrel stopper, or imperious Caesar dead and turned to clay, stopping a hole to keep the wind away, has been regarded as a pretty striking illustration of the ‘base uses’ to which human greatness is liable. It is, however, by no means certain that the character and exploits of the ‘great Julius,’ pressed into the service of a modern mushroom dynasty, and employed to justify and act of matchless perfidy and violence, is not an equally glaring example of the ignoble uses to which illustrious men may be put.”

Napoleon's claim on ancient ‘greatness’ only served to reinforce the distance between himself and his ancient model. As his power faded in subsequent years, a consensus grew that he was no Bonaparte – and no Augustus either (Anonymous 1871: 8, 12, 14):

“He at all times and seasons, was trying to fit on
And old pair of boots that his Uncle had made;
In which he intended to wade o'er to Britain,
Or some one's (he cared not whose) garden invade. (...)

He had purchased a second-hand statue of Caesar,
And robed in a sheet, for a ‘Toga’ he'd stand;
And gaze on that classical, crack'd marble Kaiser –
And then in a mirror he'd hold in hand. (...)

That eagle, all constant in peace or in quarrel,
Which in exile or empire had clung to his ship;
Just brought her poor master a morsel of laurel,
Then turn'd up her talons, and ‘died of the pip’.”

After Napoleon III was deposed in 1870, Caesar's ghost soon fled Paris. Even the classicising statue of Bonaparte, which Napoleon III had erected in Place Vendôme, did not long survive: it was pulled down on 16 May 1871, during the Paris Commune, under the supervision of Gustave Courbet. For some time afterwards, the broken statue lay in the centre of Place Vendôme among the rubble, its laurel wreath resting on the ground (see Figure 1). This Caesar's end was not a dignified one.

The History of Julius Caesar was a work of breathtaking ambition: through it, Napoleon III desired to influence debates across the world, and to shape the

legacy of the ancient world to his will. Its objectives, and its receptions, were equally bound up in nineteenth-century discourses on nation and identity: whether in Paris, London or New York, readers were acutely conscious of what was at stake in responding to this *Caesar*. However different the national debates over this text were, there was a growing consensus within them that Napoleon had failed to make Caesar his own. Caesar could not be seized and reinvented without consequences – or without limits. Across the nineteenth-century world, many too confident claims on antiquity, such as this one, ended as ingloriously as fading echoes (cf. Richardson 2013). Or as ingloriously as Napoleon III's parrots, who had the misfortune to cross the Emperor's path one day, a few months after his *Caesar* had met with the world (*The Bradford Observer*, 31 August 1865, p. 3):

“Among the pheasants which were driven up to the muzzle of the Emperor's [Napoleon III] gun at Ferrières, several trained parrots were mingled, which, when shot by Napoleon, fell at Caesar's feet with the dying cry of ‘Vive l'Empereur!’ Does not this seem like a parody on the classical ‘Morituri, te salutant, Caesar?’”

Such was the fate of the Emperor's *Caesar*: an echo heard across the world, at first attended to, then dismissed, fading fast.

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Illustration



Figure 1: Auguste Bruno Braquehais,
Statue de Napoléon 1^{er} après la chute de la Colonne Vendôme (1871)

