

Helen Gardner's *Cleopatra* (1912) and the Americanization of the *Femme Fatale*

Charles L. Gaskill's *Cleopatra* (1912) was as much the work of its star, producer, editor, studio owner and even costume designer Helen Gardner. Since she is also considered one of the first American "Vamps" she and this film can be seen as pivotal in the evolution of the American version of the Reception of Cleopatra VII Philopator in popular culture. Her Queen evokes the recent images from the 1889 novel by H. Ryder Haggard as it adapts the 1890 play by Victorien Sardou for the screen. The addition of the new character Pharon provides a sanitized link to the "One night with Cleopatra" theme represented by Theophile Gauthier (1838) among others. Although it was re-released in 1918, it was overshadowed by the similarly sourced 1917 Theda Bara version with its higher production values and star power, it has attracted more attention since the 2000 restoration with new musical score by Turner Classic Movies. Since it is currently readily available on streaming services and as a DVD, it can be appreciated alongside the more Shakespearean 1913 Enrico Guazzoni version *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* for a more complete image of Cleopatra in the Silent Era. PPT presentation requiring projection, sound optional.

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