

Antony & Cleopatra (2.2.201-28)

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| ENOBARBUS. The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, | 201 |
| Burnt on the water. The poop was beaten gold; | 202 |
| Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that | 203 |
| The winds were love-sick with them. The oars were silver, | 204 |
| Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made | 205 |
| The water which they beat to follow faster, | 206 |
| As amorous of their strokes. For her own person, | 207 |
| It beggared all description. She did lie | 208 |
| In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue, | 209 |
| O'erpicturing that Venus where we see | 210 |
| The fancy outwork nature. On each side her | 211 |
| Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids, | 212 |
| With divers-colored fans, whose wind did seem | 213 |
| To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool, | 214 |
| And what they undid did. | |
| AGRIPPA. O, rare for Antony! | 215 |
| ENOBARBUS. Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides, | 216 |
| So many mermaids, tended her i'th'eyes, | 217 |
| And made their bends adorings. At the helm | 218 |
| A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle | 219 |
| Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands, | 220 |
| That yarely frame the office. From the barge | 221 |
| A strange invisible perfume hits the sense | 222 |
| Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast | 223 |
| Her people out upon her; and Antony | 224 |
| Enthroned i'th'marketplace, did sit alone, | 225 |
| Whistling to th'air; which, but for vacancy, | 226 |
| Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too, | 227 |
| And made a gap in nature. | 228 |

ENOBARBUS

Her barge looked like a golden throne upon the waves, burning bright with the sun's reflections. The rear deck was covered with hammered gold. The sails were dyed purple, and they were perfumed so heavily that they made the air seem dizzy with love. The oars were made of silver, and the oarsmen rowed in time to flute music. As the oars beat the water, the waves seemed to speed up as if excited by lust. Cleopatra's appearance was indescribable. As she reclined under a canopy woven from gold thread, she was more beautiful than any artist's idealized portrait of the goddess Venus. Pretty, Cupid-like boys stood on either side of her, smiling and cooling her with multicolored fans, which seemed to fan the flames in her cheeks even as they cooled them, undoing what they did.

AGRIPPA

How excellent for Antony!

ENOBARBUS

Her ladies-in-waiting—like Nereides, or mermaids—tended to Cleopatra as she watched them, and their graceful movements added to the beauty of the scene. It seemed as if a mermaid were steering. The silken sails and ropes swelled in the wind, expertly handled by the ladies' soft hands. People on the wharves could smell exotic perfume wafting from the barge as it passed them. All the people came out to see her, and Antony, waiting for her in the marketplace, was left alone. Even the air itself would have gone to look at Cleopatra, if that wouldn't have caused an unnatural vacuum in the atmosphere.

Several currently-available study guides present Shakespeare's texts and, on facing pages, line-by-line translations of them into modern English prose. Such modernizations are invaluable aids to understanding how Shakespeare's language works, though not for the reasons their creators presumably intended.

| No Fear Shakespeare | Antony & Cleopatra (2.2.201–28) |
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The speech from *Antony & Cleopatra* 2.2 in which Enobarbus describes Cleopatra on her barge closely parallels Shakespeare's primary source for the play: Thomas North's 1579 English translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. In fact, critics often describe the speech as "just" a blank-verse version of North's translation. But Shakespeare's language does a lot more than add rhythm to his source.

| North's translation of Plutarch's <i>Lives</i> | <i>Antony & Cleopatra</i> (2.2.201–28) |
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| ... her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sales of purple | <div>The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, 201</div> <div>Burnt on the water. The poop was beaten gold; 202</div> <div>Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that 203</div> <div>The winds were love-sick with them. 204</div> |
| and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, oboes, citherns, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. | <div>The oars were silver, 204</div> <div>Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made 205</div> <div>The water which they beat to follow faster, 206</div> <div>As amorous of their strokes. 207</div> |
| And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, appareled and attired like the goddess Venus, commonly drawn in picture; | <div>For her own person, 207</div> <div>It beggared all description. She did lie 208</div> <div>In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue, 209</div> <div>O'erpicturing that Venus where we see 210</div> <div>The fancy outwork nature. 211</div> |
| and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys appareled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her. | <div>On each side her 211</div> <div>Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids, 212</div> <div>With divers-colored fans, whose wind did seem 213</div> <div>To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool, 214</div> <div>And what they undid did. 215</div> |
| Her Ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were appareled like the nymphs Nereides (which are the mermaids of the waters) and like the Graces, some steering the helm, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, | <div>Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides, 216</div> <div>So many mermaids, tended her i'th'eyes, 217</div> <div>And made their bends adorings. At the helm 218</div> <div>A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle 219</div> <div>Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands, 220</div> <div>That yarely frame the office. 221</div> |
| out of the which there came a wonderful passing sweet savor of perfumes, that perfumed the wharf's side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people. | <div>From the barge 221</div> <div>A strange invisible perfume hits the sense 222</div> <div>Of the adjacent wharfs. 223</div> |
| Some of them followed the barge all amongst the river's side: others also ran out of the city to see her coming in. So that in the end, there ran such multitudes of people one after another to see her, that Antonius was left post alone in the market place, in his Imperial seat to give audience ... | <div>The city cast 223</div> <div>Her people out upon her; and Antony 224</div> <div>Enthroned i'th'marketplace, did sit alone, 225</div> <div>Whistling to th'air; which, but for vacancy, 226</div> <div>Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too, 227</div> <div>And made a gap in nature. 228</div> |