Imagining Anthony and Cleopatra

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Talk to an ordinary old-fashioned reader of Shakespeare (if you can find one), or to a philosopher with a love of Shakespeare, and you'll probably pretty soon hear something like "'the many-headed multitude", as Shakespeare says in *Coriolanus*': Shakespeare, for such a reader, 'says' things; he even means them. The notion of a Shakespeare who 'says' things, let alone meaning them, has tended to become increasingly problematic; and no sophisticated reader these days is going to be caught out claiming that Enobarbus's famous lines on Cleopatra in II, ii ('The barge she sat in ...'), or Cleopatra's equally famous lines on Anthony in V.ii ('His legs bestrid the ocean ...')[1] come to us, as it were, from the Bard himself: they belong, we never tire of reminding ourselves – even if we *don't* share the fashionable modern scepticism about 'meaning' – to a dramatic context in which the individual 'characters' of Enobarbus and of Cleopatra and their interaction with their fellow participants in each scene are as important as the words which they themselves speak.

I don't exactly want to quarrel with this less extreme version of what one might call the 'modern' approach to Shakespeare – indeed, to a large extent at any rate, I share it myself. But it does seem to me that in our desire to avoid the crudity of such formulations as '*Shakespeare* says of Cleopatra that "Age cannot wither her"' we have tended to lose touch at the same time both with Wilson Knight's still useful notion of a Shakespearean play as a kind of 'extended metaphor' to which all the characters' speeches, in their individual ways, contribute,[2] and with the related notion of a Shakespearean play as embodying and enacting a more or less unified and unique imaginative experience – unique, that is, to each play – which at the same time takes its

1 All quotations from *Anthony and Cleopatra* in this essay follow, except where indicated in the notes, the Challis edition of A.P. Riemer (Sydney University Press, 1985). Quotations from other Shakespearean plays follow the so-called 'Alexander text' in *The Complete Works*, ed. P. Alexander (1951).

2 See G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (Oxford, 1930).

place in the more general development of Shakespeare's *oeuvre* as a whole.

I'd like to revive the idea that *Anthony and Cleopatra* has something that one might call a central thrust or dominant tone and that some speeches matter more than others in any attempt to define it.[3] Like Shakespeare's previous tragedies, though in its own distinctive way, *Anthony and Cleopatra* does eventually move towards a meaningful resolution of its disparate elements. And however much one might feel inclined to talk about the play in terms of its dramatic entertaining of the competing and irreconcilable value systems of Rome and of Egypt – a Rome which, in the opening scene, offers through Philo a severely puritanical and political judgment of Anthony and Cleopatra's 'love' which is far from answering to the play's more comprehensive and complex account of the matter – there's a sense, surely, in which the most significant quarrel between Rome and Egypt in the play is the quarrel that is taking place within Shakespeare's poetic imagination itself.

It's a quarrel between what one might call licence and proportion, the 'looseness' of Egypt and the authority of Rome, the urge towards expansive life and the need for structure and 'resolution'. That quarrel reflects, and is reflected in, the quarrel within Anthony and Cleopatra themselves between the Egyptian and the Roman – between, for instance, the need to 'give up' the self 'to chance and hazard' (as Enobarbus characterizes it in III.vii.56) which is expressed on this occasion in Anthony's

3 Inevitably this essay overlaps with more Shakespeare criticism than it would be possible to acknowledge in a footnote: I have no desire to compete with the Arden editions of Shakespeare to the extent of producing more footnote than text. But I had better say that, having completed an early draft of this article, I re-read some pieces I had last read some twenty years ago and found in them more echoes of my own approach to *Anthony and Cleopatra* (to speak anachronistically) than I had expected. So I must at least acknowledge my debt to G. Wilson Knight's essays in *The Imperial Theme* (3rd edn London, Methuen, 1961), to D.A. Traversi's *Approach to Shakespeare* (London, Paladin Press, 1938), to John F. Danby's 'The Shakespearean Dialectic: An Aspect of "Antony and Cleopatra"', *Scrutiny* XVI (September, 1949), 196-212, and to L.C. Knights's 'On the Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra', *Scrutiny* XVI (Winter, 1949), 318-323.

desire to fight at sea, and the complementary attraction to 'firm security' (III.vii.57), expressed finally in Cleopatra's yielding to the urge 'to do that thing that ends all other deeds,/Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change' (V.ii.5-6). In short, within the world of this play the need to find the self complements the need to lose it and both the fastidious Roman (and at the same time Hamlet-like) reaction against the world of sensation ('Epicurean cooks/Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,/That sleep and feeding may prorogue his Honour/Even till a Lethied dullness' as Pompey says contemptuously of Anthony in II.i.29-32) and, its obverse, the willing Egyptian submission to that world, are at the same time manifestations of the art which is creating them. The unexpected twists and turns of Shakespeare's indecorous imagination are unlikely these days to attract the kind of adverse comment once directed at them by Dr Johnson. But when one hears Scarus (a Roman, no less!) talking of 'yon ribaudred nag of Egypt' who 'like a cow in June/Hoists sail, and flies' (III.x.12-17)[4] one might well ask whether the kind of metaphorical promiscuousness which can imagine a 'nag' becoming a 'cow' which 'hoists sail, and flies' doesn't require something like a dash of restraint, of stern Roman puritanism, to temper its tendency to a kind of ludicrous comic excess, a too bewildering randomness: whether, in short, the celebrated 'infinite variety' of Cleopatra doesn't need the 'marble constancy' of a Caesar to keep it in check.

The aspiration towards such a balance is, perhaps, just one of the reasons why this play is unique among Shakespeare's tragedies after *Romeo and Juliet* in featuring both of its central characters in its title. (Another is connected with the play's impulse – an impulse culminating in the imagining of the confidently sexual Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* – to give equal weight to man and woman, to redress the imbalance which

4 My retention of the Folio's 'ribaudred' here in place of the Challis's 'ribald red' is partly a matter of habit – I've grown fond of the word myself – and partly a matter of my finding in this apparent coinage a manifestation of the kind of imaginative freedom that Scarus's speech as a whole seems to me to express. Apart from which the emendation offends my ear and I've always taken 'ribaudred' as meaning 'made the subject of ribaldry'.

results from the absence from *King Lear*, for instance, of a Mrs Lear.) Shakespeare's last great tragedy, *Coriolanus* (I'm ignoring *Timon of Athens)*, in being his final and his finest tribute to Rome, exists partly, perhaps, to alert us to the idea that there is rather more of Egypt than of Rome in its predecessor. But insofar as one finds oneself arguing that *Anthony and Cleopatra* does attain something like an equilibrium between Rome and Egypt, then that balance reflects not merely the play's capacity to give equal weight to the human and the political, the values of love and of power in the world 'out there', but, rather, its capacity to discover within both of these conflicting worlds qualities which answer to something of its own, inner, imaginative prompting. Just as Lily Briscoe (along with Virginia Woolf) aspires, in *To the Lighthouse,* towards the creation of a work of art which 'should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing' but at the same time 'beneath ... clamped together with bolts of iron' – 'a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses'[5] – so *Anthony and Cleopatra* seems to aspire to a similar union of momentaneousness with that desire 'to make of the moment something permanent', to command life to 'stand still here' which Woolf in her novel associates both with Mrs Ramsay and the woman who makes art out of her life. As Lily puts it, observing Mrs Ramsay: 'In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing ... was struck into stability'.[6]

So it is, I take it, not merely 'history', the history which ends (temporarily, at any rate) in Caesar's political supremacy, which requires that it should be Caesar who brings the play to an end in pronouncing its last words; for those words speak as much of the shaping imagination which 'makes' this particular Caesar and finds in him an image of its own impulse towards resolution as of the Caesar who here, it would seem, claims to have 'made' the 'high events' in which he, along with Anthony and Cleopatra, has been embroiled:

5 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Penguin, 1964), p.94.

6 *Ibid.* p.183.

> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous: high events as these
> Strike those that make them, and their story is
> No less in pity than his glory which
> Brought them to be lamented. (V.ii.412-16)

I wrote 'it would seem' a moment ago because these lines contain a significant ambiguity: is it Anthony and Cleopatra who 'make' the 'high events' which 'strike' them, or is it Caesar who makes and is struck? 'Their story' would seem to suggest that it is the lovers who are being spoken of – though 'their story' might be the story of the 'high events' rather than the story of Anthony and Cleopatra – yet the rather elliptical syntax and the seeming contrast between 'these' and 'those' which on consideration dissolves seem deliberately to blur the line between Caesar and his victims. Ultimately, we find ourselves thinking, it is the dramatist himself who 'brings' Anthony and Cleopatra to be 'lamented' in the particular way in which they are lamented in this play. And it is in the 'making', the imagining, of these 'high events' – the events that belong both to history and to tragedy – that they come to 'strike' their creator and, in 'striking' him, to strike the audience also. The traditional Aristotelian 'pity' for the 'stricken' tragic figures of Anthony and Cleopatra is dependent on the power of their creator to strike that note of pity – to bring them *to be* lamented in this particular way. Caesar's eventual triumph, in other words, mirrors the dramatist's power of life and death over his created world – his power to shape it to his own end. And yet it is a power which is at the same time constrained by the very nature of the traditional 'high events' with which it deals, events which 'make' the play as much as being made by it: the freedom to create is a freedom made possible by the limits within which it is exercised.

Here, as elsewhere in the play, then, questions are being raised about the nature of art itself – about the relation between the creative artist and his 'raw material' and the nature of the audience's own power to 'make' the 'high events' of tragedy. The imagining of Caesar plays a part in this thinking no less than the imagining of the Cleopatra who affirms that 't'imagine/An Anthony were Nature's piece 'gainst Fancy,/Condemning shadows quite' (V.ii.116-8). And the 'glory' of the Caesar who

survives, as opposed to the Anthony and Cleopatra who perish, is intimately bound up with the play's comparable capacity to imagine a kind of poetical triumph over death ('As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle' – V.ii.353) which is ultimately located not so much in Caesar as in the lovers themselves. It is *this* triumph, the triumph of 'no grave *upon the earth*', which Caesar, in his affectionately familiar use of the word 'clip', with its equable sense of death as constituting simply the lovers' final embrace (one thinks of the great song from *Cymbeline*: 'Quiet consummation have/And renowned be thy grave'), ultimately comes to celebrate: 'No grave upon the earth shall clip in it/A pair so famous'.

Anthony and Cleopatra resounds with echoes of the tragedies which precede it as well as foreshadowings of the late plays which follow it; and the effect of such echoes is that it reads not so much as yet another *re-enactment* of the tragic process so painfully embodied in *Hamlet*, for instance – whereby, to borrow Nietzsche's account of Greek tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the tragic hero eventually 'learns both to sin and to suffer'[7] – as a more calmly reflective meditation on the tragic process itself – a meditation written, as it were, from a point *beyond* tragedy. The note is caught in the words of Caesar's instruction to Thidias in III.xiii.40-42 which reverberate beyond their immediate occasion and their more obvious meaning:

> Observe how Anthony becomes his flaw,
> And what thou think'st his very action speaks
> In every power that moves.

The word 'becomes' (a favourite in this play) is used, I take it, here as elsewhere, in a double sense: the play itself is 'observing' and asking us to 'observe' Anthony 'becoming' his flaw (both adapting to it and being transformed into it) as he begins to adopt his role as tragic hero. We watch him becoming his 'very', fallen, tragic self as the play itself begins to exercise its 'power' to 'move' him inevitably towards his death. At the same time Caesar's lines alert us to the element of interpretation involved in

7 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated Francis Golffing (Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p.64.

imagining this fallen self as indeed Anthony's essential, his 'very' self: 'what thou *think'st* his very action speaks/In every power that moves'. To interpret Anthony's 'very action' in terms of tragedy is not the only way to 'speak' of it..

Indeed Anthony himself 'speaks' of it quite otherwise on his deathbed:

> The miserable change now, at my end,
> Lament nor sorrow at: but please your thoughts
> In feeding them with those my former fortunes
> Wherein I lived, the greatest prince o' th' world,
> The noblest, and do now not basely die,
> Not cowardly put off my helmet to
> My countryman. A Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my Spirit is going,
> I can no more. (IV.xv.60-68)

Death, in *Hamlet* or in *Lear*, is indeed a 'miserable change', the culmination of that 'change of fortune' which Aristotle identifies as characteristic of Greek tragedy.[8] 'Remember me', Hamlet's father's ghost mournfully commands towards the beginning of the play (I.i.95); and Hamlet, on *his* deathbed, is even more desperately intent on Horatio's 'telling' to the world the 'story' he has been bequeathed by the ghost but feels he has been unable to tell himself. The Anthony who tells us, rather, to 'please' our 'thoughts' 'in feeding them with those my former fortunes' (a different kind of 'feeding' from that against which Pompey rails in II.i.29-32) is at the same time the Shakespeare who contrives in this play to please both his thoughts and ours by feeding them both on Anthony's 'former fortunes' and on 'the miserable change' at his end – feeding and, in feeding, transforming a 'miserable change' into something (to adapt T.S. Eliot in 'The Dry Salvages') that 'fructifies in the lives of others'. The other world in which Anthony imagines himself joining Cleopatra after death –

> Where souls do couch on flowers,we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:

8 'On the Art of Poetry' in *Classical Literary Criticism*, translated and introduced by T.S. Dorsch (Penguin, 1965), p.48.

> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours (IV.xiv.58-61)

– is at the same time that world in which spiritual and physical are united – a world in which 'souls ... couch' and 'ghosts gaze' and the lovers, 'hand in hand', conduct themselves with a 'sprightly port': the world, in short, which Shakespeare's imagination bestows upon them in life as in death, thereby creating in story a 'haunt' which does indeed enable his Anthony and his Cleopatra to live on in the memory more vividly even than 'Dido and her Aeneas', to 'tell their story'.

It should be apparent by now that I don't think there's much point in trying to determine just how 'realistic' a portrait this play provides of Anthony or Cleopatra. The exaggerations of Egypt's extravagance – the stories of eating eight wild boars at a sitting and so on – are not meant to be tested against some supposedly 'real' Egypt beyond the world of the play. Rather, they testify to the way Egypt answers to a human longing for the possibility of this kind of extravagance, Pompey in II.vi. for instance, exhibiting a characteristically prurient fascination with the story of Apollodorus having carried Cleopatra to Caesar in a mattress. It's the same need as is so energetically and amusingly celebrated – celebrated, in fact, in very much the same spirit as it is in *Anthony and Cleopatra* – in Leporello's famous catalogue aria in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. 'I will *tell* you' Enobarbus begins his famous set-piece on Cleopatra, waiting for a hush to descend on his expectant audience. The self-conscious advertising of the power to 'tell' alerts us to the idea that not only is Enobarbus deliberately creating for his listeners a Cleopatra answering to their own imaginative *need* for an Egypt of such licence but that Shakespeare, too, is here drawing attention to his own capacity to 'tell' of a Cleopatra as much poetic as historical:

> she did lie
> In her pavilion, cloth of gold, of tissue,
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork Nature. (II.ii.229-32)

There's no need to play the post-modernist to the extent of teasing out the ambiguities of that word 'lie': all fashionable insistences on the artifice of fiction aside, Enobarbus's lines

make it plain enough that the play *is* centrally concerned with the nature and power of 'fancy', of Art itself. Shakespeare's 'picture' of Enobarbus's 'picture' of a Cleopatra who 'o'er-pictures' a picture which 'outworks' Nature: wheels within wheels indeed! And the significance of the use of the historic present ('At the helm a seeming mermaid *steers*') is not only that it seems to give us an Enobarbus in the process of being beguiled by his own recreated image of Cleopatra to the extent that what begins as something like 'description' of a past occasion – what Coleridge calls a 'maxim', a 'retrospective ... descanting on matters of past experience' – soon becomes more like freshly exploratory creation of an immediately *present* experience – what Coleridge calls 'an idea' which 'carries knowledge within itself, and is prospective'[9]: the historic present also calls attention to a similarly creative element in the art of this speech itself and of the play as a whole – founded as it is in Plutarch's 'historical' Cleopatra who is nevertheless here caught in the act of being transformed into Shakespeare's. So that, increasingly, it is not so much a matter of whether there is or might be such a woman as this of whom Enobarbus here dreams but of the creative power of Shakespeare's art to fashion just such a woman out of what 'history' and Plutarch provide for him, to imagine a way of *being* which satisfies both Enobarbus's listeners and Shakespeare's own search for a mode of art which is at the same time a mode of life.

To think of Perdita from *The Winter's Tale* and Cleopatra from *Anthony and Cleopatra* as having much in common with one another might seem rather odd; but to think of *Florizel's* Perdita (who is also Shakespeare's) and *Enobarbus's* Cleopatra (who is likewise Shakespeare's) as related to one another is a good deal less so. 'When you do dance', says Florizel to Perdita,

> I wish you
> A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that; move still, still so,
> And own no other function. Each your doing,
> So singular in each particular,

9 *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London, Athlone Press, 1989), p.89.

> Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
> That all your acts are queens.[10] (IV.iv.140-6)

And of Cleopatra Enobarbus observes:

> On each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-colour'd fans whose wind did seem
> To glove the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did. (II.ii.232-6)

'Move still, still so'; 'And what they undid did'. It is no accident, I take it, that Florizel's words belong to a scene which has very much at its centre a complex pondering of the relation between 'art' and 'great creating nature' while Enobarbus's follow his portrayal of Cleopatra as 'o'er-picturing that Venus where we see/The fancy outwork Nature'. Both speeches celebrate a kind of life which is also a kind of death and, in their different but related ways, they both move rhythmically and syntactically towards the definition of a kind of perpetual stasis, a kind of arrest which is at the same time a kind of continual movement ('move still'), a 'doing' which is also an 'undoing', an affirmation which is at the same time a negation:

> And having lost her breath, she spoke and panted,
> That she did make defect perfection,
> And breathless pour breath forth. (II.ii.265-7)

Indeed, it's a state which is associated as much with dying as with living in this play. As Anthony puts it, during his preparations for death:

> Now all labour
> Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
> Itself with strength. (IV.xiv.54-6)

10 L.C. Knights makes this comparison (to the detriment of *Anthony and Cleopatra*) in his *Scrutiny* piece (*loc.cit.* p.323). Florizel's words and rhythms are similarly anticipated in Anthony's lovely image of Octavia in III.ii.52-5:

> Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
> Her heart inform her tongue: the swansdown feather
> That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
> And neither way inclines.

And the celebration of such a paradoxically purposeless 'labour' in the dead Cleopatra is bestowed, significantly, upon Caesar:

> she looks like sleep,
> As she would catch another Anthony
> In her strong toil of grace. (V.ii.397-9)

A 'sleep' in which it is nevertheless possible to 'catch' another Anthony, a 'grace' which is at the same time a 'strong toil'. Again one thinks of *The Winter's Tale* and Perdita's description (in IV.v.118-20) of the 'daffodils/That come before the swallow dares, and take/The winds of March with beauty' – the word 'take' (which has its connections with Caesar's 'catch') focusing that sense of a physical activity (here, as in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, confidently but unobtrusively sexual – a coming 'before the swallow dares', a taking 'with beauty') which is at once active and passive, a submission to and an active embrace of 'the winds' of change, at once vulnerable yet strong. And while not wanting to turn *Anthony and Cleopatra* into a kind of source-book for the whole of English poetry I'd nevertheless note its enduring influence by pointing to the way in which both T.S. Eliot (who shows himself in *The Waste Land*, of course, to be haunted by Ariel's song in *The Tempest* celebrating the transformation of death into art: 'Of his bones are coral made') and W.B. Yeats are, in their different but related reactions against a poetry of abstract moral ideas, preoccupied with defining something like a similar mode of art and of life. In 'The Symbolism of Poetry', for instance,Yeats repudiates the 'vehemence' of nineteenth-century moralism together with 'those energetic rhythms, as of a man running, which are the invention of the will with its eyes always on something to be done or undone' and advocates instead 'those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination, that neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time, and only wishes to gaze upon some reality, some beauty'.[11] And Eliot, in his attempts in *Four Quartets* to apprehend 'the still point of the turning world', writes in 'Burnt Norton':

11 W.B.Yeats,'The Symbolism of Poetry' in *Essays and Introductions* (London, Macmillan, 1961), p.163.

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.

'And what they undid, did'; 'move still, still so': it's hard not to register the echo of such a way of being in Eliot's listening for and attempting to capture in his art 'the stillness/Between two waves of the sea'. And the paradox involved in Enobarbus's delight in a barge which 'burnt on the water' is not far removed from the paradox of the 'flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,/Nor storm disturbs', the 'agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve' of Yeats's Byzantium: a kind of sensual force – more tortured in Yeats than in Shakespeare, of course – which is at once magically self-generating and powerless to harm.[12]

Of course, Enobarbus's speech by no means ignores what must be suppressed in order to render this triumph of art: wryly, and with a kind of scrupulous scepticism Enobarbus acknowledges in passing the unbending authority of natural laws ('but for vacancy') while nevertheless imagining a Cleopatra who in some sense seems to transcend them. And Agrippa's 'Royal wench:/She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed,/He plough'd her, and she cropt' (II.ii.260-2) likewise keeps us in touch with a political and sexual reality which resists the transforming power of 'telling'. But it is, all the same, in the potent imagining of a kind of endlessly creative and unpredictable sensual renewal which is at the same time a kind of equably poised and divinely sanctioned decorum (a 'grace' with 'toil') that this homage to Cleopatra comes to rest:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety; other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies. For vilest[13] things

12 Cf., too, Enobarbus's 'And having lost her breath, she spoke and panted,/That she did make defect perfection,/And breathless pour forth breath' (II.ii.265-7), quoted earlier in this essay, with Yeats's 'A mouth that has no moisture and no breath/Breathless mouths may summon' in 'Byzantium'.

13 Challis 'vildest': this time my ear prefers the editorial 'vilest'.

> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish. (II.ii.270-5)

'This is the monstruosity in love, lady', says Troilus to Cressid in *Troilus and Cressida*, 'that the will is infinite, and the execution confin'd; that the desire is boundless, and the act a slave to limit' (III.ii.78-80). Shakespeare's 'other women' do indeed 'cloy/The appetites they feed' whereas Cleopatra 'makes hungry/Where most she satisfies'. To suggest that such a woman could not have been imagined by the Shakespeare of *Troilus and Cressida* is to make the point that if Enobarbus's Cleopatra is a product and a manifestation of 'fancy', of 'art', the fancy and the art are at the same time the expression of a 'nature' – a 'nature' continuous with but not the same as the 'nature' of *Troilus and Cressida* – which makes such imagining possible. The desire for a kind of static perfection, embodied in an ideal Helen or an ideal Cressid, a desire which, potently expressed in *Troilus and Cressida*, is at the same time continually undermined by the inane chatter of the play's *actual* Helen and continually disappointed by the gap between 'th' imaginary relish' which 'enchants' the 'sense' of Troilus and the tasting 'indeed' of 'love's thrice-repured nectar' (III.ii.18-21): – this desire is transformed in Enobarbus's speech into the image of a Cleopatra who is at one and the same time *beyond* time and change ('Age cannot wither her') and implicated in it – a part of its 'infinite variety': like Yeats's bird in 'Sailing to Byzantium','out of nature' and 'set upon a golden bough' yet singing 'of what is past, or passing, or to come'.

It's a paradox which is wonderfully focused in the ambiguity of 'become', a word which, as I've already suggested, tends to recur in this play. In I.v.66-8, for instance, Cleopatra says of Anthony:

> Be'st thou sad, or merry,
> The violence of either thee becomes,
> So does it no man's else.

And in I.i.52-5 Anthony similarly addresses Cleopatra:

> Fie, wrangling Queen,
> Whom everything becomes: to chide, to laugh,

> To weep; whose every passion fully strives
> To make itself in thee fair and admir'd!

The accusative 'whom' in this last example seems to forbid our reading Cleopatra as the subject of the verb 'becomes' as much as the object. And yet it is just this sense of 'become' – of 'passions' in the process of striving to become themselves – that Anthony's words go on to elicit. Nor, I take it, is it any accident that the idea of 'becoming' should be linked in the first example here with Cleopatra's sense of the uniqueness of the man she loves ('So does it no man else's') and in the second with a kind of creative effort ('fully strives/To *make* itself in thee') in which Cleopatra is the *locus* of fluctuating passions which are struggling to find their most permanently satisfying expression *in* her: the connection between the imaginings of love and of art is central to the way in which this play finds in the Cleopatra whom 'age shall not wither' an image of its own capacity at once to accept, embody in art and by embodying transcend, a life and a death of infinite variety. But to get back to the ambiguity of 'become' in the lines from Enobarbus's speech.

Enobarbus's image of Cleopatra both catches 'vilest things' in the process of 'becoming themselves' and at the same time imagines the 'selves' into which these 'vilest things' are thus transformed as behaving with a kind of 'becoming' decorum, a propriety which elevates them to a public and a spiritual realm from which they are ordinarily excluded. Cleopatra's 'riggishness' and the blessing of 'the holy priests' become part of the same imagined ideal naturalness, a naturalness both spiritual and sensual, private and public. We are in the presence of a kind of art and a kind of life rooted in the temporal and the mundanely sexual and yet at the same time miraculously transcending it.

This unpuritanical welcoming of 'becoming' and of 'riggishness' strikes a note which is associated with Enobarbus on other occasions in the play also, as in the bracing good humour of his aphoristic acceptance of Fulvia's death in I.iii.170-9 as simply part of an inevitable process (anticipating the shepherd's famous 'thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born' in III.iii.109 of *The Winter's Tale*): 'This grief

is crown'd with consolation, your old smock brings forth a new petticoat, and indeed the tears live in an onion that should water this sorrow'. It's a long way from Troilus's tortured fear of time and of sexual experience or from the 'formless ruin and oblivion' on which *Troilus and Cressida* so obsessively meditates.[14] And Enobarbus's cheerful stoicism holds sentimentality in check a good deal more equably than the misanthropy of his counterpart Thersites in the earlier play.

It is part of the meaning of Enobarbus's homage to Cleopatra that the woman whom we see in it should seem in many ways remote from the aging voluptuary whose at times rather desperate search for novelty expresses a weary dissatisfaction with a world of never-ending pleasures rather than a calm delight in its 'infinite variety': like Mrs Witt in D.H. Lawrence's *St Mawr*, Cleopatra, in suggestively inviting the messenger three scenes later, for instance, to '*ram* ... thy fruitful tidings in mine ears/That long time have bin barren' (II.v.27-8), seems rather to need to be *hurt* by life in order to persuade herself of its reality. And though *Anthony and Cleopatra* as a whole is much more relaxed and less desperately insistent in its expression of those feelings about the impermanence of things which so torture a Hamlet ('But two months dead!') there are, in the later play, enough wistfully autumnal reflections on transience, fickleness and instability – both in the world of love and the world of politics – to suggest that the woman whom Enobarbus's speech discovers answers a kind of yearning which belongs alike to Cleopatra and to the play as a whole. Both Caesar's resolute scorn for the plebeian world of flux –

> 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.47-50)

– and Cleopatra's own longing to be rescued from what Eliot in 'Little Gidding' calls 'the cold friction of expiring sense/Without

14 The phrase is taken from Agamemnon's speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, IV.v.166-7: 'What's past and what's to come is strew'd with husks/And formless ruin of oblivion.'

enchantment', from a continuously opportunistic surrender to the vagaries of time, chance and political fortunes – a longing at its most genuine in her moving collapse in I.iii.107-8 into 'Oh my oblivion is a very Anthony, And I am all forgotten!' – testify to the weight of feeling that lies behind Enobarbus's apprehension of the '*un*common body' of a Cleopatra at once (as she herself regretfully notes in I.v.33) 'wrinkled deep in time' and yet somehow beyond it.

That Enobarbus's Cleopatra should make us think of Cleopatra's Anthony in V.ii points to the way in which Shakespeare's play at one and the same time concedes the 'unreality', the 'unnaturalness' of such a Cleopatra and such an Anthony – 'Think you there was, or might be such a man/As this I dreamt of?' Cleopatra asks in V.ii.110 and Dolabella replies,'Gentle madam, no.' – and insists nevertheless on the complementary reality of a kind of *ideal* naturalness imagined as a force which, while in some sense opposing 'Nature', nevertheless belongs to it:

> But if there be, or ever were one such,
> It's past the size of dreaming. Nature wants stuff
> To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t'imagine
> An Anthony were Nature's piece 'gainst Fancy,
> Condemning shadows quite. (V.ii.114-8)

The 'shadows' who are thus 'condemned' by Cleopatra's loving vision of Anthony are the shadows of the 'Fancy' which produced the 'other women' (and the other men) of Shakespeare's earlier tragedies as well as the 'ghosts' which 'gaze', in wonder and in envy, at the 'sprightly port' of these extraordinary lovers. At the same time Cleopatra's defence of her 'imagined' Anthony constitutes a defence of the play's own continuous and vivid re-imagining of the 'shadows', the long-dead figures of Plutarch's history. (And the implied contrast between 'hearing' and 'knowing' on the one hand and 'dreaming' on the other – 'No matter, sir, what I have *heard* or *known*' (V.ii.86) – anticipates the later juxtaposition of Act V scene ii of *The Winter's Tale*, which '*tells*' of the recovery of Perdita and the reunion between Leontes and Polixenes, with the last scene, which *creates* the re-awakening of Hermione.)The

ambiguity of 'wants' (for though it no doubt means 'lacks', it could also mean 'needs' or 'desires') is central to the purport of the speech: 'Nature' *requires* the 'stuff' of 'Fancy' as much as it lacks it and imagining an Anthony – as both Cleopatra and Shakespeare necessarily do – is ultimately an act not of some disembodied and transcendent 'Fancy' but of that larger 'Nature' to which the human capacity to imagine another human being and by imagining to love them necessarily belongs. As Polixenes tells Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* (without, it transpires, fully realizing the implications of his remark for his own life):

> Yet nature is made better by no mean
> But nature makes that mean; so over that art,
> Which you say adds to nature, is an art
> That nature makes ...
> The art itself is nature. (IV.iv.89-97)

It is this 'Nature' which *Anthony and Cleopatra* seems at once to celebrate and to be beginning to farewell:

> ANTHONY Eros, thou yet behold'st me?
> EROS Aye, noble lord.
> ANTHONY Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
> A vapour sometime, like a bear, or lion,
> A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon't that nod unto the world,
> And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
> They are black Vesper's pageants.
> EROS Aye, my lord.
> ANTHONY That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water.
> EROS It does, my lord.
> ANTHONY My good knave Eros, now thy Captain is
> Even such a body. Here I am Anthony,
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape (my knave).
> I made these wars for Egypt, and the Queen,
> Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine –
> Which, whilst it was mine, had annext unto't

> A million moe (now lost) – she, Eros, has
> Packt cards with Caesar's, and false play'd my
> glory
> Unto an enemy's triumph.
> Nay, weep not, gentle Eros, there is left us
> Ourselves to end ourselves. (IV.xiv.1-25)

'Rack', 'mock our eyes with air' and 'pageants', together with the wonderingly speculative tone and the note both of remote, wistful, elegiac regret and of a kind of resigned acquiescence, suggest, as several critics have noted, that Shakespeare is here beginning that contemplation of the nature of his art – and of the life inseparable from it – which culminates in Prospero's great speech in *The Tempest*:

> These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148-158)

Both Anthony's and Prospero's speeches – Prospero's more completely than Anthony's – seem to acquiesce in the process of dissolution, in the 'insubstantiality' of life's 'pageant' and the 'baseless fabric' of the 'vision' which, in art, nevertheless builds its dreams (as Cleopatra builds her 'dream' of Anthony) out of the 'stuff' of death and of life. From one point of view this is Shakespeare's way, I take it, of saying the kind of thing that T.S. Eliot is saying in 'East Coker': 'The poetry does not matter'. And, like Eliot, he 'says' it, paradoxically, in a poetry which *does* matter. Both Anthony's and Prospero's speeches, too, potently enact the very fluctuating process of 'vision' even as they give us what that vision 'sees'.

Anthony's lines affirm the connection between the fluidity, the insubstantiality of that 'self' whose 'visible shape' he is, in the

light of Cleopatra's supposed betrayal, finding it so hard to 'hold' and the corresponding fluidity both of the external world and, at the same time, of the imagination itself, by which alone the self can be apprehended as a coherent entity ('Eros, thou yet behold'st me?'). It's an imagination which is simultaneously at the mercy of the temporal accidents of the natural world outside it (both what we 'half-create/ And half perceive' in Wordsworth's famous phrase in 'Tintern Abbey') and yet shaping that world from within – fashioning it anew just as Anthony is here fashioning his own death, with Shakespeare beyond him fashioning 'another Anthony' out of his historical material. Syntax and movement effectively blur the supposed distinction between 'Nature' and 'Fancy': the weight falls first on the 'seeing' ('Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish'), then on what is so insubstantially 'out there' ('A vapour sometime'), an external reality corresponding to an internal reality which quickly passes beyond simile ('*like* a bear, or lion') to metaphor, yielding to the seemingly more palpable (and yet imagined) reality of the 'tower'd citadel', 'pendent rock' and 'forked mountain' which nevertheless turn out to be mocking 'our eyes with air'. The syntactical ambiguities multiply, blurring 'distinctions' and focusing this sense of a more general process at once active and passive: does the horse 'dislimn' the rack and make it 'indistinct' or does the rack 'dislimn' the horse? And 'even with a thought' *could* mean, as the Challis editor suggests, 'in an instant' – expressing the sense of an imagination at the mercy of the vagaries of time and change – but it could also mean 'by the *power* of thought': the disappearing horse and the dissolving cloud (a cloud which has already been first seen as 'dragonish' – as resembling the shape of a mythical, imaginary creature – and then transformed into a 'rack', the *image* of a cloud merely) vanish both of themselves, as it were, and as a result of the imagining eye being no longer able to see them.

What Hamlet apprehends as a painful self-imprisonment *Anthony and Cleopatra* moves towards accepting as the very condition of our relations with the world outside the self: 'there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so'. The capacity to 'see' in cloud and vapour 'trees ... that nod unto the world,/And mock our eyes with air' is linked both with the

dissolving Anthony's capacity to interpret the significance of such 'signs' as 'black Vesper's pageants', the harbingers of death – to see his own imminent end as part of a larger natural process ('As water is in water') – and with the corresponding dependence of Anthony's 'visible shape' – 'even such a body' – both on his own self-conception and on the reflection of that self-conception in the eyes both of Eros ('thou yet behold'st me?') and of the woman he loves.The process of finding correspondences, of eliding 'distinctions', which is at the heart of metaphor – a process at once bound by the reality of the world 'outside' and freely transforming it – is here linked with the dependence of Anthony's own 'visible shape' on a Cleopatra at once outside him and yet the creation of his idealizing imagination: the workings of art and of love are identified in their capacity to bestow value and meaning on the world. And the persistent presence of the suggestively named Eros, invoked with that note of warm friendliness, of manly good humour so characteristic of the more domestic and intimate tone of this play in general – 'Eros, thou yet behold'st me', 'Thou hast seen these signs', 'My good knave Eros', 'my knave', 'she, Eros', 'Nay, weep not, gentle Eros' – confirms this sense of Anthony's willing vulnerability to the world beyond him.[15]

The Cleopatra whom Anthony's speech invokes is at once illusory and yet real and her necessarily ambiguous mode of being, along with the relationship between that mode of being and the capacity of the poet himself to *create* it, is tellingly suggested when Anthony fully recovers his 'self' upon Shakespeare's restoring to him, through the beautiful lines he bestows upon Mardian, the Cleopatra he 'thought' he had lost:

> Death of one person can be paid but once,
> And that she has discharg'd. What thou wouldst do
> Is done unto thy hand: the last she spake
> Was 'Anthony, most noble Anthony'.
> Then in the midst a tearing groan did break
> The name of Anthony; it was divided

15 Significantly, *Anthony and Cleopatra* as a whole contains little in the way of soliloquy: it is, as has often been noted, much more directly concerned with human relationships than Shakespeare's earlier tragedies.

> Between her heart and lips; she rend'red life
> Thy name so buried in her. (IV.xiv.32-39)

The fact that, in this play at any rate, 'death of one person' turns out to be capable of being 'paid' more than once and that Cleopatra's imagined dying tribute to Anthony could be said to be 'divided/Between her heart and lips' – neither wholly heartfelt nor a matter of lip-service merely – in a sense relevant to Anthony's earlier musings on the elusiveness of Cleopatra's affections, simply serves to reinforce the idea that Mardian's, Anthony's and Shakespeare's imagined Cleopatra are as real in this play as the Cleopatra which they at once acknowledge and transform. The Cleopatra who, with 'a tearing groan', 'renders life' in Mardian's version of her death – Anthony's 'name so buried in her' – 'renders' it to Anthony, gives birth to him as she 'dies' in the same way that Shakespeare himself gives birth once again to Anthony *and* to Cleopatra in thus imagining, through Mardian, her death. We are not far away from that great last act of *The Winter's Tale* where, by the transforming power of Leontes' reawakened love of her (a love which mirrors the dramatist's own love of his creation) and, in the audience, what Coleridge calls 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith' ('It is requir'd/You do awake your faith', as Paulina puts it in V.iii.94-5), the statue of Hermione is released from the tomb to which she has been confined for sixteen long years by Leontes' withdrawal of his affections and becomes a living woman, endowed first with the power of movement merely and then, ultimately, with the renewed power of speech: the creative act of bringing a character back from the grave by reimagining her is actually *embodied* on stage.

Just as the 'imaginary' death of Cleopatra and then the 'real' death of Eros become the inspiration for Anthony's own suicide, so the 'real' death of Anthony in turn becomes the inspiration for Cleopatra's staging of her end – both in the sense that Anthony's suicide inspires Cleopatra with the courage (fragile though it be) to take her own life 'after the high Roman fashion' (though with an Egyptian twist) and in the sense that the poetry which she and her followers speak in their last moments 'feeds' on the poetry which Anthony has spoken before them. Thus Anthony's 'the

long day's task is done,/And we must sleep' (IV.xiv.42) becomes Iras's 'the bright day is done,/And we are for the dark' (V.ii.223-4) and Anthony's 'No more a soldier' and 'since the torch is out,/Lie down and stray no farther' (IV.xiv.49,3-4) become Cleopatra's 'No more but e'en a woman' and 'Look,/Our lamp is spent, it's out' (IV.xv.86.97-8). The sexual implications of Anthony's lines – for Cleopatra is the 'torch' which lights Anthony in more than one way – in no way destroy their resonance. Rather, they point to the way in which, even in moments of crisis, this play keeps an unwavering hold on the connection between the physical and the metaphorical, body and spirit: Anthony's very last breath – 'Now my Spirit is going,/I can no more' (IV.xv.68) – is a kind of daring sexual pun and 'now/All length is torture' (IV.xiv.52-3) is similarly suggestive if one recalls where Iras would choose to have her extra 'inch of fortune': 'Not in my husband's nose' (I.ii.61).

In fact the comedy and the proliferating sexual *double-entendres* which surround the almost absurdly protracted death scenes of both Anthony and Cleopatra (Cleopatra's 'we have no friend,/But resolution, and the *briefest end*' – IV.xiv.103-4 – is apposite) and have often been commented on[16] serve simply as a manifestation of the play's own capacity, in Anthony's words, to 'Bid that welcome/Which comes to punish us' – punishing *it* in 'Seeming to bear it lightly' (IV.xv.161-3). (And 'seeming' is, of course, the operative word.) The good-humoured play with this metaphor – I'm thinking of the way in which Anthony asks, a moment later, 'carry me now, good friends' (IV.xv.164) and is soon to become the dead weight and the 'heavy sight' which Cleopatra considers so curiously: 'How heavy weighs my lord./Our strength is all gone into heaviness,/That makes the weight' (IV.xv.38-40) – is a mark of how far we have travelled from Poor Tom's fatuous if well-meaning counsel, 'Bear free and patient thoughts' (IV.vi.80) and the intractability of his other self, Edgar's, ultimate imperative: 'The weight of this sad time we must obey' (V.iii.323). The candour of Cleopatra's heroically

16 Staying close to home I shall note only A.P. Riemer's *A Reading of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* (Sydney University Press, 1968).

cheerful but at the same time poignantly disembarrassed relationship with her women – 'How do you, women?/What, what good cheer? Why, how now, Charmian?/My noble girls? Ah, women, women!' (IV.xv.95-7) – mirrors the touchingly vulnerable but at the same time manly good humour of Anthony's comforting remarks to his 'good friends'. It is all in keeping with the warmly domestic and familiar note of this play that Anthony should envisage his decline as a form of 'shaking hands' with Fortune (IV.xii.20-2). And the dead Cleopatra's displaced crown – 'Your crown's awry.[17] /I'll mend it and then play' (V.ii.360-1) – marvellously images the sense in which she is both merely a 'lass' and yet, to Charmian, to Anthony and to Shakespeare, 'unparalleled': 'Now boast thee Death, in thy possession lies/A lass unparalleled' (V.ii.357-8). The fact that, on Anthony's death, 'The round world', to Caesar's mind, '*Should have* shook lions into civil streets,/And citizens to their dens' (V.i.18-20) but didn't, is characteristic of the way in which this play seems calmly and unprotestingly to resign itself to the death of heroes: 'the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape', as George Eliot puts it in her Finale to *Middlemarch*, 'is for ever gone'.[18] But that does nothing to lessen the effect – rather, it enhances it – of the complementary fact that, in the imagination of Cleopatra, 'the varying shore o' the world' does indeed, as Anthony lies dying, 'darkling stand' (IV.xv.12-13).

Anthony's suicide is inspired by his imagining that Cleopatra 'by her death our Caesar tells/"I am conqueror of myself"' (IV.xiv.69-70). So that when, having discovered that Cleopatra is still alive, Anthony nevertheless still asserts that 'Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Anthony,/But Anthony's hath triumpht on itself' (IV.xv.17-18), he is implicitly affirming the dependence of this 'Anthony' on a Cleopatra both imagined and real. There is a sense in which 'Caesar's valour' *has* 'o'erthrown Anthony' – the Caesar who exercises his power of life and death over both Anthony and Cleopatra. And Cleopatra's own eventual defiance of Caesar is equally equivocal, representing as it does in one sense her submission to that power which 'ends all other

17 Challis 'away': I'm prepared to stake my life on 'awry'.

18 Penguin edition by W.J. Harvey (1965), p.896.

deeds,/Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change' (V.ii.5-6) – the Caesar in Shakespeare himself.

Shortly before her death Cleopatra declares, 'I am again for Cydnus/To meet Mark Anthony' (V.ii.266-7). It's a way, I think, of alerting us to the similarity between her 'immortal longings' on this occasion and Enobarbus's earlier celebration of the woman whom 'age cannot wither':

> My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
> Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
> I am marble constant; now the fleeting Moon
> No planet is of mine. (V.i.277-80)

In declaring that she has 'nothing/Of woman' in her Cleopatra evokes that 'womanliness' ('from head to foot') even as she denies it; and her dedication to 'resolution' and 'marble constancy', to a kind of fixity more settled even than Caesar's, nevertheless at the same time pays its passing tribute to the power of 'the fleeting Moon', insisting on the transitoriness of the moment – 'now' – in which it is made even as it aspires to a permanence beyond that moment.

Indeed, this insistence on the attraction of the moment (and one recalls Anthony's comparable juxtaposition: 'The miserable change *now, at my end...*') is repeated throughout Cleopatra's death-scene; Egypt clings firmly to the transitory world of sensation at the very point of wistfully farewelling it: 'Now no more/The juice of Egypt's grace shall moist this lip'. (And again one hears the echoes of Anthony's earlier farewell to the world: 'now thy Captain is/Even such a body'; 'now/All length is torture'; 'Now all labour/Mars what it does'; and, finally, 'Now my Spirit is going,/I can no more'.) 'Did I, Charmian,/Ever love Caesar so?' Cleopatra asks towards the beginning of the play (I.v.74-5), searching for confirmation that her relationship with Anthony does indeed represent something more lasting than her earlier opportunistic surrenders to the pragmatism of the moment. The lines she speaks shortly before her death seem, in their awareness of what is entailed in her willing embrace of the 'name' of 'husband', to give a conclusive answer to that question:

Husband, I come:
Now to that name, my courage prove my title.
V.ii.326-7)

Even here, though, the submission to that wifely stage which makes of this moment something permanent is imagined as, inescapably, a process, a 'coming' (and here, too, the sexual implications, not unknown in Shakespeare's day, are relevant[19]); 'Now'. To give due weight to the centrality, the enduring quality of this moment in Cleopatra's progress towards her end and the play's resolution in Caesar's celebration of that end while at the same time not losing sight of that other Cleopatra who is not beyond merely *acting* submission and whose suicide is motivated by her dislike of humiliation and her determination to thwart Caesar: this is the task of the critic no less than the dramatist. And if we are inclined nevertheless, as I am, to find in Cleopatra's death a kind of tribute to Anthony which does indeed entitle her to name him 'husband' then that, I think, is ultimately a way of testifying that this play both engages and appeases our own desire for something that 'age shall not wither' precisely because it so unremittingly places that desire in the momentaneousness and the indeterminacy of the world it aspires to transcend.

'Death destroys a man; the idea of death saves him'.[20] In *Hamlet* and in *Lear* Shakespeare gives us death; while in *Anthony and Cleopatra, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* he gives us, rather, the idea of death. In killing the king at least partly in response to the king's accidental killing of his mother, and in thus tainting himself with the poison which he had imagined to have been introduced into his world by Claudius alone, Hamlet destroys himself also, and with him die both his ideal parents and, inseparable from them, his own ideal self-conception: something like that, one might suggest, is Shakespeare's typical tragic movement. Anthony, on the other hand, takes his own life in the name both of his ideal Cleopatra and, inseparable from that, of his ideal self-conception. Instead

19 Cf. Anthony's 'Eros! – I come, my Queen – Eros!' (IV.xiv.57)

20 Michelangelo, *Rime*, ed. Girardi, no. 127.

of being implicated, along with the tragic hero, in the experience of an insidiously and imperceptibly corrupting poison we are asked to observe a more creative natural process in terms of which even individual dissolution is at the same time a kind of fructifying in the lives of others. As Anthony regretfully but at the same time almost philosophically observes of his own decline: 'The hearts/That spaniel'd[21] me at heels, to whom I gave/Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets/On blossoming Caesar: and this pine is barkt,/That over-topp'd them all' (IV.xii.22-6).

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* attempts to complement Dorothea's movement out of that idealism which 'sees reflected in the vague labyrinthine extensions of Mr Casaubon's mind the qualities which she herself brought'[22] towards the recognition of what others are 'in themselves' with a corresponding tribute to the beneficent creative power of Dorothea's 'holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them' – so that Will Ladislaw, for instance, thereby finds 'in her mind ... his highest estimate' and believes that 'the brief words by which he had tried to convey to her his feeling about herself ... would only profit by their brevity when Dorothea had to interpret them'.[23] So too Shakespeare complements the earlier enactment in his tragedies of a movement towards the destruction of the tragic hero's idealistic self-conception with a celebration, in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, of the creative and transforming power of the idealizing imagination. As Eliot puts it in *Middlemarch*: 'Who can know how much of his inward life is made up of the thoughts he believes other men to have about him ... ?'[24]

21 Challis 'panelled'.

22 *Op.cit.* p.46.

23 *Ibid.* p.829.

24 *Ibid.* p.741.