

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Cleopatra VII (69 – 30 BC) was the last and the most popular pharaoh (queen) of Egypt in 51 – 30 BC. She was the daughter of Ptolemy Auletes. When her father died, Cleopatra together with her brother was given the power to take control of the Egyptian kingdom by marriage. (“Cleopatra VII”)

Cleopatra was famous for her cleverness and intelligence in her political life as the queen of Egypt. The way she got the power in politics becomes the most controversial historical event; she used her beauty and her charm to attract the powerful men of Rome at that time, “She is irresistible, and the goddess of love is soon in the great general's bed” (“History of Cleopatra”). It is assumed that how she kept her power in Egypt by using physical attraction with the triumvirs of Rome was an implication of her nationalism feeling to make her country to be independent from the Roman Empire. Cleopatra was well-known for her ambitious and strong sense of politics (“Cleopatra’s World “)

In 48 BC her brother’s guardian dropped her from the kingdom of Egypt. But she was not the woman who gave up easily to the condition which women could not lead in politics. She was a woman who was smart in taking every

chance (“Cleopatra VII”). Her cleverness can be seen when she tried to attract Julius Caesar. He was one of the triumvirs of Rome who came to Egypt. Cleopatra did not want to waste the chance. At the age of twenty, she had a plan to take herself to Julius Caesar secretly and, Julius Caesar fell in love with her. Because of his feeling for Cleopatra, Caesar helped her to get back her power in the Egyptian kingdom (The New Junior World Encyclopedia 322). Cleopatra and Caesar had a son that was named Caesarion. They lived together in Rome. In 44 BC, Caesar was killed and Cleopatra went back to Egypt.

There was a civil war between Pompey and Rome and Cleopatra made an alliance on the Rome side. Two years after the death of Caesar, Cleopatra was 28 years old and she met Marc Antony, who was a follower of Caesar in Egypt. They fell in love with each other. Cleopatra as a cunning woman could make Antony under her control. She could make Antony decide to divorce Octavia, his wife; besides, Antony always followed Cleopatra’s advice in making decisions in the political life. (“Cleopatra’s history: Ptolemy, Greek General, ancestor of Cleopatra“ )

Octavia, the wife of Marc Antony, could not accept the relationship between her husband and Cleopatra. Octavia made a battle between Marc Antony and Octavian together with Octavius Caesar. There was a great sea battle near Actium on the west coast of Greece. The battle was won by Octavia and her forces surrounded the city of Alexandria.

After knowing that news, Cleopatra made her own burial and sent the news to Antony that she had killed herself. Antony could not accept that news and he always thought of Cleopatra’s death. It made him kill himself on his own

sword. Cleopatra saw that her lover had died and she killed herself (“The New Junior World Encyclopedia 322). Even though she decided to commit suicide, she still kept her image as an elegant Pharaoh in her death, “She arranges for a small poisonous snake, an asp, to be smuggled into her quarters in a basket of figs. Cleopatra puts on her royal robes, lies on a couch of gold, and applies the asp to her breast. Sacred to Amen-Re, the Egyptian sun god, the snake both protects the royal house and deifies anyone it strikes.” (“History of Cleopatra “)

Cleopatra’s love affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony interested two phenomenal playwrights from different periods to write a play based on this controversial history. They are William Shakespeare (Elizabethan Drama) with his work Antony and Cleopatra and G.B Shaw (Twentieth Century Drama) with a play entitled Caesar and Cleopatra.

The works of William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) are not only adored and received high attention from ordinary people but also Queen Elizabeth I herself. It can be seen from the fact that he is accepted to perform his works at Globe theatre which is Elizabethan Theatre where only particular people can perform their work there. (“Elizabethan Theater”)

In 1607, Shakespeare wrote Antony and Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra is one of the Romance Tragedy plays after Romeo and Juliet and Othello. This play is also known as one of the great love stories in the world (Ingledeew xvi). The figure of Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s play has a connection to the character of his admired woman Queen Elizabeth (Ingledeew xii).

In this play, Shakespeare took the figure of Cleopatra when she was 28 years old, and had a relationship with Marc Antony.

G.B Shaw (1856 – 1950) was not only a playwright but also a literary critic, a socialist spokesman, and a leading figure in the 20th century Theater. Shaw was a freethinker, defender of women's rights, and advocate of equality of income (“George Bernard Shaw”).

An important aim of his many plays was to face his audiences with completely new points of view and ways looking at themselves and the society they lived in. He enjoyed the shock and offence this often produced, particularly when his ideas were expressed with much wit. He is delighted in saying and showing the opposite of what his audiences expected. (Thornley and Roberts 166)

It is reflected from how he creates the character of Cleopatra in Caesar and Cleopatra. In Shaw’s play, Cleopatra is a woman who is different from ordinary women, “Cleopatra represents untamed natural passion” (Thornley and Roberts 166). In 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Caesar and Cleopatra was written in 1901. In this play, Shaw takes the setting of time from 48 BC, when Cleopatra met Julius Caesar for the first time. Even though historically Cleopatra was 20 years old when she met Caesar, in Shaw’s play Cleopatra is portrayed as a girl of 16 years old. Caesar and Cleopatra is a play that has a certain meaning for G.B Shaw “Caesar and Cleopatra is the creation of a thoughtful, practiced artist in his prime, a play that reflects its author’s innovative ideas for drama, his broad

knowledge of the theatre, his acquaintance with current thought” (Frazer xviii)

Even though these two playwrights take the same object for their play, that is Cleopatra, they take different times and events in Cleopatra’s life during her position as queen of Egypt. Besides, the way Shaw portrays Cleopatra is like the opposite of Shakespeare’s Cleopatra. Shakespeare tends to make the audience feel the atmosphere of Cleopatra’s love for Antony whereas Shaw makes the audience are surprised and tricked by Cleopatra’s naivety.

I will apply the historical-biographical approach to analyze the portrayal of Cleopatra in both plays. According to A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature: Third Edition, “The Historical-Biographical approach can be defined as the approach that sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of the author's life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work” (Guerin 22). There are some steps that I would like to take in this major thesis. First, I will analyze the character of Cleopatra in the two plays. Second, I will make a comparison between the character in the plays and the real historical figure of Cleopatra. Finally, I will search the reason of the playwrights for portraying Cleopatra in their plays.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

1. How is Cleopatra portrayed in these two plays?
2. How accurate is the character of Cleopatra in the plays compared to the historical figure?
3. What is the purpose of the playwrights in portraying Cleopatra?

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

1. To figure out how Cleopatra is portrayed in the plays
2. To find out how accurate is the character of Cleopatra in the plays compared to the historical figure
3. To find the reason of the playwrights for portraying the character of Cleopatra in their plays

## **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The method I use is library research. First of all, I read William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and George Bernard Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra. Afterwards, all the data about Cleopatra are collected. Secondly, I analyze the character by referring to literary theories (such as: motivation, personal description, hidden narration, past life, conversation of others, reactions, thought and mannerism) and find out the difference of Cleopatra's portrayal in these two plays. Then I analyze the background of William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw by using historical-biographical approach. I gather some resources and references from some books and Internet that can support the analysis and help me in writing the thesis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

I divide my thesis into four chapters, preceded by the Preface, Table of Contents and Abstract. In the first chapter, I present the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research and Organization of the Thesis. The second and the third chapters contain the analysis of Portrayal of Cleopatra in William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and George Bernard Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra. In chapter four, I draw a conclusion of my analysis. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendix.