

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA:
ENTER THE IMAGEST: A WORK IN PROGRESS

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In the simplest terms, (but for a very complex phenomenon) the "imagest" can be defined as "image" + "gesture", with, (if we take that 'est' as suffix for the superlative) an added bonus. In other words, the image of poetry is to be experienced as at one with the gesture of drama, these embodied by the actor through whom there may arise that rare and superlative moment when image *becomes* gesture, when, with the resultant impression of an integrity and inevitability of both the imaginative process and the produced work of art, words assume life. With that in mind, therefore, the following "work in progress" becomes both presentation and plea: it tries to present the workings of the imagest in a particular play, "Antony and Cleopatra" and it makes a plea for a similar approach to other plays. We already know a good deal about how "the work of art should show in itself the reasons why it is so and not otherwise", but we still do not know enough.

Thanks to Spurgeon and Clemen we know a good deal about Shakespeare's dramatic imagery; thanks to Whiter and Armstrong we know how such imagery is composed within the "logic of the imagination"; thanks to Wilson Knight and L. C. Knights we know drama as metaphor, how a single image not only permeates but integrates the specific play, and, as for enactment itself, we know a little of what goes on on stage, thanks to Sprague, Salgado, Styan or Russell Brown, or to this prompt-book or that play-reviewer. However, the fact remains that even if we have graduated from the merely (and novelettishly) situational and 'psychological' to actual stage conditions and conventions, from Bradley to Bradbrook, we still do not know enough. Here

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the imagest enters, not as mere 'extra', superogatory and superficial and ultimately dispensible, but as a *figure*, an actual and symbolic centre around which so much of the play revolves, so much in the work of a man who was, (let us remind ourselves yet again) poet, dramatist and actor. What we are concerned with here is, essentially, the genesis and evolution of Shakespeare's 'imaging', the creativity of *homo symbolicus* at his best; Shakespeare's 'work in progress', in process.

In the recent (May 1979) Haiyuza production of the play at the National Theatre, Tokyo, Cleopatra, as she raises Antony up in to the monument, (Act IV, scene 15) exclaims "*osakana o tsutteru mitai*" at which some members of the audience (at one performance at least) uttered, as they had at Antony's 'botching' of suicide earlier (Act IV, scene 14), some tentative and disturbed titters. That "*osakana o tsutteru mitai*" might be described, rather ironically, as 'saying the wrong thing for the right reason'. Why? Simply because that Cleopatra was making crudely explicit for a somewhat uneasy moment what Shakespeare has made implicit throughout the greater part of the play. That blurred Billingsgate is so far from the lofty Shakespeare 'country of the mind', and yet so near: it is a mere "morsel cold" (or worse, the dish in a plastic ad.), in an offering of "infinite variety". The Haiyuza "*sakana*" was Shakespeare's "Here's sport indeed!", IV. xv. 32, and, indeed, by this point in the play we should be aware that that "sport" is, and can only be, *fishing*, that Cleopatra has, at last, 'landed' her man. And we come to realise that that "sakana" is really too much and, symbolically, not nearly enough. If one *has* to be explicit about it then we shall find that a better exclamation might have been "*iruka o tsutteru mitai!*"

Our present purpose, however, is to suggest that the "sport" of raising Antony is the imagest towards the end of the play which completes and perfects (consummates) the earlier musing of Cleopatra, when wishing

Give me mine angle, we'll to th'river: there,
My music playing far off, I will betray
Tawny-finned fishes; my bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up,

I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say 'Ah, ha! you're caught'.

gave rise to memory:

'Twas merry when
You wagered on your angling; when your diver
Did hang a salt-fish on his hook, which he
With fervency drew up. II. v. 10-18.¹

Above all and through all, we should recognize that between that earlier desire ("I'll think them every one an Antony") and the later desire fulfilled, ("O come, come, come; / *They heave Antony aloft to Cleopara* / And welcome, welcome!", IV. xv. 37-8) is the fully-filled play; to alter Eliot, "Between the desire / And the spasm / Between the potency / And the existence / Between the essence / And the *ascent* Fall the shadows", the actors.

If that last raising is, so to speak, Revelation, where, then, is Genesis: where, in the evolution of the play is the prototype of that fish; where and how is it spawned? We need not look necessarily to the beginning, to the "*Actus Primus. Scaena Prima*" of the Folio editors, (nor to any similar divisions imposed upon the overall unity by later editors); nor to the first phrase, "Nay, but . . ." for, as it says, therein lies mere difference of opinion and not singularity of symbol, mere dialectic not

¹ All references to "Antony and Cleopatra" are to the edition of Dover Wilson, (Cambridge, 1950, 1968), hereinafter cited as *Dover Wilson*. The erotic image of Antony / fish and Cleopatra / angler might well beget the image of a reversal of roles. Hence, perhaps, the transvestism, (reminding one of Hercules and Omphale) that follows: "Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan", II. v. 21-22. According to Eliade, transvestism is "a coming out of one's self, a transcending of one's own historically controlled situation, no longer human or historical since it precedes the foundation of human society; a paradoxical situation impossible to maintain in profane time, in a historical epoch, but which it is important to reconstitute periodically in order to restore, if only for a brief moment, the initial completeness, the intact source of holiness and power", "The Two and the One", (1965), 113. What Eliade has to say on the symbolism of the serpent, the rope etc. is also of considerable interest.

singular 'imagestic'.¹ No: of all possible Jamesian "germs" of the play the most likely is:

Much is breeding,
Which, like the courser's hair, hath yet but life
And not a serpent's poison. I. ii. 193-195.

Yes, as candidate for honours (the honour of being the *fons et origo summa cum laude* of the whole 'stream of consciousness' which is the play) that "much is breeding..." has impeccable qualifications. Why?

First of all, it gets Antony and the play moving and, appropriately enough, it is in itself a definition of movement; up until this moment we have had an impression of a still-life (for Antony, some would say, a stagnant Egyptian life), but now news comes from Rome and sets things going. (It includes news of the death of Fulvia, and perhaps the consequences are surprising in two ways: that is to say, the death of his wife does not leave Antony free to marry Cleopatra and seal, as it were, his sojourn in Egypt, but instead, as has been said, the play assumes life even from news of a death, a pattern that will be found elsewhere and which may, in fact, comprise an artistic *donnée* and *credo* of the work). "Like the courser's hair": we note that this initial impetus, the springboard for the main plunge, is in simile-form, and as such is what it says it is, open-ended, asking to be completed, perfected: 'like something but *not yet* something else'.² It is not metaphorical or fully symbolic and therefore complete in itself. It is in-between, as indeed is the common source of the image, *superstition*, superstition de-

¹ I have tried to deal with the significance of the opening scene in my 'Nay, but...': "Antony and Cleopatra", Act I, Scene I. Notes for a New New Variorum", *Humanities*, XII, I.C.U., Tokyo, (December 1977), 71ff. Enright, in his "Shakespeare and the Students", points out, quite rightly, that if Philo's initial disparaging of Antony is confirmed by the first entrance of the protagonists then the play is, to all intents and purposes, over before it has really begun.

² Compare, "We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it: / She'll close and be herself", and "There the grown serpent lies: the worm that's fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed, / No teeth for the present", *Macbeth*, III. ii. 13-14 and II. iv. 29-31.

fining (as drama embodies) illusion. As superstition it is, paradoxically, both of uncertain and of universal validity; as superstition it is common, shared by high and low.¹ "A horsehair, soaked in swampwater, attracts to it a large number of animalculae, and so wriggles like a snake",² which, if we remember the "seachange" and so forth, is a pretty good definition of the poetic process itself. Indeed, whether we define that "sea" as 'stream of consciousness' or 'Nile', the phrase, as has been intimated, pin-points the play, play as product and as process, being and becoming. Its 'wrigglings' or reverberations (for that movement is essentially the vibration which is at the heart of so much creativity in literature) are endless: and to estimate and evaluate them one can only paraphrase awkwardly and inadequately: "an image, soaked in what it works in, attracts to it a large number of other images, and so becomes a snake", a "knot intricate of life", the *uroboros* of play.³

Back to the fishing: that "angle" ("give me mine angle") might be described as the point of intersection of A and B, of Antony and Cleopatra. Let us dip into the play for other variations on this basic and overall theme of contact, of (to put it rather crudely but archetypally, if rather kindly) "boy meets girl". There are a very great number from beginning, (Antony as "the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust", I. i. 9-10) to end (Cleopatra "looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil (=net) of grace", V. ii. 346-348). To itemize all such variations would be not only exhaustive but exhausting, and, in any case, space fortunately forbids. Suffice to say, instead, that the two most significant are *sword* and *snake*, which, as Charney has demonstrated,⁴ represent apparently opposing values,

¹ Compare, Yeats, "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", stanzas V and VI: "No fox can foul the lair the badger swept. / (An image out of Spenser and the common tongue)", fitting into "dream of the noble and the beggar-man". Thus, one might say, the "courser's hair" is 'an image out of Shakespeare and the common tongue'.

² *Dover Wilson*, 151.

³ Compare the comparative remoteness of Eliot's well-known and notorious 'shred of platinum' analogy.

⁴ Maurice Charney, "Shakespeare's Roman Plays", especially pp. 6off.

(*only* “apparently” because such values, like all other dualities, are to dissolve): sword=Roman (and masculine) hardness / snake=Egyptian (and feminine) softness. Antony is defined by the sword and, as man as well as Roman, can say (meaningfully to Mardian, a eunuch no less):

O, thy vile lady!
She has robbed me of my sword. IV. xiv. 22-23.¹

And Cleopatra, of course, is “serpent of old Nile”,² I. v. 25, one of the appropriately numerous namings for one who, like that “courser’s hair” seems always undergoing sinuous transformations, always being reborn and therefore needing rebaptism, one always sloughing identities and definitions.

Of these two main variations of what we might call the central symbolic line of the play we find that ‘the snake is mightier than the sword’—a judgement and discrimination of *symbolic* values which, consciously or unconsciously, suggests (for what it is worth) the *moral*. One reason for this ‘superiority’ of snake is that, compared with sword, it proves more vital in the context of death, and it is death (the most fertile of all images as Clemen reminds us) that must be the criterion, the yardstick by which so much has to be measured. Indeed, in this respect, sword is seen to be superseded by snake. Antony tries to kill himself by that hard Roman weapon; he fails. (So also, if we substitute the no-less-hard dagger, with Cleopatra, a fact which is often overlooked. She considers suicide “after the high Roman fashion”, IV. xv. 87, and then draws a dagger, V. ii. 39, but is disarmed, and eventually, the job is, of course, completed, ‘after the higher Egyptian fashion’). With the deaths of the protagonists as with so many other incidents in the play Shakespeare is re-emphasizing what should be obvious already: ‘things Roman’ are to be devalued, ‘things Egyptian’ enhanced. An-

¹ But it is, of course, Dercetus who, in fact, robs Antony of his sword, IV. xiv. III-112. Shakespeare leaves no stone (no image, no gesture) unturned in his exculpation and ‘redeeming’ of Cleopatra.

² The “now I feed myself / With most delicious poison”, I. 5. 26-27, acts as a kind of sign-post from image “serpent of old Nile” to image, the feeding, and being fed upon by, the asp.

tony's attempted suicide by the sword may be 'bungled' but it is, given the larger context and significance, mere Roman means to Egyptian end; Cleopatra's drawing a dagger almost parodies Roman ritual, and for both what is of ultimate and lasting importance is Cleopatra's taking of Antony / asp to her breast, an intimate dissolving of dualities as of identities, by which one can say, (through the familiar death / love / birth connection) 'consummatum est'.¹

Should there be any doubts about the blur of Antony and asp, should the common phallic factor not convince, there is the poetic. In her bemused (be-Mused) utterances before death, (a state of mind which, like dream, we might define as hypnagogic, the most fertile soil for poetic and symbolic growth) we find two parallel passages referring to Antony and then asp, but the factors in common between them show that the parallels meet. The juxtaposition of

Methinks I hear
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act; I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar . . . V. ii. 282-284.

and (to the asp)

poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass,
Unpolicied! V. ii. 304-307.

is essentially superimposition. A rousing gesture and the ability to articulate: what more basic concerns could the poet-dramatist have? Where Shakespeare's concern with his art is engaged, there is significance to be found.

Furthermore let us not forget that it is through the snake and its

¹ To the Elizabethan correspondence of death and love we might add the lesser known overcoming of death by love as found among the *Fedeli D'Amore* of thirteenth century Provence. Jacques de Baisieux interprets the word *amor*: *A senefie en sa partie / Sans, et mor senefie mort; / Or l'assemblons, s'aurons sans mort.* (1) See Eliade, "Rites and Symbols of Initiation", (1965), 127.

variant that Shakespeare defines that art. There are, in fact, two such definitions (“much *is* breeding!”), the first of which comes, significantly, in the galley scene, II. vii:

Lepidus: What manner o’thing is your crocodile?

Antony: It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs: it lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

Lepidus: What colour is it of?

Antony: Of it own colour too.

Lepidus: ‘Tis a strange serpent.

Antony: ‘Tis so, and the tears of it are wet. II. vii. 41-49.

For a definition of organic being, (and the work of art as ‘being’ not ‘meaning’) Coleridge could hardly do better. Like the work of art, the crocodile is what it is, and the fact that crocodile tears are wet might well be taken as the equivalent of real toads in imaginary gardens. And from this it is only a step to the second definition, the principle that since the crocodile / work of art “is what it is” it follows that it will exist and survive according to the laws of its own being and those laws only: “the worm will do his kind”, V. ii. 261. Coming where it does, with meaningful malapropisms, in a sequence of serious comedy, just before the ritual of death, those words of the clown have a portentousness equal to similar dicta of the porter in “Macbeth”. They can be taken as exquisite obviousness and sublime nonsense (the clown would surely be one familiar with “the courser’s hair”); they can be taken, thanks to that worm abreeding, as both *introit* to the play as a whole and as *benedictus* upon Cleopatra’s head.

As has been said, it is significant that the first of those definitions, (“the crocodile . . . shaped . . . like itself”) should come on the galley. Why? The reason leads us further into the effects of such an ‘imagest’. Firstly, because both crocodile and galley, symbol and locale, suggest a blur, this anticipating later and ultimate ‘dissolvings’. The crocodile, as amphibian, erases the distinction of land and water. (To visualise it with tail in water and head on shore may not be merely

fanciful; in fact we may not be far from "His legs bestrid the ocean", V. ii. 82, and so forth). So, too, the galley, neither here nor there, neither land nor water, and as in-between locus reminding one of those peripheral places which pin-point tension and transition as "vehicles of passage" in much modern poetry.¹ Be that as it may, one thing is clear: symbol (crocodile) is far more stable than setting (galley), and within the blur land and water are no more and no less than exempla of that distinction already established: Roman / hard, Egyptian / soft.

A closer look at the galley scene (surely one of the most skilled pieces of theatre as it is one of the most incisive political 'commentaries' ever composed) will bring out what has been said more clearly. If, as we have seen, there is a process of blurring through image and location, so is there also in both speech and gesture. (We grope towards another 'imagest'). And the sequence is similar in both: from 'Roman' to 'Egyptian', Roman means to Egyptian end. Both speech and gesture dissolve: Antony enters with a most Roman (mechanical, mathematical) description of the Egyptian, the topic itself (hard "pyramid", liquid "Nile") defining dissolving. And then both subject and style of speech convey the impression that 'things Egyptian' are taking over: thus, "pyramid" slurs into "pyramises" until Caesar himself confesses that "mine own tongue / Splits (Folio: "Spleet's) what it speaks", II. vii. 122-123. So with gesture, from the initial "Thus do they, sir", II. vii. 17 to the dancing in a swirl of excitement and the throwing up of the cap: from shapely gestures to an almost cinematic dissolve. Not only "Egyptian Bacchanals", II. vii. 103, but, we might say, Egyptian Queen materialize as the spirit of Cleopatra, (anticipated by that talk of the crocodile) seems to stage-manage the orgy (the only genuine Roman spontaneity in the play) from the wings. Deplorable? Hardly; and perhaps a clue to Shakespeare's 'Egyptian' sympathies comes from Caesar who, if not stone, cold sober, is chilly and stonily Roman:

¹ "Vehicles of passage", so defined by Eliade, "The Sacred and the Profane", 181ff. Cf., for example, thresholds, bridges, corridors in, say, T. S. Eliot.

the wild disguise hath almost
Anticked us all, II. vii. 123-124

this, at a moment of great theatre, most puritanically anti-theatre.

As one might hope, and indeed expect, speech and gesture coalesce as imagest. But how? Perhaps through the double dissolve of a simple but effective pun: the word "vessel".

These three world-sharers, these competitors,
Are in thy vessel, II. vii. 70-71,

says Menas, and, sure enough, the galley is not only 'ship of state' (and 'ship of fools') but a symbolic universe, macrocosm. It is, moreover, a vacuum, (not unlike that "gap in nature", II. ii. 218, left by the magnetic attraction of Cleopatra and the barge), this reinforced, as has been hinted, by another "vessel", the drinking cups. Those cups might be the essential microcosm redefining both image and gesture, especially when we note the built-in stagedirections for the round (and 'round' is the word) of drinks: for example, "Fill till the cup be hid", II. vii. 87, from which nothing could be more appropriate than the clinching and climactic:

Cup us, till the world go round,
Cup us, till the world go round! II. vii. 116-117.

Is such a vacuum abhorrent? Morally, perhaps yes, and a moral blindness, anticipating the essential image, has already been established very skilfully by the first servant:

To be called into a huge sphere, and not to be seen to move in't,
are the holes where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the
cheeks. II. vii. 14-16.

But any moral abhorrence of the vacuum is secondary to its effect as aesthetic absorbence. *In vino veritas*, that is the familiar formula: those who do not drink ("I have kept me from the cup", II. vii. 66) are "fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils", unlike those who enter into the spirit of the thing. Within the extremes of Lepidus on the one hand and Menas on the other is the always relevant contrast of charac-

ter, relative capacities, the *veritas* of Caesar and Antony:

Antony: Here's to Caesar!

Caesar: I could well forbear't.

It's monstrous labour, when I wash my brain
And it grows fouler.

Antony: Be a child o' th' time. II. vii. 97-99.

This "child" of Antony might be compared with the "Anticked" of Caesar that we have already seen: they constitute opposite attitudes to aesthetic experience, to play, and, once again, where Shakespeare's interest lies in his own art we need not ask where his sympathies lie.

In many ways the galley scene is the play *in minimo*, and since it seems to offer clues as to how the play as a whole is to be experienced, it must be dwelt upon a little more. During the incomparable *compa*, distinctions of hierarchy and even identity dissolve, anticipating the general direction of the symbolic dimension. Take Lepidus. At first the triumvir is mocked by the underlings: "They have made him drink alms-drink", II. vii. 5, but this drinking for others is redeemed by the typically generous gesture of Antony:

Pompey: This health to Lepidus!

Antony: Bear him ashore. I'll pledge it for him, Pompey.
II. vii. 84-8,

and thereby the questions of who is who and which is right, which wrong become as blurred as "water is in water", IV. xi. II. Furthermore, through the *in vino veritas* and the dissolving of the hierarchy an essential humanity ("human all-to-human", no doubt) is exposed as it will be, (and as we shall see) in later developments like the unarming of Antony. We come to realize, therefore, that "a child o' th' time" will become the "babes" and "boys and girls" of permanent symbolic potential and prefiguration. Finally, we note that all on the galley hangs by a thread or rather *cable*, an imagest in itself, a further strand, along with sword and snake, in the central symbolic line. Here again that seemingly random gossip among the servants with which the scene opens assumes added significance:

2 *Servant*: Why, this it is to have a name in great men's fellowship:
I had as lief have a reed that will do me no service as a partisan I
could not heave. II. vii. 11-13.

"Reed", soft, flexible, Egyptian and "partisan", (spear), hard and Roman anticipate cable, and the point is that to these common men (as to Shakespeare), which is which, all's one.

The cluster of association here is astonishing, and an attempt might be made to disentangle so "intrinsicate" a "knot". As so often, a clue to what is said comes from who is saying it and where, in this case servants on the galley. "Reed" is partly inspired by the earlier

1 *Servant*: Here they'll be, man. Some o' their plants are ill-rooted
already; the least wind i' th' world will blow them down.

II. vii. 1-3.

"Plants" is feet and plants: ironically a land image is introduced on board ship, preparing for eventual blur and dissolve. These stewards, we suppose, are accustomed to serving food (and keeping their balance in order to do so) in high seas: little wonder they can mock their betters who are unsteady at anchor. Such is not natural, indeed a familiar Shakespearean inversion of nature, but one which, as a kind of *derèglement*, will bring about great poetic effects. If "the least wind i' th' world will blow them down" we can envisage the effect of the whirl of the dance. The landlubbers (Romans all) are out of their element, (only Antony will rise above it); and what with the wine this 'world' seems to have sprung a leak. From "plants" then to "reed", and what more appropriate, to reemphasize the contiguity of land and water, than "reed"?

Such servants, moreover, are, technically, (let us recognize their status before the hierarchy dissolves) "supers", (some "that will do / To swell a progress, start a scene or two"), common men with the common sense of common men. That is to say they represent that humanity to which all their elders and betters are to dissolve, and so "reed", with the archetypal and scriptural associations the word and image always and unavoidably has, reconfirms the "human-all-too-human". In this respect the preacher would no doubt point to

“Thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it”, (2 Kings xviii. 21), whereas the teacher must take “a reed shaken with the wind”, (Matt., xi. 3).¹

“Partisan: a long-shafted spear with a broad head”, explains Dover Wilson,² adding “Here with a quibble on ‘partisan’=party adherent”: both, (warfare and politics) so suitably Roman. But that is only part. He glosses “as a partisan I cannot heave” as “as a role I cannot play”,³ which may be the more suggestive: common man as ‘common player’, and, perhaps, with the erotic, ‘the rise of the common player’. But there is more to it than this, which for the time being can only be hinted at. Believe it or not, (although by this time we should hardly be surprised) with reed / partisan / cable we are not far from that “courser’s hair”. The common factor is *penetration*: if we take the reed ‘piercing’ the hand, the link with the partisan / spear is reconfirmed. Further, with the cable holding reed and partisan (as it ‘secures’ everything else), we have evoked the *penetration of water*, and this will prove the creative act *par excellence*. But this is to anticipate: meanwhile let us sum up the significance of the galley scene by saying with Pompey “This is not yet an Alexandrian feast”, and reply with Antony “It ripens towards it”, II. vii. 95–96, a phrasing, not unlike the “Much is breeding”, defining *process*. Process as ‘ripening’ and ‘ripening’ as, not rotting, but inevitable stage in the ultimate dissolving.⁴

¹ Even better might be Pascal, (*Pensées*, vi. 347): “L’homme n’est qu’un roseau, le plus faible de la nature; mais c’est un roseau pensant”.

² *Dover Wilson*, 255.

³ *ibid.*, 176.

⁴ Speaking of the ‘common man’, Shakespeare, of course, has defined him for us in an image relocating the *topos* of the “courser’s hair”: “This common body, / Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream, / Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide, / To rot itself with motion”, I. iv. 44–447. To which we must add Antony’s description of Octavia: “Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can / Her heart inform her tongue—the swan’s down-feather, / That stands upon the swell at full of tide / And neither way inclines”, III. ii. 47–50. So, not unlike her brother, one who in literature was held up as a model of virtue becomes, in drama, lowered because of that fatal weakness in drama, a lack of articulateness, of poetry. Neither the statuesque Octavia nor her no-less-cold brother can take part in the ultimate and transcendental dissolving.

Have we got stuck with some very minor word-play and lost the main thread of the central symbolic line? Dr. Johnson complained that to Shakespeare a pun or quibble was all-too-often a “fatal Cleopatra” distracting him from his main duty as dramatist! But the point is “fatal Cleopatras” like reed / partisan / cable have their place in the whole play, “Antony and Cleopatra” (word-play, through metamorphosis, reflects and reenacts play as a whole): as part to whole, as schoolmaster to Antony (as critic to Shakespeare) “as is the morn-dew on the myrtle-leaf / To his grand sea”, III. vii. 9-10, but “morn--dew” nonetheless. And if we look ahead to that development and direction to which all is headed, (we are talking about dissolution) then all will be clear. The blurring of land and water which is the galley and galley-scene is not the shifting and shifty moral “quicksands”, II. vii. 59, but stable sequence and singularity of symbol. So, speaking of the protagonists, according to John Wain: “His element is earth, hers is water. When the two meet the result is mud”, and had he stopped there he might have joined the moralist ‘mud-slingers’. But he continues: “And mud, primeval slime, suggests fecundity and the warm, indiscriminating huddle in which all life begins”, this an important locating of *poetic* life.

Let us apply this to that ultimate test of symbol we dwelt upon earlier, *death*, and let us apply it anew to character, to that character which has seemed so elusive and enigmatic, Enobarbus. Enobarbus is no *punctum indifferens*, he evolves and the spectator would do well to observe the direction his development takes, observe and follow. For the greater part of the play he appears as he should be, a reflection of Roman attitudes, realistic, sceptical, cynical. “But yet”. What distinguishes him, however, (what earns him “a place i’ the story”, III. xii. 46) is not his sharing of such common Roman attitudes but his unique and most unRoman articulateness, a vitality of language. By this is meant not so much the orator of the set-piece, (the ‘barge’ speech a passage so purple and fondled as to appear somewhat bruised), but as the casual observer of more than casual observations. Thus, for example, behind the cynical

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Enobarbus: Hush! here comes Antony.*Enter Cleopatra**Charmian*: Not he, the queen. I. ii. 78.

what better and more concise statement of the mutual identity (and dissolving) of love could one wish for? Examples could be multiplied.

It is as if such statements of Enobarbus were but the other side of the coin (the harder obverse), but when that coin bearing the Shakespeare impress is melted down into the stream of Shakespeare symbol, then which is hard, which is soft, and who is who? But the development of character (and not a regression into alchemy) is our concern and we can say that as with his language so with the man himself, Enobarbus is to soften. He will go from Antony to Caesar, yes, but he will go on from Roman to Egyptian values, from sense to sensibility, to the end of his life. We notice that he dies, as does Cleopatra, with the name of Antony on his lips, and dies, moreover, after invoking the moon:

O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,
The poisonous damp of night disponge upon me", IV. ix. 11-12,

which is not unlike Cleopatra's "dissolve my life" in liquefaction: ("the discandyng of this pelleted storm", III. xii. 158-167). And from that we might ask why and where does Enobarbus die? The 'why' has been answered by various critics as 'of a broken heart'. This, let us make clear, is not, in spite of "throw my heart / Against the flint and hardness of my fault; / Which, being dried with grief, will break to powder", IV. ix. 14-16, the abrupt, brittle breakage ('riving', 'cleaving') of Roman hardness; it is more the Egyptian melting, a gradual deliquescence. *Where* he dies has been defined earlier:

I will go seek
Some ditch wherein to die; IV. vi. 37-38,

which Cleopatra echoes in

Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud . . . V. ii. 57-58,

that same ditch, indeed, in which the "mud, primeval slime, suggests fecundity and the warm, indiscriminating huddle in which all life begins". According to Enright "Cleopatra's ladies live up to her—or rather die up to her":¹ the same must be said of Antony's men.

Second only to the fishing / raising as imagest is the unarming of Antony, and here we find a further link with those essential attributes of drama we have already touched upon: the 'points of contact' between the protagonists, the merging of person and place, of person and person, and the ultimate dissolution (and absorption) of death / love as the major symbolic complex. But before the unarming there is the arming, in which ritual Cleopatra takes the place of Eros as squire, yet another blurring of character and hierarchy. Her

Is this not buckled well? IV. iv. 11.

embodies a gesture which enacts (and redeems) an image that has been so conspicuous earlier and one to which we must return:

Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after, III. xi. 56-7,

transforming it, in fact, into imagest, a "knot intricate" which even the *dénouement* may not untie.

Before the unarming, also, there is established what we might call an imagest potential, the all-important *tree*, and this we need as prop. "Where yond pine does stand", IV. xii. 1., Antony views his defeat and that location becomes the principle image of his decline:

this pine is barked,
That overtopped them all. IV. xxii. 23-24.

We remember, at this, the Antony triumphant, the man praised even by Caesar:

Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,

¹ Enright, *op. cit.*

The barks of trees thou browsed. I. iv. 65-66.

And *two* references to what we might call the 'stripped tree', far from being accidental, are integral to what follows. As soldier and commander Antony himself is 'stripped' in the unarming, (something of the tree ramifying in the familiarly Shakespearean "the torch is out", IV. xiv. 46) only to reveal the man, the humanity beneath. Nor is this all: after that embodiment of the stripped tree in the unarming it is left for Cleopatra to complete and consummate the sequence: for what does that tree become but "the soldier's pole", IV. xv. 65, that pole hung with associations of death, fertility, love.¹

Sword, snake, cable, tree²—and many more, of which we can here add only one: the ropes. As her death approaches Cleopatra declares "I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony", V. ii. 227-228, and with this the play is to come full circle, uroboros-like. How? In death, as we have seen, Cleopatra will take asp / Antony (coiled asp / curled Antony") to her breast, embodying and reenacting the *rite-de-passage* of death and rebirth. Retracting that circle and cycle, and guided by her words, we recall the first meeting: "The barge she sat

¹ One could hardly do better, at this point, than glance at the illustrations in "The Tree of Life: symbol of the centre" by Roger Cook, 1974.

² To which we might add, in passing, at least *bolt* and *whipping*. Says Cleopatra, "it is great / To do that thing that ends all other deeds; / Which shackles accidents and bolts up change; / Which sleeps and never palates more the dung, / The beggar's nurse and Caesar's", V. ii. 4-8, which through the common factor of 'embalming' seals the love / death association once again. "Bolts" suggests the sealing up of apertures as *membrum virile* as well as bolt and a prefiguring of asp. In this way, it is important to notice, person (Cleopatra's body) and place (the locked monument) are fused, this being confirmed later by, among other things, the conventional "mortal house", V. ii. 51. The whipping (of Thidias, for example, III. iii. 93ff) is to be linked up with Cleopatra's 'haling up and down' of the messenger, II. v. 61ff., both gestures being but variants of the initial fishing, imagest all! (This leads one to the suspicion that throughout the play all messengers are essentially one figure and this one figure is a surrogate for Antony: this complex but common psychological development has been dealt with in my "Here's Sport Indeed! Imaging Shakespeare" in "Festschrift for Professor Shiko Murakami", (ed. Fujii *et. al.*), Osaka, 1974, and, more fully, in my "The Shakespeare Line: a Study of *Antony and Cleopatra*", Trinity College, Dublin, 1977: (dissertation).

in . . . ”, II. ii. 191ff, and what we suspect is that upon that first meeting is superimposed the reunion in death. Take a few examples. First,

on each side her
 Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
 With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
 To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
 And what they undid did. II. ii. 201-205,

a reminder of Antony as “the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy’s lust”, and of Antony as babe, Cupid / asp.

Secondly, the gesture

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
 So many mermaids, tended her i’ th’ eyes,
 And made their bends adornings: II. ii. 206-208.

There have been many ‘bendings’ in the play, all of humiliation with two very notable exceptions, the spoken

my bended hook shall pierce
 Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up,
 I’ll think them every one an Antony,
 And say ‘Ah, ha! you’re caught’. II. v. 12-15.

and the seen, the bending in the effort to raise Antony at the end, “adornings” of that impressive tableau. “At the helm / A seeming mermaid steers”: is it too much to see here an anticipation of Cleopatra, the “captain’s captain”, stage-managing that raising? Perhaps not, given the blur of location (barge / monument) and blur of elements (water / earth) we have already had.

Thirdly, and above all perhaps,

the silken tackle
 Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
 That yarely frame the office. II. ii. 209-211.

Here are the ropes, serpentine and tumescent, by which the eventual raising might be effected. So what? What does it all add up to?

Antony and Cleopatra

21

The answer: Antony as fish. One thing missing in that somewhat overluxuriant and statuesque tableau of Cleopatra on the Cydnus is Antony himself. He is set apart:

The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthroned i' th' market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th' air. II. ii. 213-216.

That "whistling" might be Antony / fish, gasping, fish out of water, Antony out of his ultimate element.

Therefore it is only with and in that raising that the still-life of Cydnus is to be given movement, that the fancy will be anchored in Antony. As has been said, Cleopatra will then land her man; we see, also, now that then, too, she will land her 'dolphin'.

his delights
Were dolphin-like, they showed his back above
The element they lived in . . . V. ii. 88-90.

That image is not merely the conventional hyperbole of eulogy but a rather precise definition of so much that has gone before, an elevating which is both suprahuman and transelemental. Call it a rope-trick, (the play as illusion, as a playing "at fast and loose", IV. xii. 28), and within that trick which end is which, again who is who? In the variations played upon passion (the 'heart-strings') it might be said "that very force entangles itself with strength", but the resulting and inevitable shape (the circle, perfect, endless) is reconfirmed. And who can say whether that dolphin tows or is towed?

Little more has been attempted here than the introducing of a new term which may prove useful and, in the particular case of "Antony and Cleopatra", the suggesting of how far-ranging is the free play of the mind arising from the image, how so much is bred from that "courser's hair". Among the many "animalculae" attracted to it have been large and small considerations, the enactment of death and the casual word-play of 'reed / partisan', "fresh images that yet / Fresh images beget". Reconfirming that impetus and inspiration of that "courser's

hair" all that might be (and, in the little remaining space at our disposal, *can* be) done is tentatively to define the *ab ovo*. This, as has already been suggested, is the *penetration of water*, which one might take to be one of most essential, if not *the* essential, image of creativity itself. In everyday life this is as common as the dipping of pen in ink (though less common now with the prevalence of the execrable ball-point pen!), and is more than well attested in other fields of research, notably art, representational and abstract, myth and legend. It is best seen in Creation itself, cosmogony.

According to Emrys Jones, the end of the play impresses upon us an unmistakable image or icon. "We witness a metamorphosis. Cleopatra changes before our eyes from a living human being into an inanimate work of art".¹ A few moments before we have seen her apply the asp to her breast, *not* arm, as in most sources. Here is a significant change (giving rise to the "babe", and death / birth associations), and it brings to mind several related ideas. History, in the person of Professor Grant, reports "an Egyptian idea that death by snake-bite conferred immortality".² Legend, via Galen, refers to a belief "that Cleopatra bit herself", perhaps like that uroboros, the snake biting its own tail, emblem of the eternal, the perfect.³ Woman suckling a serpent has both negative and positive associations: negatively, she is Voluptas or Luxuria, positively, she is Cleopatra's divine ancestor, the one whose 'habit' she both wears and has: Isis suckling Horus.⁴ Also, in the tradition of alchemy, the hermaphrodite (not irrelevant here if we remember the blurring of character) has a babe at its breast, sometimes a cornucopia, even a dolphin.⁵

And yet we are brought back to that penetration of water, one of the mandalas uncovered by psychoanalysis in the disturbed mind and one of the archetypes exposed by poetry, mind at its best. Behind such crea-

¹ Emrys Jones, "Scenic Form in Shakespeare", (1971), 267.

² Michael Grant, "Cleopatra", (1972), 227.

³ Reported by Grant, *ibid.*, 226.

⁴ J. Leeds Barroll, "Enobarbus's Description of Cleopatra", *Texas Studies in English*, XXXVII (1958), 76.

⁵ See, Francis Klingender, "Animals in Art and Thought", (1971), 247.

tion is, as has been said, Creation, in the shape of the "earth-diver", variations of which are to met with if not "from China to Peru", then from "Gilgamesh" to the "Nihongi".¹ "In the beginning was the Word", or, as Valéry said of the genesis of "Le Cimetière Marin", "gradually a number of floating words began to solidify": but in the beginning, too, was the Gesture. It is there, drab and desolate, in Eliot:

And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Gripped the end of a stick I held him;

it is there, lush and luxuriant, in Keats:

a wild rose tree
Pavillions him in bloom, and he doth see
A bud which snares his fancy: lo! but now
He plucks it, dips its stalk in the water: how
It swells, it buds, it flowers beneath his sight;
And, in the middle, there is softly pight
A golden butterfly;²

it is there in Shakespeare.

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¹ Or California: see Eliade, "From Primitives to Zen", (1967), 88ff.

² Keats, *Endymion*, II, 55ff., (ed. Barnard, 1973), 135.