The Queen “Quotes” Plutarch in Margaret George’s *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* (1997)

Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt is perhaps the most intriguing and most controversial woman in history. Over two thousand years after her death, she still has the capacity to fire the imaginations of artists, writers, and filmmakers. Indeed, no other ancient historical figure has remained such a constant presence in popular culture. The glamour of her royal power, her wealth, her love affairs, her beauty and her death have intrigued audiences for centuries on stage, in literature, in art and in film. And while Cleopatra’s status as a charismatic cultural icon endures, many of her portrayals still pay little attention to the historical sources that serve as the valuable record for her compelling life story.

This paper will focus on a specific representation of Cleopatra in contemporary popular literature, Margaret George’s novel *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* (1997), and specifically the author’s use of an important historical source: Plutarch’s *Life of Antony* is the most obvious influence on George’s work. The plot of the novel faithfully follows Plutarch’s account of the events in Cleopatra’s life, although George mitigates Plutarch’s sometimes judgmental tone and instead portrays Cleopatra’s actions in a more positive light. At certain points throughout the novel, George reveals her familiarity with Plutarch’s work and even goes so far as to quote certain passages from popular English translations of *The Life of Antony*. In this paper, I will examine the original Greek text as well as the recent translations I believe George referenced in order to assess the influence of Plutarch on the novel. This paper will also explore why George so clearly chose to demonstrate this obvious influence of Plutarch on her work, and why she elected to remain so loyal to the ancient historian to the point of direct quotation. Finally I will examine how her knowledge of this particular ancient historical source adds an impression of credibility and authenticity to her work, and evaluate whether this dimension contributes to the value of her work as a modern reception of Cleopatra.

Working Bibliography

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