4
Comedy and Metamorphosis

> This interpenetration of gods, men, and nature does not imply an unequivocal hierarchical order, but an intricate system of interrelations in which each level can influence the others, though to differing extents. Myth, in Ovid, is the field of tension in which these forces clash and balance. Everything depends on the spirit in which the myth is related. Sometimes the gods themselves recount the myths in which they are involved, as moral examples intended as warnings to mortals; at other times mortals use the same myths to challenge or argue with the gods, as do the daughters of Pierus or Arachne. Or it may be that there are some myths that the gods love to hear told, and others they prefer to have silenced.[1]

I

The Taming of the Shrew is one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies, possibly his first. Its opening scenes may be read as an induction not only to this play but to the whole phenomenon of Shakespearian comedy. An artisan is taken in by a lord who patronizes a company of players; a dramatic performance is staged for his delight and instruction. Christopher Sly watches from above, the London groundlings from below, he watches for free, they have to pay a penny, but he still functions as their representative. The theatre offers the audience what the lord offers Sly: a fantasy of entry into a world of gentle birth, sophistication, wealth (fine clothes and good food are the norm in the Padua of the play, which is why Kate's deprivation of them is so cruel), and sexual ambiguity (a lovely boy dressed as a desirable wife: Bartholomew the page is an induction to the succession of cross-dressed heroines, Julia, Portia, Rosalind, Viola, Imogen). The gaze will be allowed to rest on an exotic, erotic, poetic

[1] Italo Calvino, 'Ovid and Universal Contiguity', in *The Literature Machine: Essays*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London, 1987), 150.

world, on strange transformations and experiences far removed from the audience's quotidian experience. The lord will offer the artisan a glimpse of 'wanton pictures' (supposed wantonness was a great provoker of anti-stage polemic on the part of Elizabethan 'puritans'); his servants (and it may be remembered here that the theatre companies were known as the 'servants' or 'men' of the lord who was their patron) will assist in describing the sight:

> 2ND SERVINGMAN. Dost thou love pictures? We will fetch thee straight
> Adonis painted by a running brook,
> And Cytherea all in sedges hid,
> Which seem to move and wanton with her breath
> Even as the waving sedges play wi'th' wind.
> LORD. We'll show thee Io as she was a maid,
> And how she was beguilèd and surprised,
> As lively painted as the deed was done.
> 3RD SERVINGMAN. Or Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,
> Scratching her legs that one shall swear she bleeds,
> And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep,
> So workmanly the blood and tears are drawn.
>
> (*Shrew*, Ind. ii. 48–59)

What is laid out here is almost a programme for Shakespeare's subsequent Ovidianism. Adonis, whose story was soon to be told in the form of Shakespeare's non-dramatic comedy, is placed in the voyeuristic position of Actaeon, whose story will be vital to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Io is on the brink of being raped; her fate and her means of communicating it will be Lavinia's. Daphne runs through the wood, scratched with briars, as Helena will in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As in the *ekphrasis* in *Lucrece*, the emphasis is on the skill of the workmanship: the *trompe-l'œil* is such that the figures really seem to be alive and to move. We are on the road to Shakespeare's most astonishing Ovidian coup, Hermione's statue, so 'lively painted' that it comes to life.

There is, however, a difference between the endings of the Ovidian stories described here and those of Shakespearian comedy. Adonis is gored, Actaeon dismembered, Io raped, Daphne saved from rape only by being dehumanized. In the previous chapter I showed how Shakespeare reversed Ovid in tragedy: the Philomel story has the release of metamorphosis whereas the Lavinia one offers no such consolation. In comedy, it is the other way round: Shakespeare is the one who lets his characters off the hook. He does so a stage sooner

than Ovid, in whom release tends to come after extreme violence. Orlando is only nipped by the lioness, not killed as Adonis is by the boar. Falstaff is only pricked and pinched, not torn to pieces as Actaeon is. Julia is saved by Valentine from Proteus' attempt to rape her in the forest. It is the third servingman's narrative that most accurately predicts the course of Shakespearian comedy: true love does not run smooth, but drastic violence is always forestalled and those who intend it are converted or expelled. In the third servingman's picture, Apollo stops pursuing and starts empathizing; in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Proteus stops making advances upon Silvia and is reunited with Julia.

But the resolutions are always fragile, and in this sense the Ovidian allusions, with their violent ends, remain to remind the audience that we can never be sure that all will end well. When she is playing the role of a boy, Julia pretends to remember a pentecost pageant in which (s)he wore Julia's gown and played a woman's 'lamentable part', that of 'Ariadne, passioning | For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight'. The effect of her (his) 'lively' acting is the same as that of the lifelike painting described by the third servingman:

> Which I so lively acted with my tears
> That my poor mistress, movèd therewithal,
> Wept bitterly.
> (*Two Gentlemen*, IV. iv. 164–8)

The allusion here is to *Heroides* X, the passionate, lamenting letter of Ariadne to Theseus after he has left her on Naxos.[2] Its function is to evoke the pain of a deserted lover; that pain cannot be made to go away by the brisk reunion with the changing Proteus a few scenes later (his conversion is even less convincing than that of Bertram in *All's Well*). As will be seen, Shakespeare alludes to the desertion of Ariadne again in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, indirectly, in *The Merchant of Venice*, in contexts which undermine the illusion that these are just happy comedies of fulfilled love.

But what about *The Taming of the Shrew*? Can it any way be construed as a happy comedy of fulfilled love? Petruchio never hits Kate, but surely real violence is done in this play—to the woman's mind. Is this not a drama in which women are subjugated, as Jupiter subjugates Io?

[2] The passion is so excessive that the poem may plausibly be read as a parody of its ante-type, Catullus 64—see ch. 6 of Florence Verducci's *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart*—but that is not how it was read in the Renaissance.

As the only release for Daphne was to become a tree, is not the only release for Kate to become a branch of Petruchio, bent to his will?

In answering these questions, one faces the problem that the text as we have it may not represent the play as Shakespeare wrote it. Current scholarship suggests—though the textual problem in question is extremely difficult and conclusions must be tentative—that in its original form it maintained the Christopher Sly business throughout the action by means of a series of brief interludes and an epilogue. The content of these, it is suggested, may be reconstructed from the play *The Taming of a Shrew*, printed in 1594, which is likely to be some sort of adaptation or reconstruction of Shakespeare's original version. The text of *The Shrew* published in the First Folio may omit the later Sly passages because the play had to be adapted to a smaller acting company after 1594, when it would no longer have been practicable to retain actors playing Sly and others as 'presenters' in the gallery above the stage—they would have been needed to double up and take part in the play within.[3] If this theory is correct, then the original play presented four versions of courtship and/or marriage: Sly and his off-stage wife, Petruchio and Kate, Bianca and Lucentio, Hortensio and his widow.

Two of these four relationships are introduced at the very end. Hortensio marries the widow for her money. She shows signs of frowardness and has to be lectured by Kate. The first half of the famous submission speech is spoken in the singular, it is addressed specifically to the widow and not to woman in general:

> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee,
> And for thy maintenance commits his body
> To painful labour both by sea and land . . .
> (*Shrew*, V. ii. 151 ff.)

The contextual irony of this is not always appreciated: in contradistinction to Kate's prescriptions, in this marriage it will be the wife, the wealthy widow, who provides the 'maintenance'; Hortensio will be spared the labours of a breadwinner. According to Kate, all a husband

[3] The introd. to Brian Morris's 1981 Arden edn. gives a full exposition of the arguments and makes an expert statement of the case that I summarize here. Especially compelling evidence that there were originally Christopher Sly interludes throughout is that without them the so-called 'law of re-entry' would have been broken, with Katherine and Petruchio going off at the end of v. i and instantly re-entering for v. ii, something that tends only to happen in Shakespeare when there is textual corruption or revision (as with the inserted fly-killing scene in *Titus Andronicus*).

asks is love, good looks, and obedience; these are said to be 'Too little payment for so great a debt' (159). But the audience knows that the debt is all Hortensio's. Besides, he has said earlier that he is no longer interested in woman's 'kindness' or 'beauteous looks' (IV. ii. 41)—all he wants is the money. Kate's vision of obedience is made to look oddly irrelevant to the reality of marriage.

Sly's marriage provides a further contextual irony for the submission speech. If *The Shrew* originally ended as *A Shrew* does, the tinker will go home claiming that the play has taught him how to tame a shrew and so he will now be able to tame his own wife. But the tapster knows better: 'your wife will course you for dreaming here tonight'.[4] The hungover Sly is in no position to tame anybody; he will return home and be soundly beaten. Kate's speech propounds the patriarchal ideal of marriage, but the Slys' is another union which reveals the distance of that ideal from reality. For all the fine words that are spoken, what we see is that ambitious gentlemen marry rich widows for money and artisans stay out late at the tavern and are beaten by their wives when they eventually get home. The Sly frame stands for the reality known to the audience; its implied resolution, with the woman on top, intimates that in reality wives are not silent and obedient, and plays can't teach husbands to tame them into submission. Since Sly is so manifestly incapable of doing a Petruchio, the play sidesteps the uglier reality of men returning from the tavern and beating up their wives.

'But,' it will be maintained, 'Hortensio and Sly are negative examples—the supposedly positive image of marriage that is offered is the patriarchal one of shrew metamorphosed into obedient wife.' But is the play's most positive image of marriage that in which the wife offers to put her hand beneath her husband's foot? Might there not be alternative models?

The key scene for the transformation of Kate is that on the road to Padua, when she accepts that if Petruchio calls the sun the moon it is the moon. At this point Vincentio passes by, and Petruchio addresses him as a woman. Kate, having learnt to play Petruchio's game, addresses the old man as follows:

> Young budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet,
> Whither away, or where is thy abode?
> Happy the parents of so fair a child,

[4] Conclusion to *A Shrew*, Additional passage E, l. 14, Complete Oxford Shakespeare text of *The Shrew*, 53.

> Happier the man whom favourable stars
> Allots thee for his lovely bedfellow.
> (IV. vi. 37–42)

The second half of this speech, with its careful rhetorical structure, is a compressed *imitatio* of a passage in the story which follows shortly after that of Pyramus and Thisbe in the fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*:

> right happie folke are they,
> By whome thou camste into this worlde, right happy is (I say)
> Thy mother and thy sister too (if any bee:) good hap
> That woman had that was thy Nurce and gave thy mouth hir pap.
> But farre above all other, far more blist than these is shee
> Whom thou vouchsafest for thy wife and bedfellow for too bee.
> (Golding, IV. 392–7)

This is Salmacis addressing the beautiful but reluctant Hermaphroditus. Shakespeare's use of the comparative adjective follows the Latin original: '*Happy* the parents . . . *Happier* the man' replicates 'qui te genuere, *beati* . . . *beatior* illa, | si qua tibi sponsa est' (IV. 322–6, 'happy are they who gave thee birth . . . happier she, whoever is your bride').[5]

It may be that Shakespeare is merely borrowing the rhetorical effect. But *imitatio* so often brings the matter with the trope, *res* with *verba*, that we should at least consider the possibility of contextual relevance. Ovid and Shakespeare are playing the same kind of joke with the gender of the addressee. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, Salmacis' wooing of Hermaphroditus is the classic source of sexual role-reversal: the female speaks the language of praise that is conventionally the prerogative of male courtship. Kate switches the gender back to that of convention, changing the lucky wife into a lucky husband, but the switch is ironically turned again when one remembers that, like Salmacis, she is in fact addressing a man. In a sense, she goes one up on Petruchio: she appears to be addressing Vincentio as a woman, in accordance with the demand of her husband, but the language in which she does so was in its original

[5] A. B. Taylor provides supporting evidence that Salmacis and Hermaphroditus was in Shakespeare's mind in this scene by pointing to the word 'froward' (IV. vi. 79) and the phrase 'The field is won' (IV. vi. 24): in Golding, Salmacis calls Hermaphroditus a 'froward boy' (IV. 459) and when she leaps on him in the pool she cries 'The prize is won' (IV. 440), a translation of Ovid's 'vicimus' (IV. 356), which in the Tereus and Philomel story is translated 'The fielde is oures' (VI. 654)—'Shakespeare and Golding', *N&Q* NS XXXVIII (1991), 492–9 (p. 495).

context addressed to a man. Hermaphroditus is a sort of male shrew, tamed by Salmacis; by bringing their relationship into play, Kate inverts the roles which Petruchio has so painstakingly set up. This small linguistic victory may be seen as a first sign that Kate can give as well as take a taming, that, as in the subtitle of Fletcher's sequel to the play, the tamer will be tamed. In my discussion of *Venus and Adonis*, I argued that the union of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus served in the Renaissance as a model for the idea of marriage as the union of spiritual equals.[6] Its presence beneath the surface of the text in this crucial scene perhaps suggests that there may be a Salmacian/Hermaphroditic inflection to certain images of mutuality elsewhere in *The Taming of the Shrew*—'madly mated', with its suggestion of two becoming one; 'Petruchio is Kated', with its fusion of names (III. iii. 116–17).

I have phrased the foregoing argument tentatively, for it is based on slender evidence. A theatre audience could not be expected to move from the brief *imitatio* to a general sense of Salmacian/Hermaphroditic equality. But the fact that Shakespeare went to Salmacis for the image is enough to suggest that the idea of marriage as mutuality rather than subjugation was in his mind as he wrote the play. Furthermore, whilst the idea of reciprocity is at most beneath the surface in the Petruchio/Kate plot, it is clearly on the surface, and available to be read by a theatre audience, in the Bianca/Lucentio plot. It is their relationship which offers the play's most positive model of courtship and marriage.

In an allusion early in the play, Lucentio empties Jupiter's disguised wooing of Europa of its deceit and interprets it in terms of male humility:

> O yes, I saw sweet beauty in her face,
> Such as the daughter of Agenor had,
> That made great Jove to humble him to her hand
> When with his knees he kissed the Cretan strand.
> (I. i. 165–8)

Metamorphosis can mean lowering one's estate before ultimately raising it. Prince Hal progresses through *Henry IV* by sounding the very bass-string of humility, but then breaking through the clouds as

[6] On this idea and its relevance to *The Taming of the Shrew*, see J. A. Roberts's suggestive article, 'Horses and Hermaphrodites: Metamorphoses in *The Taming of the Shrew*', *SQ* xxxiv (1983), 159–71, which takes off from the passage discussed here.

he is transformed into a feathered Mercury upon a fiery Pegasus, witching the world with noble horsemanship.[7] He describes the first part of the process by alluding, as Lucentio does here, to Jupiter's descent through the chain of being for the sake of Europa, daughter of Agenor: 'from a god to a bull—a heavy declension—it was Jove's case. From a prince to a prentice, a low transformation—that shall be mine' (*2 Henry IV*, II. ii. 165–7). By changing places with his servant, Lucentio is able to gain access to Bianca and express his love. But where Jupiter and Hal remain manipulative, Lucentio's transformation is wholly creative because the love turns out to be mutual. Bianca shares in the wonder of love's metamorphosis:

> BIANCA. Cambio is changed into Lucentio.
> LUCENTIO. Love wrought these miracles. Bianca's love
> Made me exchange my state with Tranio
> While he did bear my countenance in the town,
> And happily I have arrived at the last
> Unto the wishèd haven of my bliss.
> (V. i. 114–19)

Kate's submission speech accepts patriarchy's chain of being, in which god, king, and husband are heads. The Bianca/Lucentio plot proposes a different model, one in which the chain of being is disrupted—a god humbles himself to become a bull, a gentleman becomes a schoolmaster, a servant becomes a master—in the name of a shared love.

The reciprocity that is so vital to the relationship is rendered partly by a bold reworking of Ovid, but the Ovid of the amorous poetry, not the *Metamorphoses*. The multiple disguises in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and particularly those that relate to the wooing of Bianca, are adapted from those in George Gascoigne's *Supposes*, itself a prose adaptation of Ariosto's highly classical Renaissance comedy, *I Suppositi*. Gascoigne's explanation of his title is also a proleptic reading of Shakespeare's play: 'But understand, this our Suppose is nothing else

[7] Vernon's speech (*1 Henry IV*, IV. i. 105–11), which I paraphrase here, is an odd composite allusion. In *Met.* iv, it is Perseus, not Mercury, who springs from the ground 'as light as any feather' and who is associated with 'Swift *Pegasus* the winged horse' who comes into being from the blood of the slain Medusa (Golding, iv. 765, 958). It was Mercury who gave Perseus his winged feet. Perhaps the point of invoking the god of furtiveness and trickery here is that the play charts Hal's reinvention of himself as a Perseus, a warrior-hero skilled in horsemanship, by means of an art that is always mercurial.

but a mystaking or imagination of one thing for an other. For you shall see the master supposed for the servant, the servant for the master . . . the stranger for a well known friend, and the familiar for a stranger.'[8] But where Gascoigne's play is set in Ferrara, Shakespeare transposes it to Padua, the centre of Aristotelianism and possibly the most renowned university city in Europe. Lucentio has come there to study; he begins with the Aristotelian and humanist view that education is synonymous with the pursuit of virtue (I. i. 8–20). But his knowing servant persuades him to reject the philosophical syllabus associated with the city of Padua:

> *Mi perdonate*, gentle master mine.
> I am in all affected as yourself,
> Glad that you thus continue your resolve
> To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy.
> Only, good master, while we do admire
> This virtue and this moral discipline,
> Let's be no stoics nor no stocks, I pray,
> Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
> As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured.
> (I. i. 25–33)

Tranio not only makes the Horatian case that pleasure should be mingled with profit, he also makes Lucentio see that what he 'affects' is Ovid's art of love rather than Aristotle's philosophy of virtue.

Accordingly, when Lucentio disguises himself as a schoolmaster in order to gain access to Bianca, his textbooks are Ovid's books of love rather than Aristotle's *Ethics* or Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*. A Latin lesson becomes a courtship device. Lucentio speaks under the mask of the schoolroom technique whereby a text is construed word by word. He 'translates' a couplet from the first letter of the *Heroides*, '*Hic ibat Simois, hic est Sigeia tellus,* | *Hic steterat Priami regia celsa senis*' (III. i. 28–9, from *Her.* i. 33–4):

> *Hic ibat*, as I told you before—*Simois*, I am Lucentio—*hic est*, son unto Vincentio of Padua—*Sigeia tellus*, disguised thus to get your love—*hic steterat*, and that Lucentio that comes a-wooing— *Priami*, is my man Tranio—*regia*, bearing my port—*celsa senis*, that we might beguile the old pantaloon. (III. i. 31–6)

There may be a contextual irony in that the letter in question is

[8] Gascoigne, *Supposes* (1566), 'The Prologue or Argument', Bullough, i. 112.

written by Penelope while she is surrounded by wooers whom she'd rather be without. There may also be a glancing allusion to the play's disruption of social roles when 'Priami', the king, is translated into the servant Tranio, whose temporary elevation to the gentry also parallels Sly's temporary metamorphosis into a lord. But the chief effect of this device is to take the Latin text out of the schoolroom and make it a means to the fulfilment of desire. Lucentio is following Tranio's advice and using his learning to pursue what he most affects. In *Titus Andronicus* we saw that the disciplines of the schoolroom did not teach virtue: a reading in the grammar did not lead Demetrius and Chiron to integrity of life. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, bookish philosophy—the kind of Aristotelian pursuit of virtue which Lucentio described in his opening speech—is abandoned and truth is read in women's eyes.[9] Similarly, though *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, as will be seen, a play full of Ovidian matter, 'love's richest book' in which Lysander finds 'Love's stories' is not a written text to be studied at school like the *Metamorphoses*, but the eyes of Helena (II. ii. 121–2). In Lucentio's wooing, on the other hand, the schoolroom is not rejected but appropriated for creative purposes. And, crucially, the woman gives as good as she gets. She answers the amorous appropriation of the text word for word: '*Hic ibat Simois*, I know you not—*hic est Sigeia tellus*, I trust you not—*hic steterat Priami*, take heed he hear us not—*regia*, presume not—*celsa senis*, despair not' (III. i. 40–3). Bianca is beautifully poised here, wholly in control: she gives ('despair not') but she also withholds ('presume not').

The symmetrical parodic construings of the extract from the *Heroides* set the tone for the relationship between Bianca and Lucentio. Theirs will be a marriage between equals, built on mutual desire and consent—Bianca escapes her class of sixteenth-century woman's usual fate of being married to a partner of the father's choice, to Hortensio or Gremio. If anything, she is the dominant

[9] Biron's speech to this effect (*Love's Labour's*, IV. iii. 287–341) has a nexus of references to Ovid's Orpheus, reinforcing some of the connections that I established in the previous chapter: 'bright Apollo's lute strung with his hair' adapts the 'Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews' of *Two Gentlemen*; 'Make heaven drowsy with the harmony' is a variation on Cerberus being sung to sleep; and 'O, then his lines would ravage savage ears, | And plant in tyrants mild humility' is especially close to Lodowick in *Edward III*. The pedant's representation of those humanist exemplars, the Nine Worthies, contributes further to *Love's Labour's Lost*'s witty critique of book-learning: in the show staged by schoolmaster and curate, the great Hercules becomes a mote of a boy and the noble Hector a braggart Spaniard.

partner at the end. She is not read a lecture by Kate, as the widow is, and she gets the better of her husband in their final on-stage exchange:

BIANCA. Fie, what a foolish duty call you this?
LUCENTIO. I would your duty were as foolish too.
The wisdom of your duty, fair Bianca,
Hath cost me a hundred crowns since supper-time.
BIANCA. The more fool you for laying on my duty.
(v. ii. 130–4)

Like Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, she more than matches her man in the art of word play:

LUCENTIO. Now, mistress, profit you in what you read?
BIANCA. What, master, read you? First resolve me that.
LUCENTIO. I read that I profess, *The Art to Love*.
BIANCA. And may you prove, sir, master of your art.
LUCENTIO. While you, sweet dear, prove mistress of my heart!
(iv. ii. 6–10)

As Hortensio recognizes in the next line, she has proved a 'quick proceeder', a clever scholar. She is no longer the pupil: in her 'resolve me that', she turns the language of the schoolroom back on the 'master'.

The Art to Love, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, was excluded from the Renaissance schoolroom for obvious reasons. In this exchange it is recovered as part of a practical education in love. And its nature is subtly transformed. Petruchio implicitly bases his taming on one precept within it: 'Vim licet appelles: grata est vis ista puellis'—'You may use what is termed force: girls like you to use it' (i. 673). But he makes a fatal misreading, for this precept is from Book One, on the art of winning a lover, not Book Two, on the art of keeping her. If the relationship is to last, Ovid argues, the method of the male must be subtler:

> Though at the first you find her but untoward,
> Bear it, and she in time will prove less froward.
> The crooked arm that from the tree is cut
> By gentle usage is made streight; but put
> Such violence to it as thy strength delivers,
> And thou wilt break the short wood into shivers.
> (Heywood's trans. of ii. 177–80)

> This only means all dangers will disperse:
> Yield her her humour when she grows perverse:
> When she in conference argues, argue thou,
> What she approves, in self-same words allow.
> Say what she says, deny what she denies,
> If she laugh, laugh; if she weep, wet thine eyes.
> And let her count'nance be to thine a law,
> To keep thy actions and thy looks in awe.
> (Heywood's trans. of ii. 197–202)

Here the man remains the master by allowing the woman to appear to be dominant, whereas when the text of the *Ars* is appropriated by Bianca it no longer serves as a token of male manipulativeness, a repository of cynical seductive ploys. It becomes instead a symbol of reciprocal adult love. The woman wants her man to be master of the art of love. One might almost say that where the *Ars Amatoria* is masturbatory in its self-regarding erotic wit, the witty verbal coupling of Bianca and Lucentio, like that of Beatrice and Benedick, is a sign that they will have a good sex life. Their presence in the play is a guarantee that it is no uncomplicated apology for patriarchy. Kate's submission speech propounds a theory of degree that is ultimately Aristotelian; thanks to Bianca, the play as a whole has just as much time for a playful, joyful theory of love that is ultimately Ovidian. In Fletcher's sequel, *The Woman's Prize; or, The Tamer Tam'd*, Petruchio is corrected by his second wife. The epilogue of that play applies to his marriage, and to marriage generally, a moral that could previously have been drawn from Bianca and Lucentio: men 'should not raign as Tyrants o'er their wives',

> Nor can the women, from this precedent
> Insult, or triumph: it being aptly meant,
> To teach both Sexes due equality;
> And as they stand bound, to love mutually.[10]

II

The induction of *The Taming of the Shrew* moves from a description of Ovidian pictures to a stage performance; it thus summons up only to stave off the possibility that the Ovidian tales might be acted out for Sly's benefit, as Gaveston proposes to stage the Actaeon story for

[10] Epilogue, in *The Woman's Prize*, ed. Fredson Bowers, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. iv (Cambridge, 1979), 117.

Edward II. With this possibility in mind, we could imagine another play beginning with an induction that opens like this:

—Is all our company here?

—You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.

—Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit through all Athens to play in our interlude before the Duke and the Duchess on his wedding day at night.

—First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on; then read the names of the actors; and so grow to a point.

—Marry, our play is The Most Lamentable Comedy, and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe.

—A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry.

The company has assembled to play out their dramatization of one of the best-known stories from the *Metamorphoses*. As in *The Taming of the Shrew* and other plays of the period such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale*, the whole of the main action would then be a play-within-a-play; the duke and duchess would be an on-stage audience, reacting to the 'Lamentable Comedy' that is enacted in their honour.

But what I have quoted is not, of course, an induction. The characters who speak the dialogue, Quince and Bottom, are artisans of the city, not the duke's professional players. Shakespeare, as so often, transforms a convention, for this is a second scene, which occurs after the duke and duchess and other well-born characters have been introduced, after the unfolding of the first events in a plot akin to, but different from, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The play replays, but updates and alters, the classical tale of parental resistance to young love and the lovers' plan to meet outside the city. Instead of the whole play being a play-within-a-play in the manner of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the play-within is withheld until the main action has been resolved.

When it comes, it is preceded by another quasi-induction, which offers a choice of Ovidian performances: before 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is selected, 'The battle with the Centaurs' from Book Twelve of the *Metamorphoses* is rejected, as is a dramatization of 'The riot of the tipsy bacchanals | Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage', the final stage of the Orpheus myth from Book Eleven (*Dream*, v. i. 44–9). Everybody in Athens seems to have been rehearsing the matter of the *Metamorphoses* in preparation for the wedding festivities of Theseus

and Hippolyta, themselves characters from ancient myth. And the matter rehearsed serves as a reminder to both on-stage and off-stage audiences that courtship does not always end in the comic resolution of marriage—Pyramus and Thisbe go to the tomb, not the wedding-bed—and that the relationship between the sexes has its discords as well as it concords: the battle between the Centaurs and the Lapiths took place at a wedding and the Orpheus myth was, as I argued in the last chapter, bound up with rape and revenge.

A Midsummer Night's Dream may, then, be described as a displaced dramatization of Ovid. Why did Shakespeare include a parodic staging of Pyramus and Thisbe, one in which Golding's 'Ninus Tumb' becomes 'Ninny's tomb',[11] in a play which as a whole is deeply but not directly Ovidian? If he wished to proclaim himself as an Ovidian dramatist, why did he not simply stage Pyramus and Thisbe? The answer, I would suggest, may be found in Renaissance conceptions of *translatio* and *imitatio*. *Trans-latio*: to translate is to bring across; it is to make a text from an alien culture speak in the distinctive language of the translator's culture. George Chapman claimed in the dedicatory epistle to his translation of Homer's *Iliad* that the character of Achilles 'did but prefigure' the Earl of Essex.[12] He considered it part of his function as a translator to alter the original text in order to make it more conformable to his vision of Essex as a chivalric hero (Chapman's project is another context for Shakespeare's Ovid-like destabilization of the epic idiom in *Troilus and Cressida*). Imitation goes even further than translation in reconstituting the source-text in contemporary terms: for Spenser in *The Shepheardes Calender*, imitation of Theocritus and Virgil was a proper medium for reflection upon sixteenth-century ecclesiastical politics. It is through such processes of rewriting and 'modernization' that the classics are kept alive; Renaissance humanism proposes that it is exactly this capacity to become 'modern' that makes Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and the rest classics.

Quince's impromptu theatrical troupe do not understand the true nature of translation. Their obsessive literalism renders their performance risible. For Golding, translation was also interpretation: Lion, Wall, and Moonshine are there to be moralized. For Snug,

[11] The more educated Quince cites Ninus correctly (Golding, iv. 117; *Dream*, III. i. 92, v. i. 137), but to the others he is a Ninny (III. i. 91, v. i. 201, v. i. 258).

[12] *Seaven Bookes of The Iliades* (1598), in *Chapman's Homer*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, 2 vols. (London, 1957), i. 504.

Snout, and Starveling, Lion, Wall, and Moonshine are there to be impersonated in as literal a way as possible, and if necessary the fact of the impersonation must be pointed out. Quince knows a little better, but only a little, for he too is a literalist. That is to say, he wants to follow the source-text to the letter: 'we must have a wall in the great chamber; for Pyramus and Thisbe, *says the story*, did talk through the chink of a wall' (III. i. 57–9, my emphasis). He is bounded by the letter and accordingly fails to perceive the spirit: his script leaves out the point of the story. Ovid's narratives climax with symbolic metamorphosis; Golding makes it his business as a translator to include interpretations in the form of applications of the narratives to contemporary moral values. Quince's dramatization, on the other hand, ends with the death of the lovers: there is no Ovidian metamorphosis and no Goldingesque moralization. A translation without application is of little more use than a grammar-school boy's crib—even in the classroom, pupils learnt to proceed from literal translation to rhetorical improvisation.[13]

In the last chapter I argued that *Titus Andronicus* is a *translatio* from the classroom to the theatre of the humanist ideal of the educative value of the classics; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* goes a step further and draws a distinction between different kinds of theatrical imitation. By including Quince's literal and therefore deficient *translatio*, Shakespeare draws attention to the higher level of his own. It is elsewhere in the play, not in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', that we find all the marks of true Ovidianism: a philosophy of love and of change, the operation of the gods, animal transformation, and symbolic vegetation. It is the translation of these elements out of the play-within and into the play itself that transforms *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into Shakespeare's most luminous *imitatio* of Ovid. The dispersal of Ovid throughout the text is what makes Shakespeare, to use the terms of Renaissance imitation theory, a true son rather than an ape.[14] The son distinguishes himself from the ape by virtue of difference, the *dissimilitudo* discussed in the last chapter in relation to

[13] Quince's translation is also deficient at a more basic level: he makes a number of schoolboy howlers. As A. B. Taylor points out, the solecism 'Sweet *moon*, I thank thee for thy *sunny* beams' (v. i. 267) is an attempt to translate Ovid's 'lunae radios' (iv. 99), but 'the phrase presented [Quince] with a problem because he knew *radius* only by a stock definition he found in dictionaries like Cooper's *Thesaurus*, as "A beame of the sunne"'—'Golding's Ovid, Shakespeare's "Small Latin", and the Real Object of Mockery in "Pyramus and Thisbe"', *ShS* xlii (1990), 53–64 (pp. 61–2).

[14] For this distinction see the passage from Petrarch, *Le familiari*, quoted in Ch. 3.

Titus Andronicus and 'the tragic tale of Philomel'. Quince does what the story says, whereas the motto for the relationship between the play as a whole and the *Metamorphoses* is Helena's reversal of a typical Ovidian sexual pursuit: 'The story shall be changed: | Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase' (II. i. 230–1). Quince attempts a literal translation of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', but his rehearsal is thrown into chaos when 'sweet Pyramus [is] translated' in another way (III. ii. 32).

Like Golding's translation at its best, the play is both ancient and modern. The opening scene sets a contemporary problem—the will of a father against the desire of his daughter—in the ancient Athens where many of Ovid's mythic encounters are located. The play engages with substantive matters of law and custom which speak directly to a Renaissance audience, but at the same time infuses the atmosphere with the power of the classical gods. Hermia swears 'By the simplicity of Venus' doves' (I. i. 170), taking us back to the silver doves who drew the love-goddess away in the final stanza of Shakespeare's narrative poem based on the *Metamorphoses*. She also swears 'by Cupid's strongest bow, | By his best arrow with the golden head' (I. i. 169–70), an explicit allusion to the first book of the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovid distinguishes between the mischievous boy's golden and leaden shafts:

> T'one causeth Love, the tother doth it slake.
> That causeth love, is all of golde with point full sharpe and bright,
> That chaseth love is blunt, whose steele with leaden head is dight.
> (Golding, i. 566–8)

The context of this allusion is Apollo's love for Daphne, a love 'Which not blind chaunce but *Cupids* fierce and cruel wrath did move' (i. 546). Apollo, flushed with pride after slaying the monstrous Python with his mighty bow and arrows, mocks Cupid as a 'wanton baby' whose own bow and arrows are but toys. Cupid promptly punishes Apollo by showing him what his little golden dart can do: the Olympian god falls in love with the chaste Daphne and chases her, but his love is not consummated, for she is metamorphosed into a laurel (taken by some interpreters to be symbolic of the virtue of chastity). Hermia, then, is swearing her love for Lysander by Apollo's love for Daphne. Once in the wood, Helena, with 'The story shall be changed: Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase', transforms the story by imagining Demetrius/Apollo as chaste and herself/Daphne as

rapacious. For a time, under the influence of love-in-idleness, Helena succeeds in her rewriting of myth by becoming a kind of double Daphne, pursued by both Demetrius and Lysander.[15] But then the story is changed again, as Ovid's narrative of metamorphosis replacing consummation is itself replaced by resolution in multiple marriage. Where Ovid typically ends with the hardness of Daphne as tree or the grotesquerie of the bubbling blood of the suicides in Pyramus and Thisbe, Shakespeare's play offers more benign transformations: 'Things base and vile, holding no quantity, | Love can transpose to form and dignity' (I. i. 232–3). For Golding, Daphne was a 'myrror of virginitie' and the fate of Pyramus and Thisbe a warning against the 'headie force of frentick love' (Epistle, 68, 110); Shakespeare, in contrast, celebrates the frenzy of love and makes even Daphne a mirror of desire.

The language of the opening scene is also used to establish an etiological framework. It is interested in finding stories which explain the origin of the condition in which lovers find themselves: 'Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, | And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind' (234–5). Ovid was of course the classic source for the etiology of love, but here Shakespeare has undertaken a subtle inversion. He has already moved on from *Venus and Adonis*, which was etiological in the traditional Ovidian sense: Adonis dies, Venus is sorrowful, and *therefore* sorrow will always attend on love. But in Helena's image it is the other way round: she begins with the nature of love and moves the mythological figuration back to the sequential clause. At one level she is merely giving the reason for the traditional representation of Cupid as blind, but to explain that blindness as the result of love's contrariness rather than make it into the active cause of it is to shift the balance of power away from the gods.

This shift is important because the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is more anthropocentric than myth traditionally is. If the distinction may be allowed, one might say that the mortals are the playthings of the gods, *but only playfully so*. Take Cupid's bow and his blindness literally and human beings are arbitrary victims of love. Ovid does not take Cupid and the other love-gods quite so seriously: he uses them to show his reader something about the capriciousness of

[15] Love's changes are rendered in a crisp rhetoric that is in part learnt from Ovid: compare Demetrius' 'Not Hermia but Helena I love' with a line in the *Ars Amatoria*, 'Scilicet Hermionem Helenae praeponere posses?' (ii. 699, 'So you would be able to prefer Hermione to Helena?').

love, but the writer of the erotic poems is always on hand to remind us that love is also an art, something that we can control. The Shakespeare of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* goes even further than Ovid: he invites us to consider the possibility that the love-gods are no more than a dream, something we invent to help us understand erotic love, which comes wholly from within. The fiction of an external form—call it Cupid, call it Puck—makes a complex condition easier to comprehend. This is Theseus' view of the matter. He doesn't believe the sort of things one reads in books like the *Metamorphoses*: 'I never may believe | These antique fables, nor these fairy toys' (V. i. 2–3). In his diagnosis, the art of a poet like Ovid who incarnates abstract forces such as love and war in humanoid forms such as Venus and Mars is an embodying and turning to shape of things unknown, a giving 'to airy nothing | A local habitation and a name'. This, he says, is a 'trick' of the strong imagination (V. i. 14–18).

But, as critics have often noted, the play as a whole does not endorse Theseus' reading.[16] We are not instructed to consider everything that happens in the forest as no more than a dream. Rather, we are invited to see double as Hermia does (IV. i. 189): to believe and not believe. How can we believe in the fairy-world when the play-within-the-play is then put on to remind us that the players of the *Dream* are all just actors ('The best in this kind are but shadows'—V. i. 210)? How can we not believe when the forest-gods return and have the play's last words? A Renaissance humanist like Golding would say that the stories of the pagan gods are worth reading because they can be given a contemporary moral application. Hippolyta is closer to this position than that of Theseus: she sees that the story of the night, the story of love's metamorphosis in the forest, has transfigured the minds of the lovers. Demetrius has come to see that his deeper love is for Helena; 'Something of great constancy' has grown from all the changes (V. i. 26). This pattern accords with the kind of humanist revision of Ovid's book of changes—Spenser's in the final stanzas of 'Mutabilitie', say—which proposes that they ultimately teach of the transience of all earthly things and the unique constancy of God. So too with Hippolyta's response to the line about the actors of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' as shadows: the audience's imagination can 'amend them', rather as the imagination of the reader can amend Ovid's narratives of the pagan gods into sources of

[16] See e.g. David P. Young, *Something of Great Constancy: The Art of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* (New Haven, Conn., 1966), 139–40.

moral (if you read with Golding) or psychological (if you read with Shakespeare) wisdom.

Shakespeare's humanistic amendment of Ovid is primarily achieved by a form of emendation in which the ancient is made modern. Puck stands in for Cupid, Titania and Oberon for others in the classical pantheon. Oberon sometimes seems to be Neptune transported to a wood or the lusting Jove, with the changeling boy as his Ganymede. The name 'Titania' is derived from Ovid, where it refers to a range of goddesses of the night—Diana, Latona, Circe, Pyrrha (in Golding, these are always 'Titan's daughter[s]', never 'Titania', so this is another small piece of evidence that Shakespeare remembered Ovid's Latin original).[17] Puck does Cupid's work throughout the night; one could almost say that in Oberon's etiology of love-in-idleness Puck could not see Cupid because he *was* Cupid ('That very time I saw, but thou couldst not . . .'). The wood outside Athens thus becomes an English wood peopled by fairies from the vernacular tradition. The Robin Goodfellow takes over the shape-changing art of the classical Proteus: 'Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound, | A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire'.[18] It is a more comprehensive *translatio* than that of Lyly in *Gallathea*, where the classical gods disport themselves slightly uneasily in the countryside around Hull. As Golding does with his rural vocabulary, Shakespeare translates Ovid into the native culture. It is a translation which at one and the same time reaffirms the original poet's classic status and elevates the native element to the status of high culture. Folklore becomes myth.

Shakespeare, as so often, seems to stand between high culture and popular tradition. One side of him looks down on what is represented by 'Pyramus and Thisbe', using it as a means to stake his own claim as a higher imitator, a true humanist. But another side of him shows solidarity with the artisans by putting the criticism of them in the mouth of a character such as Theseus who, as any half-way educated person in the Renaissance could tell you, was a notorious rapist. The play reminds the audience of what some of them would have read in Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*, that he ravished Perigouna and broke his faith with fair Aegles, with Ariadne and Antiopa (II. i. 78–80). The

[17] Given Shakespeare's particular interest in the Actaeon story, it may be from there that the name 'Titania' for Diana struck him (*Met.* iii. 173).

[18] *Dream*, III. i. 103–4. The *locus classicus* for the changes of Proteus—who of course gives his name to the fickle lover in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*—is *Met.* viii. 730–7.

well-known tenth letter of the *Heroides*, Ariadne's lament, would have predisposed many a listener against any claim made by Theseus. Partly because of the delinquencies of Theseus and partly because characters like Bottom have a kind of grace, the theatre audience is not encouraged to patronize the performers of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' quite so much as the well-born characters on stage do: as artisans they are in a sense representatives of both the professional actors of Shakespeare's companies and the groundlings who formed the bulk of the audience. To put a celebrated tragic tale from antiquity in their hands is to begin to bring high culture to the people, home-spun though the representation of it may be.

For Shakespeare to give the voice of scepticism with regard to antique fables to Theseus, himself an antique fable, further complicates the question of exactly what the play is or is not asking us to believe. Shakespeare resembles Ovid in that his attitude to the gods cannot be pinned down: we can never be sure whether or not they are anything more than external projections of human desires and predicaments. The gods and creatures of Ovidian myth are everywhere in the language of the forest. The beach is 'Neptune's yellow sands' (II. i. 126) and the sea itself is transformed by 'Aurora's harbinger' from 'salt green' to 'yellow gold' (III. ii. 381, 394), night is drawn by 'swift dragons' (III. ii. 380), the fairies sing of Philomel, and Oberon imitates Jupiter in his way of metamorphosing himself for the purposes of seduction: 'And in the shape of Corin sat all day, | Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love | To amorous Phillida' (II. i. 66–8). Hippolyta's forest memory is of being 'with Hercules and Cadmus once | When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear | With hounds of Sparta' (IV. i. 111–13): this is not a direct memory of Ovid, but an elegant variation on him, for her image of herself, a beautiful huntress, in the company of the legendary heroes in pursuit of the bear seems to be adapted from Meleager's hunting of the Calydonian boar in the company of other legendary heroes, including Theseus, and a different beautiful huntress, Atalanta (*Met.* viii. 260–546). The transformation of Ovidian boar into Shakespearian bear is *imitatio* at its quickest.[19] So it is that the world of the *Metamorphoses* is revitalized in the imaginary wood. Whether or not we believe in the figures of Ovidian myth and whether or not we believe in the figures of the Shakespearian forest become one and the same question.

[19] It reverts to a boar when the image is replayed at *Two Noble Kinsmen*, I. i. 79.

That we should suspend our disbelief in them is perhaps forced upon us by the fact that we are asked to believe that the metamorphosis of Demetrius is permanent, not a temporary illusion of the night. Since the agency which effects it is figured in an *imitatio* of the *Metamorphoses*, we may infer that the Ovidian language of the play is not mere embroidery: it is something of paradoxical constancy rather than a trick of the strong imagination. If we look for the symbolic vegetation which Quince forgets about in his dramatization, we find that it is the chief instrument of the plot in Acts II to IV. As Leonard Barkan has observed, the blood-coloured mulberry into which Pyramus and Thisbe are metamorphosed is replaced by the flower named love-in-idleness which works metamorphic magic when squeezed upon a sleeper's eyes.[20] Each plant is 'Before, milk-white; now, purple with love's wound'.

Oberon's account of the origins of the flower's power is *imitatio* at its most complex. In contrast to the literalizing Quince, Shakespeare catches the spirit of Ovid's god-infused nature by improvising on the master's themes without overtly translating him.[21]

> Thou rememb'rest
> Since once I sat upon a promontory
> And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
> To hear the sea-maid's music?
>
> (II. i. 148–54)

The mermaid on the dolphin's back is sitting in for Arion, who in the *Fasti* (ii. 79–118) played on his lyre, charming the waves and paying his fare in song to a dolphin who carried him to safety. Shakespeare will put Arion back on the dolphin when he replays the image in *Twelfth Night*, and in *The Tempest* Prospero's agent Ariel, whose name may be a variant on Arion, will also affect the temper of the sea. Indeed, a central process of Shakespeare's last solo performance is an application to human characters of the metamorphosis of nature described by Oberon here: after the rude sea of the tempest comes the

[20] *The Gods Made Flesh*, 257, an analysis to which I am much indebted.

[21] At this point Shakespeare may be fusing Ovid with the Seneca of *Hippolytus*: see Harold F. Brooks's Arden edn. (London, 1979), pp. lxiii, 36–7, 142, though I think the Senecan connections are overplayed.

growth to civility of the men of sin. What is distinctive about the image in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the absence of the directly Ovidian figures: Neptune has given way to the fairy king, Oberon, and Arion to the mermaid. The image is also an overgoing of Ovid in its conjunction of the sea and the stars. Ovid often metamorphoses his characters into creatures of the sea or astral formations, but never both simultaneously; the mermaid's music is an agent bringing transformation to diverse elements.

These changes signal to the careful listener that Shakespeare is varying his great original, as a good imitator should. We are thus prepared for a more startling variation when in Oberon's next speech an Ovidian figure, Cupid, *is* introduced:

> That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth
> Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,
> And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
> And the imperial vot'ress passèd on,
> In maiden meditation, fancy-free,
> Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.
> It fell upon a little western flower—
> Before, milk-white; now, purple with love's wound—
> And maidens call it love-in-idleness.
> Fetch me that flower; the herb I showed thee once.
> The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
> Will make or man or woman madly dote
> Upon the next live creature that it sees.
>
> (II. i. 155–72)

Having begun with Cupid, thus echoing the language in which Hermia established the Ovidian nexus in the opening scene, Oberon seems to stray from the *Metamorphoses* to modern high politics. There is a long tradition of reading the 'imperial vot'ress' passage as a compliment to Queen Elizabeth.[22] The combination of chastity and an imperial figure throned in the west makes such a reading hard to resist (the point of 'in the west' is that Elizabethan England was claimed as a

[22] See the extraordinary range of allegorical interpretations in the relevant note to H. H. Furness's New Variorum edn. of the play (Philadelphia and London, 1895), 75–91.

descendant from Troy and Rome by virtue of the westward shift of empire). The virgin Queen is the one human strong enough to withstand 'Cupid's fiery shaft', but the knock-on effect of her chastity is the wounding of the flower and the uncontrollable loves that are born with its juice. Where *Venus and Adonis* proposes that sorrow attends on love because of Venus' sorrow at the loss of Adonis, this image proposes that irrationality attends on love because of Elizabeth's strong chastity. Shakespeare seems to be saying: Cupid won't be gainsaid, so if you want a chaste Queen walking imperially on 'In maiden meditation, fancy-free', her subjects will have to bear mad doting in their love-lives. This seems a curious claim until you turn it upside-down, which is what you usually have to do to understand an etiology: Shakespeare observes that ordinary people do seem to spend much of their time 'madly doting'; his task as an etiologist is to invent a story to explain the cause of this phenomenon; where Ovid found causes in gods and ancient stories, Shakespeare finds it in contemporary history. This has the effect of 'updating' Ovid and, crucially, giving the Queen the kind of power that is usually given to the gods. It is at once a humanist move whereby the present is read with the apparatus of the classics (quasi-Ovidian etiology), and a politic one whereby the Queen is elevated into a mythic figure, as she is in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

The Ovidianism of Oberon's speech is comparable to that of Spenser, who so frequently demands to be read simultaneously in mythical and historical terms, as for example when in 'Mutabilitie' he rewrites the Actaeon myth in the landscape of the Ireland where he held a government post. It is very unusual for Shakespeare to 'politicize' Ovid in this way—it will be shown in a later section of this chapter that he did not take the opportunity to make Actaeon into the Earl of Essex, as Ben Jonson did. And in Chapter 6, I shall argue that Ovidian resonances are deployed in *The Tempest* to make the play transcend the polity of early Jacobean England; it is only with another passing compliment to Queen Elizabeth at the very end of *Henry VIII* that we get another historical allusion of this sort.[23] Why, then, did Shakespeare introduce this glancing figuration of the throned virgin?

I suspect that it may have been an attempt to forestall a dangerous

[23] The only other incontestable contemporary political allusion in Shakespeare is that to Essex's return from Ireland in the prologue to the fifth act of *Henry V*, but being a choric interjection it is not written into the play's narrative line as the two compliments to Queen Elizabeth are.

identification elsewhere in the text of *Dream*. In a pageant performed during the royal visit to Sudeley in 1592 Elizabeth herself was incorporated into an Ovidian dramatization in the role of Queen of Chastity: a tree is riven, Daphne issues out, Apollo pursues her, and she, 'running to her Majestie, uttered this: "I stay, for whither should Chastety fly for succour, but to the Queene of Chastety?" '[24] Gloriana, Spenser's fairy queen, is the chaste Elizabeth: doesn't that raise the possibility that all fairy queens are the chaste Elizabeth? Titania is of course frequently referred to as the fairy queen, so does this not invite the identification of her with Elizabeth? But the consequences of such a reading are alarming. Titania is anything but chaste: she fawns on her changeling boy[25] and she is the one who will be the chief victim of love-in-idleness. Oberon plans a bestial coupling for her:

> Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
> On meddling monkey, or on busy ape—
> She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
> (II. i. 180–2)

What she ends up pursuing is, of course, an ass/weaver. Shakespeare cannot afford to license the interpretation of this as an image of the Queen in a perverse encounter which upsets both the natural and the social order; if such an interpretation were at all prominent, the Master of the Revels would not have licensed the play. By identifying the Queen with the imperial votaress, Shakespeare denies the transgressive identification of her with Titania. The historical reading is restricted to the etiology of love-in-idleness; we are accordingly asked to read the encounter with Bottom in other terms. Interpretation cannot of course be policed in the way that this implies, so there is nothing to stop an ingenious reader such as Louis Adrian Montrose relating the courtship of Bottom to the astrologer Simon Forman's dream of a sexual encounter with the Queen.[26] Montrose's reading

[24] *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. John Nichols, new edn., 3 vols. (London, 1823), iii. 139. Accidentals emended in my quotation.

[25] Provoking the jealous wrath of Oberon, which manifests itself in disruptions of nature imitated from those that occur when Ceres is angry after Dis abducts Proserpina (compare *Dream*, II. i. 88 ff. and Golding, v. 591–604). As with other aspects of the play's Ovidianism, the *imitatio* is marked by copiousness—thus Golding's 'the corne was killed in the blade' is embroidered into 'the green corn | Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard'—and by *translatio* into the vernacular, as when Shakespeare adds in such distinctively English elements as the nine men's morris filled up with mud.

[26] Montrose, '"Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', *Representations*, ii (Spring 1983), 61–94.

might be said to be licensed by a mythographic way of approaching a text which sees multiple interconnectedness between different levels of figuration, but it does seem to me to run counter to Shakespeare's attempt to confine the figuration of Elizabeth to the etiological passage which is carefully placed in the play-world's past, not its present.

The business of Bottom and the ass's head is not a subversive historical allusion; rather, it is the play's most remarkable 'higher imitation' of Ovid. Quince is preparing an Ovidian play without a metamorphosis in it, but magically in the midst of rehearsals a metamorphosis does take place: Bottom is 'changed', as Snout puts it, 'translated', as Quince puts it in his slightly more learned vocabulary (III. i. 109, 113), and with him the story is changed or translated from that of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' into a combination of Ovid's Midas myth and a piece of vernacular folklore, probably derived from Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*,[27] about the power of witchcraft to give a man an ass's head. This combination of classical and native elements is another mark that the play is a translation in the higher Renaissance sense, not a literalistic dramatization like Quince's. Two textual markers indicate the presence of Midas: Bottom's foolishness and Titania's emphasis on his 'fair large ears, my gentle joy' (IV. i. 4). Renaissance interpreters tended to elide the two parts of the Midas story into one. In Ovid he is first punished for his greedy desire that everything he touches should turn to gold, then punished again with the ass's ears when he misjudges the song contest between Apollo and Pan; but for Abraham Fraunce, he can be wrapped up in one line as '*Mydas* the golden asse, and miserlike foole'.[28] In the collapsed reading of the Midas story, the rich fool is punished with ass's ears; in the metamorphosis of Bottom, the poor man with his ass's ears is rewarded with the love of the fairy queen, but in his beautiful naïvety, his folly which is true wisdom, he does not want it—he only wants his ass's means of subsistence, some good dry oats, a bottle of hay, a handful or two of dried peas, and the blessing of sleep.

[27] See Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), ed. Brinsley Nicholson (London, 1886), 94, 315. Scot cites a story from Bodin and also the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, which Shakespeare may have known directly (the difference between Bottom's translation and that in *The Golden Ass* is that it is of the head only; the similarity is that the ass is desired by a female character whom the audience/reader is supposed to perceive as desirable herself).

[28] Fraunce, *The Third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch* (1592), p. 11^{r}. The ears apparently sprout on stage in Lyly's *Midas*, IV. i. 142.

The language of Bottom changes astonishingly between his first reappearance wearing the head, when he still speaks as Nick Bottom (III. i. 114 ff.), and the scene on Titania's flowery bed, when he requests an ass's food and thus really seems to be becoming an ass. This is one of the few moments in Shakespeare at which Ovidian metamorphosis actually seems to be taking place on stage. But of course the stage has certain limits. Supernatural interventions which lead to the transformation of human beings into animals, birds, trees, flowers, streams, and stars cannot be staged as they can be described in narrative poetry. And the characteristically Ovidian form of violent sexual activity, in which Jupiter becomes a bull, a swan, or a shower of gold in order to gain access to some hapless girl, would most definitely have been out of order on the Renaissance stage. When Thomas Heywood staged a whole sequence of stories from the *Metamorphoses* in his *Age* plays, he frequently had to resort to choric narrative rather than direct action. Titania with Bottom is the nearest Shakespeare comes to a god making violent love to a mortal: by inverting the customary gender roles—the rapacious divinity is female, as in *Venus and Adonis*—and by making the mortal into a wise fool, Shakespeare defuses the encounter into comedy. Johann Heinrich Fuseli's extraordinary paintings of the scene have exactly the grotesque quality of the more perverse couplings in Ovid, but in the theatre it is a tryst which provokes more mirth than discomfort.

So too with the metamorphosis itself. A man becoming an ass and a woman making sexual advances to the creature: if it were credible, it would be very unpleasant indeed. Shakespeare hints at its credibility just enough to give a keen edge to the drama, but the audience knows perfectly well that the ass's head is nothing more than a stage prop. My remark above to the effect that Bottom 'really seems to be becoming an ass' is at one level ludicrous: there is no Bottom, there is only an actor. Indeed, the dramatist goes out of his way to remind us of this by staging the metamorphosis in the middle of a play-rehearsal. It is as if he is saying, 'I will not insult you by pretending that a real metamorphosis has taken place; we all know that can't happen in the theatre; let us agree instead to enjoy the illusion together'. But at the same time, we begin to realize that a kind of metamorphosis *has* taken place: in the instant that we think 'Bottom is playing the ass', we stop thinking 'Will Kempe [or whoever] is playing Bottom'. It might be said, then, that a displacement of the illusion occurs, whereby when the character becomes an actor, the actor becomes the character. The

comic deficiency of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is that the actors keep telling us that they *haven't* become their characters. An assumption of disguise—Rosalind becoming Ganymede or Viola Cesario—does similar work to the translation of Bottom. Shakespeare's often-observed self-conscious theatricality, what has become known as his 'metadrama', simultaneously reminds us that we are in the theatre and helps us to forget where we are. In that forgetting, we come as near as is humanly possible to a witnessing of metamorphosis. With Bottom himself, we in the audience may say, 'I have had a most rare vision' (IV. i. 202). The medium of metamorphosis in Ovid is myth; in Shakespeare, it is drama. Shakespeare's capacity to metamorphose Ovid into a different medium is what makes his art *imitatio* of the highest form. As will be seen in Chapter 6, the climax of *The Winter's Tale* offers the supreme example of what I mean. There the art of 'that rare Italian master, Giulio Romano' replaces that of Ovid and is in turn replaced by that of Shakespeare.

III

As must by now be apparent, one of the books of the *Metamorphoses* on which Shakespeare drew most extensively during the 1590s was the fourth, with its stories of Pyramus and Thisbe and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. Ovid's third and fourth books are unified by the figure of Cadmus. At the beginning of the third, he wanders the world in search of his lost sister, Europa, after her abduction by Jupiter as bull; but before Cadmus' story is resolved, there are narratives concerning a number of his relatives, including Actaeon, his grandson,[29] Semele, his daughter, who is burnt to a cinder when visited by Jupiter in the form of lightning, and Ino, her sister, who brings up Bacchus, the offspring of this union, is persecuted by Juno—ever jealous of her husband's infidelities—and is eventually driven into the sea, where Neptune transforms her into a goddess. At this point, Cadmus' own story is continued: 'And fleeting long like pilgrims, at the last | Upon the coast of Illirie his wife and he were cast' (iv. 700–1). Such tales as Pyramus and Thisbe, Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, and Actaeon are thus contained within a pattern of severings, wanderings, and sea-changes. The works in which these

[29] 'Nepos' (iii. 138): 'nephew' in Golding (iii. 161).

stories are recast, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Venus and Adonis*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, are themselves contained within a definable part of Shakespeare's career which begins with the supposes of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Protean interchanges of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and the confusions, separations, and reunions of *The Comedy of Errors*. Dromio of Syracuse's baffled cry, so obviously anticipatory of Bottom, might be the motto for all these plays: 'I am transformèd, master, am not I?' (*Errors*, II. ii. 198). The cry is the same for all those fictional selves who are destabilized by love: 'how farre Metamorphozed I am from my selfe, since I last saw thee'.[30] Shakespeare's last play in which this mode is dominant was *Twelfth Night*.

These connections may begin to explain why that play, so full of shifting watery images, should be set in an imaginary land called Illyria. Cadmus and his wife are washed up on the coast of Illyria, not knowing that their daughter and her child have been saved from drowning by being metamorphosed; Viola and Sebastian are washed up separately on the coast of Illyria, neither knowing that the other has been saved, though Viola is given hope by the captain saying that he saw her brother bind himself to a mast, 'Where, like Arion on the dolphin's back, | I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves' (I. ii. 14–15). The choice of simile here is telling. Drowning is averted not by external agency, as it is when Neptune comes to the aid of Ino and her son, but by the strength and imagination of the character himself: Sebastian is compared not to a victim of love in the *Metamorphoses*, but to Arion in the *Fasti*, who, as noted above with regard to the dolphin image in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, saves himself through his own musical art. In *Twelfth Night*, too, the power of music—as embodied in the name Viola—calms emotional storms and restores harmony. It is noteworthy in this respect that the name of Cadmus' wife, though not mentioned by Ovid, is Harmonia.

Twelfth Night is pervaded by a sense of mutability; constancy and inconstancy in love shape both the twists of the plot and the preoccupations of the characters. The tone is set by Orsino's opening speech in which he changes his mind about whether or not he wants more music, and compares the spirit of love to the ebb and flow of the sea. 'So full of shapes is fancy, | That it alone is high fantastical' (I. i. 14–15): the language signals entry into that world of the

[30] Nashe's projection of the Earl of Surrey, in love with his Geraldine in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (*Works*, ed. McKerrow, ii. 243).

imagination and its inconstant shapes which Shakespeare explored most fully in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. So it is that certain myths from the Cadmean section of the *Metamorphoses*, in particular those of Actaeon and of Narcissus and Echo (another watery story in Book Three) are among the controlling structures of the play.[31]

The image of metamorphosis is introduced openly when Orsino speaks of the effect of his seeing Olivia:

> That instant was I turned into a hart,
> And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
> E'er since pursue me.
>
> (I. i. 20–2)

The figure of Actaeon is so embedded in this trope that he is not mentioned by name. In reading the hounds as an image of Actaeon's own desires, Shakespeare is following the traditional interpretation of the myth: in Golding's Epistle it is a warning that we will be hunted by the dogs of our sensual excesses; according to Abraham Fraunce, 'Actaeon was devoured of his owne doggs, so he be distracted and torne to peeces with his owne affections, and perturbations';[32] and in the fifth sonnet of Samuel Daniel's *Delia* cycle, 'My thoughts like houndes, pursue me to my death'. Shakespeare's allusion economically suggests the exact sense of self-consuming passion that will recur throughout the play. And it is made in the expectation that the audience are capable of reading into it not only the name of Actaeon, but also the received interpretation.

In comparing himself to Actaeon, Orsino implicitly compares Olivia to Diana; thus, when he explicitly compares Cesario to Diana (I. iv. 31), we know that (s)he is replacing Olivia as the Duke's idealized object of desire. Diana is above all the goddess of chastity: it is because of Olivia's pose of chastity that Orsino's suit is unsuccessful and the pursuit of love turns self-destructively inward. Orsino is in love with the idea of being in love, and that is a state approaching the self-love of Narcissus. The abundant desire which surfeits on itself and so dies is that of Narcissus. Not only do many of the play's dilemmas

[31] My account here is in some respects anticipated by D. J. Palmer in '*Twelfth Night* and the Myth of Echo and Narcissus', *ShS* xxxii (1979), 73–8. See also M. E. Lamb, 'Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*', in *Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. Maurice Charney, New York Literary Forum Special Issue (1980), 63–77, though the theory of names expounded there (e.g. Orsino as 'ursus', bear, and therefore Callisto, who becomes a bear) is tenuous.

[32] Fraunce, *The Third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch*, p. 43^{r}.

and potential disasters arise from the narcissism of Olivia and Orsino: the comic plot reiterates and emphasizes the motif. Malvolio is 'sick of self-love' (I. v. 86) and 'practis[es] behaviour to his own shadow' (II. v. 16) in the manner of Ovid's Narcissus, who is to be seen 'gazing on his shadow still with fixed staring eyes' (Golding, iii. 524). He is gulled into wearing yellow, the colour of the flower into which Narcissus is transformed.

Malvolio also presents a different angle on the Actaeon pattern. If the noble Orsino is to be read as Actaeon in that he is hunted by the dogs of his own desires, the steward may be viewed in terms of the myth's implication that it is dangerous to lift one's eyes above one's rank. In the box-tree scene, instead of seeing Actaeon spying on Diana, we watch an Actaeon figure being spied on himself as he fantasizes about his Diana's desire for him. As Malvolio interprets the meaning of the 'I' in the letter, Fabian remarks, 'Ay, an you had any eye behind you you might see more detraction at your heels than fortunes before you' (II. v. 132–4). The pun concentrates the double identity of Malvolio as Narcissus (the self-obsessed 'I') and Actaeon (the desiring 'eye'). The dogs are watching him—even Sir Andrew is 'dog at a catch' and, as Feste says, 'some dogs will catch well' (II. iii. 60–1)—and already snapping at his heels. The 'detraction' which comes to him is the play's version of the fate of Actaeon. Given this, it is tempting to read his final cry of vengeance as an image of Actaeon turning the story around and beating off the pursuing hounds: 'I'll be revenged on the whole *pack* of you'.[33] Malvolio is also a bear, baited by dogs.[34] It may therefore be that Shakespeare is making one of his characteristic fusions of high and low culture: the educated audience reads Malvolio as Actaeon and simultaneously the illiterate spectator—who does not view the theatre so differently from the bear-pit—sees him as a bear.

The hounding of Malvolio has reached its height in the Sir Topas scene, where, as in the main plot during the fourth act, identities and reality itself shift bewilderingly amid images of madness, darkness, and dream. Feste, in the guise of Sir Topas, alerts the audience to the Ovidian, metamorphic nature of this world when he asks Malvolio,

[33] v. i. 374, my italics. *OED*'s first usage of 'pack' for a company of hounds kept for hunting is 1648, but Shakespeare does sometimes use the word in contexts suggesting violent collective pursuit: 'God bless the Prince from all the pack of you! | A knot you are of damnèd bloodsuckers' (*Richard III*, III. iii. 4–5); 'Hence; pack! . . . Out, rascal dogs!' (*Timon of Athens*, v. i. 111, 114).

[34] See Stephen Dickey, 'Shakespeare's Mastiff Comedy', *SQ* xlii (1991), 255–75.

'What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wildfowl?' (IV. ii. 51). As in the Sonnets, mutability is suggested by means of allusion to the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*. Malvolio has asked for his sanity to be tested 'in any constant question' (IV. ii. 49–50), by which he means any formal rational discourse, but Feste replies with a question that leads to the inconstancies of Pythagorean metempsychosis.

If all the characters in *Twelfth Night* were perpetually self-centred, it would be no comedy. It is above all Viola who effects a release from narcissism. When she first appears as Cesario, she too seems to be a Narcissus: the ambivalence suggested by ''Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man' (I. v. 153–4) associates Cesario with the sixteen-year-old Narcissus, who 'seemde to stande beetwene the state of man and Lad' (Golding, iii. 438). As Cesario attracts both Orsino and Olivia, so with Narcissus, 'The hearts of divers trim yong men his beautie gan to move, | And many a Ladie fresh and faire was taken in his love' (iii. 439–40). But Viola redeems the play because she proves to be selfless, not selfish, in love. She becomes Echo instead of Narcissus.

When Olivia asks Cesario what he would do if he were in love with her, the boy departs from the script which Orsino has given him, with its enumeration of the conventional courtly lover's groans and sighs, and speaks instead with an authenticity and intensity that immediately strike a chord in Olivia ('You might do much', she murmurs approvingly in reply):

> Make me a willow cabin at your gate
> And call upon my soul within the house,
> Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love,
> And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
> Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth,
> But you should pity me.
>
> (I. v. 257–65)

The 'babbling gossip of the air' is an explicit allusion to Echo, prepared for by the images of the reverberating hills and of hopeless love—Echo's love is condemned because Narcissus loves only himself. Shakespeare's adjective was probably determined by Golding's 'A babling Nymph that *Echo* hight' (iii. 443). Cesario seems to speak authentically because it is really Viola speaking of her own secret love

for Orsino; her plight, which requires silence and concealment of her feelings, appears to be like Echo's. So it is that when she is with Orsino, Viola implicitly compares herself to Echo by speaking of an imaginary sister, really herself, whose history is a 'blank',

> she never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i'th' bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy
> She sat like patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
>
> (II. iv. 110–15)

This is a typically Shakespearian fusion of images. The motif of concealing love, pining, and eventually becoming a blank evokes Echo, but the similes of the canker and the funerary monument come from native traditions—Shakespeare and his audience would have read of Echo, but seen the worm in the bud and the figure of Patience on a monument. The latter may also have an Ovidian bearing in that the archetypal image of a female figure in stone, representing stoical endurance, is Niobe.

But not all the associations of Echo are melancholy. She functions in Ovid as an alternative to self-love: had Narcissus responded to her love, neither of them would have been destroyed. Viola's function is to enable characters to respond, to see that love requires echoing instead of narcissism. Here the mythological pattern is transformed into a metaphorical one. This process is at work earlier in the scene with Orsino. After speaking of the instability of lovers, 'Save in the constant image of the creature | That is beloved', Orsino asks Cesario how he likes the music that is playing:

> VIOLA. It gives a very *echo* to the seat
> Where love is throned.
> DUKE. Thou dost speak masterly.
>
> (II. iv. 20–1, my italics)

Viola has given words to Orsino's own thoughts: they echo each other in the belief that music echoes love. Viola harmonizes Illyria by teaching its inhabitants to echo and thus to love. Cesario, through being two natures in one, shows the others that their true selves are to be found by looking at others instead of contemplating their own images in the manner of Narcissus. The moment of greatest harmony

occurs in the visual echo when Viola faces Sebastian, love is doubled, and the plot resolved.

Yet the resolution is by no means complete. Malvolio is still a Narcissus or an Actaeon, and Viola must be split from Cesario. *Twelfth Night* recognizes the fragility of Echo and the pervasiveness of Narcissus. It is no coincidence that the play stands on the threshold of the tragedies: narcissism is a characteristic not only of Feste's enemy, Malvolio, but also of King Lear, who, as his Fool recognizes, becomes his own shadow. *Twelfth Night* is and is not a benign rewriting of the myth, in which Narcissus recants of his narcissism, Echo is re-embodied and wins his love, and they live happily ever after. Quite apart from the little local problem of Malvolio's detention of the captain who holds the symbolic key to Viola's reassumption of feminine identity, the tonality of the final song is not that of living happily ever after: it is of the wind and the rain, it is to be reiterated in the storm by Lear's Fool.

Narcissus clearly functions in the play, as he does in the marriage-group of the Sonnets, as a negative *exemplum* which warns against introspective self-absorption. But the Echo who teaches Orsino and Olivia to look outside themselves is Cesario, and if we are to believe imaginatively in the union of Viola and Orsino, Cesario must be killed off—though it is clear from his final speech that Orsino rather hopes that they can go on acting out a relationship that bears some resemblance to that between Jove and Ganymede. It is important to remember that in Ovid, although the pining away to disembodiment is a consequence of unrequited love for the selfish boy, Echo is deprived of the power to initiate speech *before* she meets Narcissus: in punishment for her complicity in one of Jove's philandering sprees, Juno has ruled that all the girl can do is double the last word of what other people say. This, of course, gave Ovid the opportunity to use his virtuoso echo topos, which was so frequently imitated in the Renaissance. By becoming Cesario, Viola gains freedom of speech. When she becomes Viola again, she will revert to silence, not speaking unless spoken to, and when spoken to expected merely to echo her assent. She will, that is to say, become Echo in all her passivity and pathos. So it is that the character who has driven the plot for most of the play does not say a single word in the final one hundred and twenty-five lines of it.

Golding called Echo a 'babling Nymph'. The point is that she blabs, she talks too much: her skill in speech was such that she succeeded in

detaining Juno in conversation, giving her fellow-nymphs the time to finish making love to Jove and then run away before the angry goddess could get them. That is why her tongue is curbed. In the moralizing tradition, the figure thus becomes a type for the woman of active tongue who must be silenced—in short, the shrew who must be tamed. As usual, and in accordance with the skilful rhetorician's capacity to present opposing arguments with equal force, Shakespeare leaves the question open. It remains for the judicious spectator to choose between a reading in which Viola empties Illyria of narcissism (Malvolio apart) and is rewarded with love—a Lucentio and Bianca reading, if you will—and a darker interpretation—a Petruchio and Kate one—in which woman is reduced to the status of man's echo.

The capacity of Ovidian allusion to destabilize comedy's march towards harmony is further demonstrable from *The Merchant of Venice*. At the end of the first scene of that play, Bassanio comes up with a plan to gain money in order to help Antonio: 'In Belmont is a lady richly left', he begins. His stressing of wealth before beauty and virtue has the effect that his subsequent term 'worth' comes to mean cash-value more than moral excellence:

> Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
> For the four winds blow in from every coast
> Renownèd suitors, and her sunny locks
> Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
> Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchis' strand,
> And many Jasons come in quest of her.
> (I. i. 167–72)

This is a fine example of the Renaissance habit of thinking in terms of parallels between present experience and mythological precedent. That Portia is like the golden fleece makes Belmont into Colchis' strand. The latter image is probably derived from the line describing Jason's success at the climax of the golden fleece story in Book Seven of the *Metamorphoses*: 'And so with conquest and a wife he loosde from *Colchos* strond' (Golding, vii. 218), a turn of phrase that applies very well to Bassanio on his departure from Belmont in Act III. Golding interpreted 'The good successe of Jason in the land of Colchos' as a sign 'That nothing is so hard but peyne and travell doo it win, | For fortune ever favoreth such as boldly doo begin' (Epistle, 143–6), and this positive reading could be applied to Bassanio: his

travail on behalf of Antonio leads him to travel to Belmont, where he makes a bold choice of casket and is rewarded with good fortune.

But the terms of the allusion do not support this reading. Where the love of a woman, Medea, assists Jason in his winning of the fleece, Bassanio views the woman, Portia, as the fleece itself. She is a valuable treasure to be won, not a human being to be loved. When he comes to make his choice in Belmont, Bassanio knows his mythology sufficiently well to disdain the gold casket: it is 'food for Midas' (III. ii. 102) and thus brings disaster to those who choose it. He must not give the appearance of being in pursuit of gold; only by making the apparently unmercenary choice of lead will he gain the treasure. On opening the leaden casket he finds an image of his fleece in the form of the 'golden mesh' of Portia's hair (III. ii. 122). Once Bassanio's quest is fulfilled, his friend Graziano rounds off the comparison that was introduced in the first scene: 'We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece'.[35] Just to make it absolutely clear that in the minds of these men, coming as they do from the mercantile world of Venice, 'the fleece' denotes treasure more than beauty or virtue, Salerio replies, 'I would you had won the fleece that he hath lost', a reference to the wealth contained in Antonio's ships. The success of Bassanio and his friend as Argonauts is nothing more than a means of compensation for the loss of Antonio's argosies.

Portia, meanwhile, has read Bassanio as Hercules:

> Now he goes,
> With no less presence but with much more love
> Than young Alcides when he did redeem
> The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
> To the sea-monster. I stand for sacrifice.
> The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,
> With blearèd visages come forth to view
> The issue of th'exploit. Go, Hercules.
> (III. ii. 53–60)

She is romantically construing the moment of Bassanio's choice as the heroic one in which Hercules rescued Hesione from the sea-

[35] III. ii. 239. This is a suggestive echo of Ithamore's 'I'll be thy Jason, thou my golden fleece' in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, to which '*The Merchant* or otherwise called *The Jew of Venice*', as it was called in the Stationers' Register, alludes in so many ways. Ithamore's speech is an extraordinary one in which the slave and the courtesan become parodies of both Ovidian ('I'll be Adonis, thou shalt be Love's Queen') and Marlovian ('Shalt live with me and be my love') lovers (IV. ii. 92–102).

monster to which she had been sacrificed in order to save Troy (Shakespeare would have known this story from Book Eleven of the *Metamorphoses*).

But Bassanio promptly distances himself from Hercules, remarking that many men are cowardly at heart yet wear 'upon their chins | The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars' (III. ii. 84–5). He'd rather rely on Jason's cunning than Hercules' strength. His detachment of himself from Hercules is part of the argument about not trusting external appearances which enables him to see that gold was 'Hard food for Midas' and that he should therefore not do the obvious thing and choose the golden casket. Bassanio is simply not the heroic figure whom Portia imagines. His chosen model was one of the least heroic heroes in the mythological pantheon: Jason's labours in obtaining the fleece, such as encountering bulls who are all bellow and no bite, are a poor, even a parodic, version of those of Hercules.

Jason is a troubling precedent in another respect. He has the dubious distinction of being the recipient of two letters from deserted lovers in the *Heroides*: number six is from Hypsipyle, whom he deserted for Medea, and twelve is from Medea, whom he deserted for Creusa.[36] As Helen of Troy says in her letter, 'False Jason promised all things to Medea—was she the less thrust forth from the house of Aeson?' (*Her.* xvii. 229–30, 'omnia Medeae fallax promisit Iason— | pulsa est Aesonia num minus illa domo?'). Jason is *fallax Iason*, an archetype of male deceit and infidelity. That he will later be unfaithful to Medea, as Bassanio is symbolically unfaithful to Portia in the act of giving away her ring, does not make one sanguine as to the husbands' future conduct in the imaginary afterlife of the play's characters. Graziano has the last words on stage, and in them he harps on the idea of 'keeping safe Nerissa's ring' (V. i. 307). 'Ring' puns on the slang for female genitals, thus implying the husbands' proprietorial guarding of their wives' chastity and their fear of female infidelity. But, like the business of the rings, the allusions to Jason, which Graziano shares with Bassanio, suggest that what is really open to question is the future conduct of the men.

Does Bassanio's self-identification as Jason implicitly make Portia into Medea as well as the fleece? Certain resemblances may be

[36] In the context of the *Heroides* as a whole, Jason's position is unique: the only other man to receive two letters is Paris, but the second of these, from Helen, is one of the paired letters towards the end—the relationships where there is a reply are of a different order from those in which the only speaker is the deserted woman.

adduced. The great interior monologue early in Book Seven of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Medea's reason battles with her passion, could be read as a precedent for the speech with which Portia begins the scene in which Bassanio has to make his choice of casket. Like Medea, she struggles to suppress her love in a fragmented syntax that is mimetic of her divided mind: 'There's something tells me—but it is not love— | I would not lose you'.[37] It could possibly be argued that as Medea assists Jason to the fleece by giving him enchanted herbs to charm the bulls, so Portia assists Bassanio to the correct casket and hence the fleece by dropping him a hint in the words of the song that is sung while he is making his decision ('ding, dong, bell' meaning 'choose the thing that's made of lead'). In the trial scene Portia proves herself to be a verbal magician; she works a kind of magic to renew the life of Antonio, who perceives himself as 'a tainted wether of the flock, | Meetest for death' (IV. i. 13–14) and might therefore be thought of as equivalent to the ageing Aeson whose life is renewed by Medea. But these connections are tenuous: the story of Aeson is not explicitly alluded to in connection with Portia. In fact it is displaced into the play's other plot.

Lorenzo and Jessica's exchanges at the beginning of the final act sound to innocent ears like lyrical evocations of great lovers past:

> —in such a night
> Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,
> And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents
> Where Cressid lay that night.
> —In such a night
> Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew
> And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,
> And ran dismayed away.
> —In such a night
> Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
> Upon the wild sea banks, and waft her love
> To come again to Carthage.
> —In such a night
> Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
> That did renew old Aeson.
> (V. i. 3–14)

[37] *Merchant*, III. ii. 4–5. For a wide-ranging account of the influence of the interior monologues of the *Metamorphoses* on the Shakespearian soliloquy, see J. W. Velz, 'The Ovidian Soliloquy in Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Studies*, XVIII (1986), 1–24, a fine article which is especially persuasive on Angelo in *Measure for Measure*.

But to the mythologically literate members of Shakespeare's audience, these allusions would have been shot through with irony every bit as sharp as that of the subsequent exchanges in which Lorenzo speaks of stealing Jessica, Jessica of Lorenzo's 'many vows of faith | And ne'er a true one', and Lorenzo of Jessica's slandering and shrewishness (17–22). It is hardly auspicious that at this moment of union and harmony the lovers compare themselves to Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Dido and Aeneas. Cressida is probably lying with Diomede as Troilus mounts the walls; Pyramus and Thisbe will soon be dead; Aeneas will not return to Carthage. Furthermore, 'Dido with a willow in her hand', signalling to the departing ship in the vain hope that she will be remembered, closely echoes an image in the lament of another woman deserted by her lover, Ariadne left on Naxos by the promiscuous Theseus in the *Heroides*.[38]

But most sinister of all is 'In such a night | Medea gathered the enchanted herbs | That did renew old Aeson'. At first glance this might seem to be an image of regeneration, perhaps a suggestion that old Shylock will come to accept his daughter's marriage and be given a new life. But what was the consequence of Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson? In Book Seven of the *Metamorphoses*—and it is unquestionable that Shakespeare was thinking of the *Metamorphoses* here, for the words 'enchanted herbs' and 'renew' are lifted from Golding's translation of the passage[39]—we learn that it was prelude to a peculiarly violent act: having rejuvenated Aeson by boiling him in a cauldron with those magic herbs, she gave the daughters of Pelias the opportunity to submit their father to the same process, but this time left out the key ingredients and thus killed Pelias. By activating Medea's destructive magic here, Shakespeare is contaminating a superficially lyrical interlude with a precursor text which is marked by bodily dismemberment that perhaps reawakens Shylock's demand for his pound of flesh (Ovid has a clinical description of the bleeding of Pelias). What is more, the image of Medea gathering ingredients for

[38] 'iactatae late signa dedere manus; | candidaque imposui longae velamina virgae— | scilicet oblitos admonitura mei!' (*Her.* x. 40–2, 'I sent you signals with my hands; and upon a long tree-branch I fixed my shining veil—of course to bring me to the memory of those who had forgotten'). I do not see why Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is given special prominence in discussions of this scene (see e.g. the fnn. in John Russell Brown's 1955 Arden edn.)—Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson, for instance, is in Ovid but not Chaucer.

[39] 'chaunted herbes', 'renew': Golding, vii. 204,381.

her cauldron evokes a world of witchcraft akin to that of Shakespearian tragedy, not comedy—her nocturnal gatherings are also of ingredients like those of the weird sisters. 'I would outnight you, did nobody come', Jessica concludes the exchange: the outnightings have by this time become associated not with love, but with desertions, dark deeds, and death.

In his allusion to Ovid's Orpheus (Ovid having become 'the poet'), Lorenzo seeks to distance the associations of darkness by appealing to the harmonizing power of music:

> Therefore the poet
> Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods,
> Since naught so stockish, hard, and full of rage
> But music for the time doth change his nature.
> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
> And his affections dark as Erebus.
>
> (v. i. 79–87)

Poetry and music are elided here and a creative metamorphic power is claimed for them: they soften hard hearts, bring concord and animation. One thinks forward to the drawing of stone to life when music strikes in *The Winter's Tale*. Leonard Barkan writes that Ovid's presence is signalled in Lorenzo's speech by the word *change*,

> and in that change the matter of Ovid has been transformed into a complete world-picture, from the sensual accidents of individual loves to the universals of cosmic harmony. That is, of course, the range of the *Metamorphoses* itself. But it is viewed through a special Renaissance rose-colored glass, like that of Titian's *Bacchanale of the Andrians*. Antiquity is seen as a golden world, in which beauty and sensuality are not subject to accident but contribute to a universal harmony.[40]

This is beautiful and just. It is a way of saying that Ovid and metamorphosis help to bring the golden world of Shakespearian comedy to resolution in cosmic harmony. But what it leaves out is an acknowledgement of the fictiveness of the golden world and a sense of the precariousness of the resolution. The phrase of Lorenzo's which it passes over is 'for the time': the harmony is only momentary. Time

[40] *The Gods Made Flesh*, 272.

then moves on, as it does in Rosalind/Ganymede's ungolden anatomy of its crawl and gallop in *As You Like It*. For a moment our ears will be touched by the sweet music of the 'In such a night' exchanges; but a moment later comes the dissonance, as we see that the lovers invoked are far from exemplary.

Lorenzo begins his speech with the concord, but he cannot altogether banish the treasons, stratagems, and affections dark as Erebus. They are there at the end of the speech, just as they are there with the off-stage malevolence of Shylock and in the implications of the comparison between Bassanio and Jason. And they are there in the very allusion to Orpheus, which brings not only his music but also his association with Erebus. It is to the gods of Erebus ('deos Erebi') that Orpheus complains after Eurydice's second death and immediately before he touches his strings and moves the trees (*Met.* x. 76). Shakespearian comedy supposes that Eurydice really can be led out of the underworld—one thinks of the supposed death and supposedly miraculous restoration of Hero, of Helena, of Thaisa, of Hermione—but it also recognizes that its resolutions are only a suppose.

IV

In the tradition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Lyly's *Gallathea*, *As You Like It* is another comedy in which the wood is mediated through Ovid. The old Duke and his fellow-exiles in Arden 'fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world' (i. i. 112–13). In his commentary on Book One of the *Metamorphoses*, George Sandys crystallizes the Renaissance interpretation of the Golden Age, which will also be of great significance in *The Tempest*:

> Then was there neither Master nor Servant: names meerly brought in by ambition and injury. Unforced Nature gave sufficient to all; who securely possest her undivided bounty. A rich condition wherein no man was poore: Avarice after introduced indigency: who by coveting a propriety, alienated all; and lost what it had, by seeking to inlarge it. But this happy estate abounding with all felicities, assuredly represented that which man injoyed in his innocency: under the raigne of *Saturne*, more truly of *Adam*.[41]

As You Like It opens with the relationship between a master and a servant, who is named Adam as if to evoke Eden, the Christian

[41] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 25.

equivalent of the golden world; with the move into Arden, Adam ceases to play the role of a servant and is treated with civility, waited upon by nobles. In Arden, the Duke laughs off 'The penalty of Adam, | The seasons' difference' (II. i. 5–6)—Ovid describes in Book One how the varying seasons come with the end of the Golden Age in which it was perpetual spring 'and *Zephyr* with his milde | And gentle blast did cherish things that grew of owne accorde' (Golding, i. 122–3). But although the Duke claims that he and his fellows do not feel the harsher seasons, 'the icy fang | And churlish chiding of the winter's wind' (II. i. 6–7) does blow through Arden. The play does not suppose that the Golden Age, with its perpetual mild zephyrs and gentle blasts, can be restored. It is uncompromising in its confrontation of those twin phenomena from which the Golden Age was imagined to be free: property (linguistically synonymous with 'propriety') and alienation (legal exclusion from property). To be exiled from the court to the forest is to be alienated, as Celia recognizes: 'But what will you be called? | Something that hath a reference to my state. | No longer Celia, but Aliena' (I. iii. 125–7). Corin does not live in Golden Age idleness; he is denied the *otium* of soft pastoral and is sold and bought along with the property of which he is tenant.

But the Duke's point is that the pains of the forest are as nothing compared with the perils of the envious court. The adversities of Arden can be transformed for positive ends. Nature, like the book of Ovid, can be read morally: 'Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, | Sermons in stones, and good in everything' (II. i. 16–17). One of the lessons to be learnt is the need to empathize with nature: as Ovid shows what it might be like to be a hunted hart or bear and ends his book with Pythagoras making the case for vegetarianism, so the Duke laments the necessity of killing deer for food and Jaques anthropomorphizes the poor sequestered stag. The fact that this does not stop the exiled lords celebrating the slaughter of a deer in the fourth act is another mark that they remain of the court and that this is not really the Golden Age—if it were, they would be living 'by Raspis, heppes and hawes, by cornelles, plummes and cherries, | By sloes and apples, nuttes and peares, and lothsome bramble berries' (Golding, i. 119–20). The Golden Age is exposed as a fiction, but it is nevertheless morally and socially enabling, in that it serves as a critique of the values of the court.

To go to Arden is also to go to Ovid in his capacity as 'praeceptor amoris'. Erotic love is a form of opposition to the court, which depends on dynastic liaisons and parental control. As the character of Aliena points out in Lodge's *Rosalynde*, sexual love transcends the barriers of rank: 'Experience tells thee, that Peasaunts have theyr passions as well as Princes, that Swaynes, as they have their labours, so they have theyr amours, and Love lurkes assoone about a Sheepcoate, as a Pallaice' (Bullough, ii. 224). The celebration of sexuality is accordingly a risky matter. The writing of the *Ars Amatoria* was one of the reasons for Ovid's exile from Rome; Marlowe's translation of the *Amores* was among the books banned and burned by episcopal order at the time when Shakespeare was writing *As You Like It*. Tranio nails his colours to the mast of love in *The Taming of the Shrew* by saying that Ovid should not be made an 'outcast'. To allude to the *Ars Amatoria*, as Lucentio and Bianca do, is to throw in one's lot with transgression. In *As You Like It*, it is by becoming outcasts from the court that Rosalind and Orlando can refine the art of love. As Ganymede, Rosalind becomes a 'praeceptor amoris', her sexual pragmatism as down-to-earth and her wit as sharp as they are in Ovid himself ('men are April when they woo, December when they wed; maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives'—IV. i. 139–41). Here power is given over to those who do not usually have it: the character who dominates the discourse is imagined simultaneously as a woman and a Ganymede—the name which served as Elizabethan slang for a catamite like Gaveston, alluding to the lovely boy for whom Jove/Jupiter (by whose name Rosalind/Ganymede keeps on swearing) was fired with love in Book Ten of the *Metamorphoses*.[42]

Touchstone explicitly reads the characters' exile in relation to Ovid's: 'I am here with thee and thy goats, as the most capricious poet honest Ovid was among the Goths' (III. iii. 5–6). There was some confusion in the Renaissance as to whether the barbaric tribe who inhabited Tomis on the Black Sea where Ovid was exiled were Getes or Goths, but whichever they were it was agreed that they would have been incapable of appreciating the poet's witty writings. Ovid makes that complaint himself and Touchstone echoes him in his reference to a man's verses not being understood.[43] In *Pierce Pennilesse*, Thomas

[42] x. 155–61. The word 'catamite' is in fact a corrupt form of 'Ganymede'; *OED*'s first usage is Drayton, 1593.

[43] *Tristia*, III. xiv. 39–40, IV. i. 89–90, V. xii. 53–4; also *Ex Ponto*, IV. ii. 15–38, though I have found no evidence that Shakespeare knew this work.

Nashe makes the encounter between Ovid and the Getes into the equivalent of reasoning with a man who wants only to drink beer: '*Ovid* might as well have read his verses to the *Getes* that understood him not, as a man talk reason to them that have no eares, but their mouths, nor sense but of that which they swallowe downe their throates' (*Works*, i. 180). Touchstone puns on the 'goats' of Audrey and on 'capricious' ('caper/capri', the goat, aligned with the capriciousness of Ovid's verbal play) with a wit that makes him into the equivalent of the banished Ovid. His 'honest Ovid' displaces the epithet: the court fool and the Roman poet are cunning sophisticates among 'honest' or simple country folk. But Touchstone benignly rewrites Ovid's fate: where the exiled poet was reduced to penning his *Tristia*, sad letters home to his wife and the emperor whose favour he had lost, the banished fool makes the best of things and marries a native of the forest. The play's vision of multiple marriage is large enough to include the conjunction of a court figure whose very foolishness is a mark of his sophistication and a goatherd from the very bottom of the social scale. One can only assume at the end of the play that places will change, bringing the goatherd to court and leaving a courtier, Jaques, in the forest.

It is Jaques who recognizes that the handy-dandy affects the social order. His exasperated reply to Touchstone's punning allusion to Ovid is 'O knowledge ill-inhabited; worse than Jove in a thatched house!' (III. iii. 7–8). The comparison flips from Ovid's life to his work. Its significance becomes apparent if we recollect *Much Ado About Nothing*'s image of descent from high to low in the context of wooing: when Don Pedro courts Hero at the ball on behalf of Claudio, he says, 'My visor is Philemon's roof; within the house is Jove', to which Hero replies, 'Why, then, your visor should be thatched' (II. i. 88–9). The allusion is to the encounter of the supreme god and humble humans when the disguised Jove is entertained in what Golding called the cottage 'thatched all with straw and fennish reede' of Baucis and Philemon (viii. 806). The hospitality exercised by this aged couple in their poverty-stricken home indicates that true nobility is not a matter of good birth. The theory of degree carries with it the assumption that well-born people behave well, basely-born ones basely. The pastoral virtues of Baucis and Philemon, and of Corin in the play, overturn this assumption. When Orlando arrives in the forest he expects to find barbarity, but he is greeted with civility: in giving food to old Adam, the Duke and his courtiers mirror the hospitality of Baucis and

Philemon, and the audience sees that Arden has begun its healing work.

As You Like It makes the court learn from the country, those of high degree learn from those of low. But the ending is different from Ovid's characteristic one. Where Baucis and Philemon are rewarded by Jove granting them their wish, and the problem of gender in the Iphis and Ianthe story (discussed in my first chapter) is solved by divine intervention, love's metamorphosis in Shakespeare's play is wrought by human agency. It is Rosalind who grants the wishes. Hymen is invoked and appears, as at the wedding of Iphis and Ianthe (*Met.* ix. 762–97), but his descent in *As You Like It* is more performance than theophany: the god is meant to be seen as an actor, for Rosalind is orchestrating the script. The Iphis and Ianthe story ends with the setting up of a tablet inscribed with the text '*The vowes that Iphys vowd a wench, he hath performd a Lad*' (Golding, ix. 933); its purpose is to give thanks to Juno, Venus, and Hymen for the transformation which has allowed this to happen. In *As You Like It*, it is Rosalind herself who sets up the multiple marriage vows and brings them to fruition. In this shift whereby metamorphosis comes from within the human world, thus dispensing with the magic of myth, the play anticipates the late romances, notably *The Winter's Tale*, in which Ovidian myth is recast in the form of Shakespearian metadrama.

As in *The Winter's Tale*, the resolution to which the metadrama steers the action is one in which the social order is upheld. Shepherdesses are not finally allowed to marry well-born characters; Touchstone will ditch Audrey a few months after returning to the court. The virtues of Baucis and Philemon can be read as an affirmation of degree just as easily as an overturning of it: they are 'the patternes of chast and constant conjugall affections: as of content in poverty; who make it easy by bearing it chearfully. A condition as full of innocency, as security: and no meane blessing, if wee could but thinke so.'[44] The reversion from the licence of Arden to the reaffirmation of orthodoxy in Shakespeare's comic endings is perhaps one mark of his political cautiousness—he does seem to have been about the only major dramatist of his age never to have been imprisoned or censured for his work. That caution is also apparent in the way that the Ovidianism of the comedies is political in a broadly conceptual, not a narrowly topical, sense. Save possibly in the case of

[44] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 295.

the love-in-idleness passage of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, discussed in the previous section, Shakespearian comedy eschews the sort of specific historical allegory which Spenser deployed. Belphoebe in *The Faerie Queene* is at once Ovid's Diana and Queen Elizabeth. Phoebe in *As You Like It* is neither.

That the *Metamorphoses* could be used as a vehicle for contemporary political comment in the drama around the time that Shakespeare was writing his mature comedies is apparent from Ben Jonson's play, *Cynthia's Revels; or, The Fountain of Self-Love*, which was performed at court on Twelfth Night in January 1601. Jonson, writing for the Children of the Royal Chapel and the sophisticated Blackfriars and court audiences, works in an overtly mythological and allegorical mode; like Lyly before him, he has Ovidian characters playing major parts on stage. Indeed, the play was entered in the Stationers' Register with the title 'Narcissus, or the fountaine of selfe love'. In the first act, Echo speaks a lament beside the fountain in which Narcissus drowned while trying to kiss his own reflection. But the location of the scene introduces another myth: it is set in the vale of *Gargaphie*, sacred to Diana, in which Actaeon was torn to pieces. The character of Cupid explains that it is in celebration of Actaeon's destruction that Cynthia ('Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana', as Spenser reminds us)[45] has ordered the revels: 'The Huntresse, and Queene of these groves, DIANA (in regard of some black and envious slanders hourely breath'd against her, for her divine justice on ACTEON, as shee pretends) hath here in the vale of Gargaphy, proclaim'd a solemne revells' (I. i. 91–5). This demands to be read as a topical allegory: the Queen will reassert her power and benevolence in order to stem the tide of discontent in the wake of the Earl of Essex's fall from grace. The context of this is the fact that the play was performed in the tense period between Essex's banishment to his house in 1600 and his attempted *coup d'état* in 1601. Actaeon peeping at the naked Diana thus becomes a representation of the Essex who, on his return from Ireland in 1599, had burst into the Queen's chamber in his riding-habit (Actaeon's dress) while she had 'her hair about her face'. The moment was 'as near an approach as an Elizabethan mortal was likely to make to gazing on "Cynthia's naked loveliness" '.[46] In the fifth act, Cynthia becomes Elizabeth, justifying her severity in

[45] 'A letter of the Author[']s . . . to . . . Sir Walter Raleigh', prefixed to *The Faerie Queene*.

[46] Herford and Simpson, in *Ben Jonson*, i. 395.

banishing Essex from the court. His Actaeon-like peep into her chamber was no small matter:

> Seemes it no crime, to enter sacred bowers,
> And hallowed places, with impure aspect,
> Most lewdly to pollute? Seemes it no crime,
> To brave a *deitie?*
>
> (v. xi. 19–22)

The full political force of the Actaeon myth in the Renaissance may be discerned from Sandys's commentary on Book Three: 'But this fable was invented to shew us how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of Princes, or by chance to discover their nakednesse: who thereby incurring their hatred, ever after live the life of a Hart, full of feare and suspicion.'[47] Sandys then makes a crucial move from the fate of Actaeon to that of Ovid himself: 'Some such unhappy discovery procured the banishment of our *Ovid*.' In making the link between the myth and the poet's own transgression—the scandal ('error'), whatever it was, impinging upon the royal household—Sandys is following the precedent of Ovid himself. Inserted in the commentary on the *Metamorphoses* at this point is a translation of a passage from the *Tristia* written during Ovid's exile. It is the same passage as that cited by Thomas Watson in the headnote to 'Actaeon lost in middle of his sport':

> Why had I sight to make mine eye my foe?
> Or why did I unsought-for secrets knowe?
> *Actaeon* naked *Dian* unaware
> So saw; and so his hounds their master tare.
> The Gods sure punish fortune for offence:
> Nor, when displeased, will with chance dispence.
> (*Trist.* ii. 103–8, trans. Sandys)

'Guard we therefore our eyes; nor desire to see, or knowe more then concernes us: or at least dissemble the discovery', Sandys concludes from this, citing the case of Julius Montanus, put to death after meeting the emperor Nero in the dark.

But the Renaissance mythologist is driven by a restless desire to adduce multiple interpretations: 'But why may not this fable receave a double construction? Those being the best that admit of most

[47] *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 100. Subsequent quotations from Sandys in this and next paragraphs are from the same page.

senses.' In the case of Actaeon, the text of the *Metamorphoses* itself invites double construction, since Ovid ends the tale with its audience arguing about how to interpret it:

> Much muttring was upon this fact. Some thought there was extended
> A great deale more extremitie than neded. Some commended
> *Dianas* doing: saying that it was but worthely
> For safegarde of hir womanhod. Eche partie did applie
> Good reasons to defende their case.
>
> (Golding, iii. 305–9)

Sandys accordingly reads the story of Actaeon in a variety of ways. '*Actaeon*, neglecting the pursuite of virtue and heroicall actions, puts off the minde of a man, and degenerates into a beast': this offers the traditional moralization to which so many of Ovid's stories were submitted. But then the hounds who destroy Actaeon are 'ravenous and riotous sycophants: who have often exhausted the Exchequors of opulent Princes, and reduced them to extreame necessity': here Sandys introduces a distinctive twist on the political reading. Read morally, Actaeon is a general representation of illicit sexual desire; read politically, he is a specific representation of both the over-ambitious courtier and the over-opulent Prince.

But Shakespeare does not politicize the Actaeon story in the manner of Jonson or Sandys. Consider the play to which the figure of Actaeon is especially relevant, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. With its clear allusion to the ceremonies associated with the Order of the Garter, this, if any, is a Shakespearian comedy with opportunities for myth to be read topically. But the opportunity is not taken. When Falstaff wears the horns, Actaeon is made to coalesce not with the contemporary court but with folk culture, with the native tradition of Herne the Hunter and the ritual mockeries of the mummers' play.[48] And the primary reading demanded by the play's allusions to Actaeon, both verbal and visual, is the traditional moralization in terms of self-destructive male sexual desire. His hart's horns come to symbolize cuckoldry. Pistol proposes this reading as a way of stirring the obsessively jealous Ford:

[48] On the fusion of classical and folk motifs, see François Laroque, 'Ovidian Transformations and Folk Festivities in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *As You Like It*', *Cahiers Elisabéthains*, xxv (1984), 23–36, and *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge, 1991), 266–7, 382.

> FORD. Love my wife?
> PISTOL. With liver burning hot. Prevent,
> Or go thou like Sir Actaeon, he,
> With Ringwood at thy heels.
> O, odious is the name!
> FORD. What name, sir.
> PISTOL. The horn, I say. Farewell.
> (*Merry Wives*, II. i. 111–17)

The joke on Falstaff is that he is made to wear the horns of a cuckold without even having a wife in the first place. His entrance with a buck's head is the nearest Shakespeare comes to metamorphosing one of his characters into one of Ovid's. As John Steadman perceives in an excellent article, 'Except for one comic variation—Sir John's obesity—there is a point-by-point correspondence between his disguise as Herne the Hunter and the standard Renaissance picture of Actaeon as a composite figure with stag's head, human body, and hunter's clothing.'[49] Visually, Falstaff resembles Actaeon in the process of being metamorphosed; his pinching at the hands of the children dressed as fairies is a comic nemesis that playfully revises the savaging of Actaeon by his own hounds. The audience knows that Falstaff will not really suffer the fate of Actaeon: he has time to pull off his Windsor stag's head whilst a noise of hunting is heard within. The real hounds won't get him. In Shakespeare's most local comedy, it is sufficient for the sexual adventurer to be bruised and humiliated, for the myth of auto-destructive desire to be domesticated.

Falstaff does not, however, perceive himself as Actaeon. He has another precedent for his transformation into a stag, and this takes us back to the general, non-topical, sense in which the Ovidianism of Shakespeare's comedies is political.

> The Windsor bell hath struck twelve; the minute draws on. Now the hot-blooded gods assist me! Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa; love set on thy horns. O powerful love, that in some respects makes a beast a man; in some other, a man a beast! You were also, Jupiter, a swan, for the love of Leda. O omnipotent love! How near the god drew to the complexion of a goose! A fault done first in the form of a beast—O Jove, a beastly fault!—and then another fault in the semblance of a fowl—think on't, Jove, a foul fault! When gods have hot backs, what shall poor men do? (v. v. 1–13)

[49] John M. Steadman, 'Falstaff as Actaeon: A Dramatic Emblem', *SQ* xiv (1963), 230–44, repr. in his *Nature into Myth: Medieval and Renaissance Moral Symbols* (Pittsburgh, 1979), ch. 8 (p. 118).

Part of the joke is that the audience sees Falstaff's horns as Actaeon's, whereas he sees them as Jove's. But he is more like Jove than Actaeon in that the animal form is his chosen disguise, not a state he is forced into. As in Falstaff's monologues on honour and on sack at corresponding positions to this in the two parts of *Henry IV* (in each of three plays, he soliloquizes in the field before some sort of violent encounter), there is wisdom here as well as self-deception. Love disrupts degree: it may make a god or a man into a beast, but since in some respects it makes a beast a man, it may by implication make men godlike—consider Antony and Cleopatra's vision of their love. As the scene unfolds, Falstaff suffers indignity, but he is just in his claim that he is in venerable company: Jupiter, king of the gods, was drawn by his love for Leda to become a swan, and a swan is very nearly a goose. Dignity, the propriety of the great chain of being, could hardly be ruffled more comprehensively than that. Ovid, it may be noted, did in fact draw a goose to the complexion of a god, when the 'unicus anser' of Baucis and Philemon recognizes the divine presence before the humans do.[50]

'When gods have hot backs, what shall poor men do?' is one of Falstaff's great cries for human tolerance. It is comparable to 'If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned' (*1 Henry IV*, II. v. 475–7). The context of the latter is the demand that plump Jack should not be banished, that room must be kept for the body, for misrule, for all that is in opposition to the values of the Lord Chief Justice. It is a deeply subversive demand, and one which Prince Hal knows he must reject if order is to be maintained in the state. But it is a demand which the spirit of comedy always makes. The Falstaffian voice coalesces here with the Ovidian. Hal's model is in a sense Virgil's *Aeneid*, which says that in the name of historical destiny and the establishment of a new imperial nation, love (Dido) must regretfully be rejected. Ovid replies to Virgil as Falstaff justifies himself in Windsor forest: how can you expect men to reject love when the gods do not? The comprehensive catalogue of divine promiscuity of which the *Metamorphoses* is comprised makes the philandering of Falstaff and even that of the *Ars Amatoria* look like chicken-feed—fowl matter not foul matter, as Falstaff would put it. 'When gods have hot backs, what

[50] Baucis and Philemon are about to kill their only goose and it flies to their visitors for protection; the latter then reveal themselves as Jupiter and Mercury (*Met.* viii. 684–90).

shall poor men do?': Authority has no answer to this question. So Ovid is banished, Falstaff is banished.

Banishment is a recurring motif in Shakespeare. Touchstone's association of exile with 'Ovid among the Goths' raises the question of whether other Shakespearian banishments are keyed to Ovid. The language of exile in the first act of *Richard II* seems to echo that of the *Tristia*, with its emphasis on 'frozen winters' spent in banishment and separation from the native tongue.[51] But, save for Falstaff's, the most celebrated banishment is Romeo's. And here the association with Ovid, at least in the mind of one contemporary, is decisive. In a scene in *Poetaster* (1601) which veers notoriously between lyricism and parody, Ben Jonson rewrote the parting of Romeo and Juliet in the form of the parting between Ovid and the emperor's daughter, Julia. The Renaissance tendency to read the *Amores* autobiographically reinforces the association: all the poems are assumed to be addressed to Corinna and Corinna is assumed to be Julia, so I. xiii, the prime source for the genre of aubade (the lover's complaint to the rising sun),[52] is read in the context of Ovid and Julia. It follows that, by entering into that genre, the dawn parting in *Romeo and Juliet* is asking to be read in the tradition of Ovid and Julia.

Jonson's Julia 'appeareth above, as at her chamber window'. She begins, 'Ovid? my love?', to which he replies, 'Here, heavenly Julia'. But he is below where she is above (as in the first balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*), a visualization of their separation in rank; she is thus led to the confusion of 'Here? and not here?'. A series of near-departures and returns climaxes in

> OVID. Yet Julia, if thou wilt,
> A little longer, stay. JULIA. I am content.
> OVID. O, mightie Ovid! what the sway of heaven
> Could not retire, my breath hath turned back.[53]

In *Richard II* it is the 'breath of kings' that banishes or revokes

[51] Compare, for instance, the 'Six frozen winters', 'frosty Caucasus', and 'December snow' of *Richard II*, I. iii. 204, 258, 261 with Ovid's 'longius hac nihil est, nisi tantum frigus et hostes, | et maris adstricto quae coit unda gelu' ('nothing is farther away than this land except only the cold and the enemy and the sea whose waters congeal with the frost'—*Tristia*, ii. 195–6). These associations are pursued by Jeremy Maule in an as yet unpublished paper, 'Banishing Ovid'.

[52] Donne's 'The Sunne Rising' is only the most famous of the many Renaissance imitations of this poem.

[53] Quotations from IV. ix.

banishment; here the breath of the poet momentarily transcends his political fate. But it is only a moment, for Ovid then goes into exile as punishment for the liaison with Julia and for staging a wanton mythological pageant before the eyes of Augustus Caesar.

Poetaster as a whole is a critique of what Jonson saw as two kinds of false poetry, and a defence of what he took to be the true moral and civic function of the art. Because of interest in the so-called 'war of the theatres' of the first years of the seventeenth century, criticism has attended primarily to the attack on the poetry of detraction associated with Marston and Dekker (represented as Crispinus and Demetrius).[54] The other sort of false poetry is that associated with Ovid. At the beginning of the play, the character of Ovid seems to represent true poetry. The action begins with him speaking the lines on immortality which conclude the first book of the *Amores*: 'Then, when this bodie falls in funerall fire, | My name shall live, and my best part aspire' (I. i. 1–2, translating I. xv. 41–2). A little later, he recites the whole of *Amores*, I. xv, in a translation which Jonson adapted from Marlowe's. Ovid defends the vocation of poetry against his father's desire that he should pursue a career in the law, and Jonson is clearly in sympathy with this defence, as he is with Lorenzo Junior's similar one in *Every Man in his Humour*. Unlike the lawyer, the poet is morally independent, seeking for fame not place: Ovid refuses to 'prostitute [his] voyce in everie cause' (I. i. 48). But the play argues that he goes wrong in following the path of love. A humanist education should lead to possession of the self, whereas Ovid loses himself in the labyrinth of love. He perverts the power of poetry by staging a sensual banquet which celebrates sexual desire instead of the *civis*—indeed, his show proposes that all hierarchies are overthrown by love and appears to conclude by advocating mass adultery. Poetry, says Augustus, should praise the gods and teach and eternize virtue, whereas Ovid, he proclaims, has profaned the gods and reduced virtue to something 'painted'. His kind of poetry is 'idle' and hence politically dangerous.

Jonson collapses the whole history of Augustan poetry into a single action. Once Ovid is exiled, Virgil is brought on as an example of the true poet who practises decorum and celebrates piety, honour, and the best traditions of Rome. A translation from the *Aeneid* pushes aside

[54] Though see Eugene M. Waith, 'The Poet's Morals in Jonson's *Poetaster*', *MLQ* xii (1951), 13–19, and James D. Mulvihill, 'Jonson's *Poetaster* and the Ovidian Debate', *SEL* xxii (1982), 239–55.

that from the *Amores* which began the play, replacing Ovid's assertion of the love-poet's immortality with an image of ill fame (many-tongued Rumour), a 'monster' who is as covetous 'of tales and lies' as she is 'prodigall of truth' (v. ii. 97–8, from *Aeneid*, iv. 188). The passage in question concerns Dido, the type of erotic love whom Virgil's Aeneas rejects in the name of his political destiny, but whom Ovid defended when he rewrote the most celebrated part of *The Aeneid* in *Heroides*, Letter 7. *Poetaster* as a whole thus follows the line of Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Governour*, that classic of political humanism: Virgil is the pre-eminent model, whereas Ovid is distinctly problematic, for there is little learning in him 'concerning either virtuous manners or policy', his *Amores* contain nothing 'but incitation to lechery', and time spent reading him would 'be better employed on such authors that do minister both eloquence, civil policy, and exhortation to virtue. Wherefore in his place let us bring in Horace, in whom is contained much variety of learning and quickness of sentence.'[55] For Jonson, the danger of Ovid and Catullus is that much of their work does not exhort to virtue in the manner of Horace and Virgil. It offers instead incitements to sexual vice—it is with the language of first Catullus and then the *Metamorphoses* that Volpone attempts to seduce and rape the chaste Celia.

Jonson's learned humanism assumes that ancient Rome provides *exempla* which are applicable to his own times. Given this, the attack on Ovid in *Poetaster* must also be an attack on 1590s Ovidianism, just as the arraignment of Crispinus is an indictment of Marston. Jonson's own position is clearly identified with the decorum of Horace and his ideal for the function of poetry is the Augustanism of Virgil. The latter has plausibly though not conclusively been identified with Chapman,[56] who was himself a notable critic of the erotic reading of Ovid which predominated in the 1590s. His continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* morally corrects the poem by introducing an allegory which argues that love must be sanctified by Ceremony.[57] And where most Ovidian poems indulge the senses—Shakespeare's Venus works through a banquet of seeing, hearing, touching,

[55] Elyot, *The Book named The Governor* (1531), ed. S. E. Lehmberg (London, 1962), 32, 47.

[56] See the discussion in Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, i. 433–5.

[57] For Chapman's continuation as a moralizing development, even a 'correction', of *Hero and Leander*, see D. J. Gordon's essay, 'The Renaissance Poet as Classicist', in his *The Renaissance Imagination*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), 102–33.

smelling, and tasting (433–45)—Chapman's *Ovids Banquet of Sence* demands to be read either as a transmutation of the Ovidian erotic into the higher mode of Neoplatonic spirituality or as an assault on Ovid and the 1590s Ovidians for not making such an ascent.[58] Jonson is in accord with Chapman, as his Horace is with his Virgil. The Ovid of *Poetaster* is initially identifiable as a poet like Marlowe, who rejected the career for which his Cambridge education had prepared him and gave himself over to erotic verse-making, beginning with a translation of the *Amores*. But relations between Jonson and Shakespeare's company were not good at this time, so, given the status of *Venus and Adonis* as a showpiece of erotic Ovidianism, the celebration of the Ovidian labyrinth of love in Shakespeare's comedies, and the clear correspondence between Ovid and Julia and *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a strong case for reading the character of Ovid as Jonson's composite representation of Marlowe and Shakespeare.

Even if absolute identifications are resisted, there can be no doubt that Shakespeare was a prime mover in the 1590s Ovidian tradition which *Poetaster* is rejecting. That rejection is at once moral, political, and aesthetic. The banquet of senses in the fourth act, devised by Ovid with Mercury as his master of the revels, destabilizes both the political and the moral order as both gods and royals are made fools of love. It offers a poetics of play, not of edification. Shakespearian comedy does the same. Traditional orders are re-established in the endings, but for the duration of the action a space has been opened up in which there is a free countenancing of the licentious apophthegm with which Ovid departs from the action of *Poetaster* at the end of the balcony scene: 'The truest wisdome silly men can have, | Is dotage, on the follies of their flesh.'

[58] See Frank Kermode, 'The Banquet of Sense', in his *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne: Renaissance Essays* (London, 1971), and Raymond B. Waddington, *The Mind's Empire: Myth and Form in George Chapman's Narrative Poems* (Baltimore, 1974). Waddington sees the poem as a development of *The Shadow of Night*, in which 'Chapman publicly takes sides against the vogue for the erotic Ovidian poem, seemingly epitomized for him by *Venus and Adonis* [the reference here is to what seems to be a slighting allusion to that poem's epigraph in 'Hymnus in Cynthiam'], and darkly proclaims his allegiance to the Ovid of the allegorized *Metamorphoses*' (p. 113).

Shakespeare and Ovid

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