5
Tragedy and Metamorphosis

> Only then, when passion or suffering become too big for utterance, the wisdom of ancient art has borrowed a feature from tranquillity, though not its air. For every being seized by an enormous passion, be it joy or grief, or fear sunk to despair, loses the character of its own individual expression, and is absorbed by the power of the feature that attracts it. Niobe and her family are assimilated by extreme anguish . . . Clytia, Biblis, Salmacis, Narcissus, tell only the resistless power of sympathetic attraction.[1]

I

Save in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, modern criticism has attended more to the Ovidianism of Shakespeare's comedies than that of his tragedies. One reason for this is the particular association, discussed in the last chapter, between the *Metamorphoses* and the Golden Age, with its primal examples of many of Shakespearian comedy's key materials—the forest, the springtime, leisure, youth, and love. But Ovid described the Age of Iron too, and the language in which he did so opens on to the world of Shakespeare's tragedies. In the words of Golding's translation, in lines that are immediately preceded by a Timon-like reference to the divisive power of 'yellow golde' dug from the ground:

> Men live by ravine and by stelth: the wandring guest doth stand
> In daunger of his host: the host in daunger of his guest:
> And fathers of their sonne in laws: yea seldome time doth rest
> Betweene borne brothers such accord and love as ought to bee,
> The goodman seekes the goodwives death, and his againe seekes shee.
> The stepdames fell their husbands sonnes with poyson do assayle.

[1] Johann Heinrich Fuseli, lecture 5 of 1805, in *Lectures on Painting, by the Royal Academicians. Barry, Opie, and Fuseli* (London, 1848), 470.

To see their fathers live so long the children doe bewayle.
All godlynesse lyes under foote. And Ladie *Astrey* last
Of heavenly vertues from this earth in slaughter drownèd past.
(Golding, i. 162–70)

This famous passage is the source of the tag 'Terras Astraea reliquit', quoted in *Titus Andronicus* in the original Latin (IV. iii. 4). The tag is cited without any suggestion of allusion to Queen Elizabeth as the returned Astraea: as with his non-topical use of Actaeon, Shakespeare eschews the kind of direct contemporary political allegory that was practised by so many of his contemporaries, most notably Spenser.[2] The Age of Iron is made instead into the archetype of the time of tragedy, that in which justice has fled the earth. It is characterized by the breaking of sacred bonds—the bonds between host and guest, as in *Macbeth*, and above all those within the family. The divisions between kin described here are analogous to those of which Gloucester complains in the second scene of *Lear*; children tiring of seeing their fathers live so long are especially relevant to that play (as in Edmund's 'I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny' in his forged letter—I. ii. 50–1). The correspondence is made explicit in *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*: 'Oh yron age! O times! O monstrous, vilde, | When parents are contemned of the child!'[3]

A sense of the relation between tragedy and the latter two of Ovid's four ages is reinforced by Heywood's *Age* plays: the *Golden* and *Silver* ages are concerned with the loves of the gods, while the *Brazen Age* includes such stories as 'The Tragedy of Meleager' and 'The Tragedy of Jason and Medea', and the two parts of *The Iron Age* tell the tragic story of Troy. The movement from comedy to tragedy may be conceived as a decline from the Golden Age through the Brazen to the Iron. All Shakespeare's works are to varying degrees tragicomedies, and his Ovidianism is complicit with this generic instability. The Ovidian tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe is not only a play within the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is also a precedent for the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, as George Pettie saw in 1576, some twenty years before the play was written: 'such presiness [oppressiveness] of parents brought Pyramus and Thisbe to a woful end, Romeo

[2] On Elizabeth as Astraea, see Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (1975; repr. Harmondsworth, 1977), 29–87.

[3] ll. 761–2, Bullough, vii. 355–6. The exclamation combines the Iron Age with Cicero's much-cited tag, 'O tempora! O mores!'.

and Julietta to untimely death'.[4] Shakespeare may have been attracted to Arthur Brooke's *Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* partly because it translated into a modern setting the Pyramus and Thisbe plot in which lovers are divided by parental resistance to their union, the male partner makes the tragic mistake of thinking his beloved is dead and consequently takes his own life, and the woman is left to return or awake only to take her own life. Like Ovid's tales, Shakespeare's comedies never lose sight of the painfulness and the potential for the grotesque or for disaster wrought by love's changes; so it is that what Heywood called 'The Tragedy of Jason and Medea' is, as I have shown, a darkening point of reference in *The Merchant of Venice*. If part of the Ovidianism of the comedies is their potential for violence and tragedy, it would seem logical to expect that Ovidianism to be developed in the tragedies.

If *Titus* is recognized as one of Shakespeare's most characteristic plays, rather than dismissed as a juvenile aberration, it becomes much easier to see the tragedies as well as the comedies as metamorphic. This chapter will argue that the technique used so extensively in *Titus* of invoking mythological precedents as patterns for tragic structures is sustained throughout Shakespeare's career, with the difference that what was a prominently flaunted mode of composition in the early play became a more inwoven practice in the later ones.

In Chapter 1 I argued that the Phaëthon story provided a pattern for the falls of both Gaveston and Edward II in Marlowe's history play. Shakespeare's *Tragedy of King Richard the Second* closely resembles *Edward II*, with its weak king and his favourites, its deposition, imprisonment, and regicide, its sense of the king's struggle to find an identity once he has been stripped of his crown. It was perhaps from Marlowe, then, that Shakespeare saw the value of an allusion to Phaëthon in such a play. At the centre of the tragedy, in the scene set at Flint Castle, Richard stands on the walls (in the theatrical 'above' space) and accepts the inevitability of his fall from the throne:

What must the King do now? Must he submit?
The King shall do it. Must he be deposed?
The King shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of King? A God's name, let it go.
(III. iii. 142–5)

[4] *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* (1576), quoted from Bullough, i. 374.

Northumberland summons him down with the words, 'My lord, in the base court he doth attend | To speak with you. May it please you to come down?' (175–6). The King replies,

> Down, down, I come like glist'ring Phaethon,
> Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
> In the base court: base court where kings grown base
> To come at traitors' calls, and do them grace.
> (III. iii. 177–80)

He exits, reappears below, and symbolically hands power over to Bolingbroke, anticipating the formal deposition two scenes later. The fall of Phaëthon thus serves as a mythological precedent for the a*base*ment of Richard, which is visually enacted in his move from the above space to below.

For the theatregoer or reader who knows the Phaëthon story and its standard sixteenth-century interpretations, a number of associations suggest themselves. Golding moralized the fable in terms of 'ambition blynd, and youthfull wilfulnesse': in his prison cell, Richard is led to reflect upon 'Thoughts tending to ambition' (v. v. 18) and their ultimate vanity; as for youth and wilfulness, lack of maturity is apparent in the king's choice of follower. Golding's moralization continues, 'The end whereof is miserie, and bringeth at the last | Repentance when it is to late that all redresse is past' (Epistle, 73–4): Shakespeare's play replicates the pattern of a movement towards misery, but has a characteristic shift of emphasis from moral judgement to psychological insight—it is not so much repentance to which Richard comes too late as knowledge of the restlessness of his own and all men's condition,

> But whate'er I be,
> Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
> With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased
> With being nothing.
> (v. v. 38–41)

Both Richard's language and the appeal to a mythological archetype invite the audience to universalize his tragedy, to read it in terms of what Vives called 'the essential nature of human beings'. Such a pull towards the universal has, of course, been a source of the endurance of Shakespearian tragedy.

But the Phaëthon myth was also given a more grounded and

political interpretation in the sixteenth century, and this is equally applicable to the play. According to Golding, the story shows 'how the weaknesse and the want of wit in magistrate | Confoundeth both his common weale and eeke his owne estate' (Epistle, 75–6). In the moralization of Sabinus, Phaëthon is the rash and ambitious young prince ('ambitiosi & temerarii Principis') and the horses are the common people ('per equos ipsum vulgus') who, when they are given a free rein or promoted into high office ('in officio'), go out of control and bring chaos to the body politic. As Sandys puts it, in a sentence translated from Sabinus: 'The Horses of the Sun are the common people; unruly, fierce, and prone to innovation: who finding the weaknesse of their Prince, fly out into all exorbitancies to a generall confusion.'[5] In the scene immediately after the one in which Richard makes himself into Phaëthon, the confounding into chaos of the commonwealth as a result of the king's weakness and his unwise choice of deputy (those 'caterpillars of the commonwealth' Bushy, Bagot, and Green) is emblematized in the image of the overgrown garden. One effect of the allusion to Phaëthon may therefore have been to contribute to the process whereby the play became more politically dangerous than Shakespeare intended it to be. It could be that he made the reference in order to universalize the fall of Richard, but the availability of an interpretation of it in terms of the government of the commonweal facilitated a contemporary application: Richard/Phaëthon thus becomes Queen Elizabeth, with her reputation for vacillation, and the deposition is seized upon by the Essex faction, who commission a performance of the play on the eve of their attempted *coup d'état*.

The Renaissance tradition of multiple interpretation means that the two readings of the allusion to Phaëthon—what would then have been called the moral and the historical, what we might now call the universalizing and the political—are not mutually exclusive. Phaëthon's inability to manage his 'unruly jades', as Richard describes them in language that is also Golding's, is at one and the same time a universally applicable emblem for loss of control of the passions and a politically specific figuration of the reins of power, in so far as the horses drive the chariot of the sun and the sun is an emblem of the monarch. Even within the historical interpretation there are several different strands: if we follow Golding's reading of Phaëthon,

[5] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 67. Georgius Sabinus, *Metamorphosis seu Fabulae Poeticae* (Wittenburg, 1555, quoted from edn. of Frankfurt, 1589), 55–7.

the play becomes an apology for strong government, but if we follow Sandys's, it becomes an appeal for rulers not to be arbitrary but to attend to wise counsellors: 'In that [he is] rash and unexperienced, he is said to be a boy, and refractory to counsell (with out which, Power is her owne destruction) and therefore altogether unfit for government, which requires mature advice.'[6] The allusion does not pin Shakespeare down, rather it opens up multiple possibilities.[7] Doubtless the Essex faction would have gone with the reading in terms of strong government, but according to Golding the most important thing about the fall of Phaëthon was that it was a negative example which 'dooth commende the meane' (Epistle, 79). Ironically, Essex himself became a Phaëthon by aspiring too high—here it may be recalled that it is not only Richard II and Edward II but also Gaveston who is figured as the ill-fated charioteer. Shakespeare himself seems to push the play in the direction of commending the mean by critiquing both the ineffectual rule of Richard and the Machiavellian drive of Bolingbroke.

The problem with the mean is that it is not very exciting dramatically. The play is most interested in exploring and seeking to make its audience feel what it would be like to be Richard, to be Phaëthon, tumbling in free fall. As so often, Shakespeare bypasses the moralizing tradition and returns to Ovid himself, who drives the original narrative with Phaëthon's energy and recklessness. The tale is a pattern for early Shakespearian tragedy because it shows how quick bright things come to confusion.

Ovid's classical horses of the sun run wild with the same abandon as those of the vernacular Queen Mab who, according to Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, 'gallops night by night | Through lovers' brains'.[8] They cannot be stopped. When Friar Laurence enters at dawn (or is it when Romeo exits at dawn?), 'fleckled darkness like a drunkard reels | From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels' (II. ii. 3–4): one senses that the driver is not to be trusted here, for the drunkard only

[6] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 67.

[7] It thus leaves room for both my reading here and the rather different interpretation of Robert P. Merrix, who reads Richard's search for identity in relation to Phaëthon's search for his father: 'The Phaëton Allusion in *Richard II*: The Search for Identity', *ELR* xvii (1987), 277–87. On Richard's narcissistic identity in relation to Ovid's Narcissus, see A. D. Nuttall's elegant 'Ovid's Narcissus and Shakespeare's Richard II: The Reflected Self', in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge, 1988), 137–50.

[8] *Romeo and Juliet*, I. iv. 71–2. Mab's driver is a 'waggoner' (I. iv.65), Golding's word for Phaëthon.

narrowly escapes being run over. It seems to be Phaëthon at the wheel, streaking headlong to disaster. A few hours later, at nine in the morning, Juliet observes 'the sun upon the highmost hill of this day's journey' (II. iv. 9–10): from this point on, its motion—and with it that of the play—can only be downward like Phaëthon's.[9] By midday the temperature is fiercely hot, as if in repetition of the conflagration which occurs when the horses of the sun finally hit the earth. By evening, Juliet is willing the horses to run faster, the language learnt from Marlowe's *Edward II*:

> Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
> Towards Phoebus' lodging. Such a waggoner
> As Phaëton would whip you to the west
> And bring in cloudy night immediately.
>
> (III. ii. 1–4)

(Both 'fiery-footed' for the steeds and 'waggoner' for Phaëthon are taken from Golding.)[10] The dramatic irony of the allusion is intense. Juliet invokes Phaëthon because she thinks that he could quicken the pace of the sun and thus hurry time on to 'love-performing night'. The irony is that in willing on the night, she is willing on the tragedy, the moment of separation, Romeo's exile, and ultimately the confusion and mistiming which bring the death of both lovers. The audience sees, as the character does not, that to put Phaëthon in charge is to precipitate the catastrophe. The network of secondary allusions supporting Juliet's apostrophe is brought to completion at the very end of the play when the Prince begins the final speech, 'A glooming peace this morning with it brings: | The sun for sorrow will not show his head' (V. iii. 304–5), an image paralleling the aftermath of the fall of Phaëthon: 'And if it be to be beleved, as bruted is by fame, | A day did passe without the Sunne' (Golding, ii. 418–19).

But there is an important difference in the endings: where Phaëthon falls like a shooting star (as does Richard),[11] Juliet, in the soliloquy which begins 'Gallop apace', imagines raising Romeo to the

[9] In the note on these lines in his 1980 Arden edn., Brian Gibbons aptly cites Golding's translation of the equivalent moment in the Phaëthon story: 'the morning way | Lyes steepe upright, so that the steedes . . . have much adoe to climbe against the Hyll' (ii. 84–6).

[10] Golding, ii. 491, 394.

[11] 'But *Phaeton* . . . Shot headlong downe . . . Like to [a] Starre in Winter nightes' (Golding, ii. 404–6); 'Ah Richard! . . . I see thy glory, like a shooting star, | Fall to the base earth from the firmament' (*Richard II*, II. iv. 18–20, 'base' anticipating the language of the speech in which the king alludes to Phaëthon).

stars, in the manner of the apotheosis of Julius Caesar in Book Fifteen of the *Metamorphoses*: 'Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die | Take him and cut him out in little stars' (III. ii. 21–2). And where Phaëthon is memorialized only in an epitaph inscribed upon the stone which covers his smouldering body, Romeo and Juliet are to be immortalized in the form of golden statues. In this symbolic transformation, which secures the reunion of the divided households, they are granted the sort of metamorphic release which Ovid usually gives his characters but, exceptionally, denies to Phaëthon.

Shakespeare thus reverses the metamorphic Ovid. *Romeo and Juliet* is also notable for a revision of the amorous Ovid. Whilst *The Taming of the Shrew* shows how the *Ars Amatoria* may be a textual end to sexual conquest, *Romeo and Juliet* turns one of that poem's precepts to troubled account in Juliet's recognition of the perils inherent in the articulation of love:

> Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay',
> And I will take thy word. Yet if thou swear'st
> Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,
> They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
> If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
> Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
> I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
> So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
> (II. i. 132–9)

'At lovers' perjuries, | They say, Jove laughs.' In his translation of the *Ars Amatoria* Thomas Heywood rendered the relevant image in language very close to, possibly even borrowed from, that of *Romeo and Juliet*: 'For *Jove* himself sits in the azure skies, | And laughs below at Lovers perjuries'.[12] But the distance between the Ovidian and the Shakespearian contexts of the laughing Jupiter is considerable. The poet of the *Ars* is at his most cynical:

> Nec timide promitte: trahunt promissa puellas;
> Pollicito testes quoslibet adde deos.
> Iuppiter ex alto periuria ridet amantum,
> Et iubet Aeolios inrita ferre notos.

[12] *Ovid De Arte Amandi*, trans. Heywood (1682 edn.), 27. The translation is a fairly obvious one and the line was well known, so the similarity of phrasing may be coincidental, but it is noteworthy that where Ovid has 'Iuppiter' both Shakespeare and Heywood choose 'Jove'. Heywood's trans. was probably made a few years after *Romeo and Juliet*.

> Per Styga Iunoni falsum iurare solebat
> Iuppiter; exemplo nunc favet ipse suo.
> Expedit esse deos, et, ut expedit, esse putemus.
> (*Ars Am.* i. 631–7)

Nor be timid in your promises; by promises girls are caught; call as witnesses to your promise what gods you please. Jupiter from on high laughs at the perjuries of lovers, and bids the winds of Aeolus carry them unfulfilled away. Jupiter would swear falsely by Styx to Juno; now he favours his own example. It is expedient that there should be gods, and, since it is expedient, we do deem that gods exist.

The last line—to Renaissance eyes a Machiavellian proposition—is the sort of startling claim which makes it comprehensible that the writing of the *Ars* was one reason for Ovid's exile. The passage as a whole has no interest in honesty in human relations ('deceive women, for they're mostly deceivers themselves', Ovid continues) and is as irreverent as the *Metamorphoses* in its acknowledgement of Jupiter's perjuries and infidelities. Jupiter laughs because he knows that he and everyone else are deceivers ever. Stylish, even jokey, as the mode of expression may be, the reader is left with a distinctly sour after-taste. Roman sexual mores are made to seem as self-serving as imperial political strategies become in the *Annals* of Tacitus.

In Juliet's speech, on the other hand, the laugh is alluded to as part of an attempt to elicit a 'true-love' language that is not dependent on the formalization of an oath. Jove knows, she is saying, that human beings are frail, and so to swear an oath is to court the breaking of it. It is not a laugh of complicity, as in Ovid, but one of superiority. 'Do not swear', Juliet says three times; especially do not swear 'by the moon, th'inconstant moon | That monthly changes in her circled orb, | Lest that thy love prove likewise variable' (II. i. 151–3). But love still has to be mediated through language and thus remains painfully prone to misinterpretation: hence 'Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won, | I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay'. For the speaker of the *Ars*, language is an instrument of power; like Jupiter, he can get what he wants by means of perjury. For Juliet, language is a trap. Earlier in the scene she has been overheard pouring out her 'true-love passion' (II. i. 146). Now she is in a bind: having acknowledged her desire she cannot return to the reserved ('strange') and ultimately false language of 'form' and 'compliment',[13] but by not doing so she

[13] 'Fain would I dwell on form . . . but farewell, compliment. . . . I'll prove more true | Than those that have more cunning to be strange' (II. i. 130–1, 142–3).

runs the risk of seeming fast, 'too quickly won'. The Ovidian voice is supremely in control—to such an extent that it can produce the line about believing in the gods because it is expedient to do so (they are there to be invoked as precedents for one's own betrayals)—whereas Juliet is supremely out of control, because she is in love for the first time and because she is a woman who is culturally deprived of the right to give voice to her passion, on pain of being considered a whore. She is confused, her syntax stops and starts, whereas the speaker of the *Ars* is urbane and self-confident, free to play with words ('fallite fallentes': 'deceive the deceivers', i. 645). The reanimation of the Ovidian phrase in a context so antithetic to that of its source is an extreme example of what Thomas Greene calls 'dialectical' imitation. To hold the two contexts together is to be confronted with cultural difference: in form, the difference between the register of mock-didactic Augustan elegiacs and that of Elizabethan tragedy; in tenor, the difference between unashamed male desire and a recognition that women have traditionally been denied the language of desire because they have been constructed as the desired.

Juliet is trapped not only by woman's traditional passivity in love, but also by her father's will. She alludes to her concomitant linguistic imprisonment at the end of the first balcony scene:

> Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud,
> Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
> And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
> With repetition of my Romeo's name. Romeo!
> (II. i. 205–8)

But in the very act of speaking thus, she overcomes her bondage. Unlike the conventionally silent woman, she speaks aloud; and, as Echo cannot, she initiates a further dialogue with her beloved. In a wonderful touch, she speaks her Romeo's name and the echo comes back, 'Romeo!'. She has become her own Echo, symbolically liberating both herself and her mythical antetype. Her liberation is short-lived, but the play's final couplet gives endurance to the transference by which she possesses rather than is possessed by her lover, as '*my* Romeo's name' is reiterated in 'For never was a story of more woe | Than this of Juliet and *her* Romeo'.[14]

[14] v. iii. 308–9. The closing line should not be dismissed as a convenient rhyme: the rhyme with 'woe' would still have been possible with, say, 'loved by Romeo'. Throughout the play, Juliet takes possession of Romeo's name far more often than vice versa.

II

Lavinia's nephew learns from his study of Ovid that 'Hecuba of Troy | Ran mad for sorrow' (*Titus*, IV. i. 20–1). His grandfather, who has a choice library, has said 'full oft' that 'Extremity of griefs would make men mad' (IV. i. 19). The *Metamorphoses* offered a vast repertory of tales in which extremity of suffering or desire brings about transformation. As was seen in Chapter 1, Shakespeare and his audience inherited a tradition centuries long in which Ovid's literal transformations were interpreted as metaphors for the internal changes effected by emotional and behavioural extremity. In the words of Georgius Sabinus in the prefatory material to his widely used 1555 edition,

> Titulus inscribitur Metamorphosis, hoc est, transformatio. Finguntur enim hic conuerti ex hominibus in belluas, qui in hominis figura belluae immanitatem gerunt: quales sunt ebriosi, libidinosi, violenti & similes, quorum appetitus rectae rationi minime obtemperat.

> The title is Metamorphosis, that is, transformation. For here are represented those who have changed from men into beasts, who bear the barbarity of the beast in the figure of man: such are the drunken, the libidinous, the violent and similar, whose appetite submits minimally to right reason.[15]

'Extremity of griefs would make men mad': the idea is relevant not only to Hecuba in the *Metamorphoses*, to Titus and Lavinia, but also to the various kinds of madness suffered by Hamlet, Othello, and Lear. Although direct allusions to Ovidian mythological material became less frequent in Shakespeare's Jacobean tragedies, perhaps because he no longer felt it necessary to display his literacy as he had done in *Titus*, and to a lesser extent *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the notion of internal metamorphosis remained pivotal.

Othello hinges on the metamorphosis of the hero at the hands of Iago. 'These Moors are changeable', Iago informs Roderigo early on (I. iii. 346); 'The Moor already changes with my poison', he says in the interlude between the two central encounters in the great temptation scene (III. iii. 329). The deceitful language with which he convinces Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful acts as a verbal equivalent to the poisonous shirt of Nessus with which Deianira is deceived into destroying another great martial hero, Hercules, after he has been unfaithful. I make this connection—an

[15] *Metamorphosis seu fabulae poeticae*, sig.) (8^v (my translation).

affinity, not an allusion—because the shirt of Nessus has similar properties to the handkerchief: it is a charmed object that is supposed to subdue the partner entirely to the love of the person who gives it (cf. *Othello*, III. iv. 58–60) but in fact becomes the mechanism through which the lovers are destroyed.

The play's recurring images of monstrous birth and bestial transformation are also Ovidian. Sabinus read the *Metamorphoses* in terms of the animal in man; the play uses a sustained language of bestiality. In Sabinus' list of destructively metamorphic vices ('ebriosi, libidinosi, violenti'), drunkenness may seem the mildest, but Cassio knows that after he has been inveigled into drunkenness 'what remains is bestial', and that in getting drunk we 'with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform ourselves into beasts' (II. iii. 258, 285–6). He becomes the ass which is concealed in the middle of his name.[16] Iago's devilish skill is to transform the civilized Cassio into one of the 'ebriosi', and the noble Othello into one of the 'violenti' by persuading him that his wife is among the 'libidinosi'. His success in doing so owes much to the way in which he plays perniciously on the prejudice that merely through being a Moor Othello is already close to being a beast: 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans' (I. i. 113–15). In the temptation scene he infects Othello with the same kind of language: 'Exchange me for a goat', 'I had rather be a toad' (III. iii. 184, 274). By the end of the scene, the transformation has been effected and Othello is threatening to behave like a beast: 'I'll tear her all to pieces' (III. iii. 436). When he blows away his love and calls for vengeance to rise, he is dramatizing his internal metamorphosis.

Shakespearian tragedy makes universal claims for the personal and social transformations it stages. For Ovid, the primary universal metamorphosis was that from chaos into order with which the world—and his poem—began. In the beginning there was 'a huge rude heape' ('rudis indigestaque moles')[17] named Chaos and all things were 'at strife among themselves for want of order due' (Golding, i. 7–9). God and Nature then create order, separating heaven and earth, land and sea. Tragedy is universalized by being imagined as a breakdown of this order, a return to primal chaos. So it is that immediately before Iago begins his work of destructive change in the temptation scene Othello speaks after the parting Desdemona, 'But I do love thee, and when I love thee not, | Chaos is come again' (III. iii. 91–2). This becomes a terrible prophecy, for when he is turned to a monster within, it is as if Chaos has come again.

Shakespeare, then, works intensively with the Ovidian idea of raw emotion, engendered chiefly by sexual desires and fears, reducing man to the level of the beast. When Othello demands that Iago give him 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's infidelity, he says that if he does not, Iago 'hadst been better have been born a dog | Than answer my waked wrath' (III. iii. 367–8). This is based on a passage in the play's source, 'If you do not make me see with my own eyes what you have told me, be assured, I shall make you realize that it would have been better for you had you been born dumb',[18] but the change from the vague 'been born dumb' to the specific 'born a dog' produces one of a number of associations between Iago and a dog which may have an Ovidian provenance. The pattern of images culminates in Lodovico's 'O Spartan dog' (v. ii. 371). Why 'Spartan'? The New Cambridge editor notes that 'Spartan dogs were, according to Seneca's *Hippolytus* (trans. J. Studley, 1581), "eager of prey"',[19] an association that would tie in with Lodovico's ensuing line, 'More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea'. But Iago is not merely eager of prey; he is treacherous. When Shakespeare had wanted a dog a few years earlier in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he had remembered Actaeon 'With Ringwood at [his] heels' in Golding's Ovid.[20] At the head of the list of Actaeon's dogs was Melampus, described by Ovid as 'Spartana gente'—'Blackfoote of Spart', as Golding has it.[21] Contemporaneously with *Othello*, Ben Jonson assumed that Spartan dogs were Actaeon's: 'Better not ACTAEON had . . . The dog of *Sparta* breed, and good, | As

[16] See Anne Barton, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford and Toronto, 1990), 124.

[17] *Met.* i. 7, applied by Shakespeare to Crookback Richard: 'foul indigested lump', 'an indigested and deformed lump' (*2 Henry VI*, v. i. 155, *3 Henry VI*, v. vi. 51). Salisbury's lines to Prince Henry at the end of *King John*, 'you are born | To set a form upon that indigest | Which he hath left so shapeless and so rude' (v. vii. 25–7), give a political inflexion to Ovid's originary image: the young Henry III will bring order out of the Chaos of John's troublesome reign. The juxtaposition of 'monsters and things indigest' in Sonnet 114 supports the association between Chaos and Ovidian monstrosity in the mind of Othello.

[18] Cinthio, *Gli Hecatommithi*, in Bullough, vii. 246.

[19] *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders (Cambridge, 1984), 186.

[20] *Merry Wives*, II. i. 114; cf. Golding, iii. 270.

[21] *Met.* iii. 206–8; Golding, iii. 245–7. Ovid's Actaeon is almost certainly the source for Theseus' 'My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind' (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, IV. i. 118), *pace* Harold Brooks's claims for Seneca's *Hippolytus* in his Arden edn., p. 94. John Harington linked Melampus and Ringwood in *The Metamorphosis of Ajax* (1596; ed. Elizabeth Story Donno, London, 1962), 110: 'in comes Melampus, or Ringwood'.

can ring within a wood'.[22] I do not want to overstretch the idea of Iago as Blackfoot, but I do think that 'Spartan dog' is supposed to suggest the foremost of Actaeon's dogs who destroy their own master—George Sandys referred in his commentary on Book Three of the *Metamorphoses* to servants who become traitors and 'inflict on their masters the fate of *Actaeon*'.[23]

Actaeon stands for all who are destroyed by sexuality. As was seen in *The Merry Wives*, his horns may easily stand for those of the cuckold. The identification is readily made even in a consciously unclassical, 'lowbrow' piece of writing like Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury*: 'A maiden faire I dare not wed, | For feare to have *Acteons* head'.[24] Othello's 'A hornèd man's a monster and a beast' (IV. i. 60) is thus not only a conventional reference to cuckoldry, but also another figure of bestial metamorphosis. Characters in the *Metamorphoses* feel an intensely physical process at work when their arms begin to become the branches of trees or they start growing animal appendages; correspondingly, there is a highly tactile quality to Othello's 'I have a pain upon my forehead here' (III. iii. 288). But Othello is not exactly Actaeon, for where the latter is torn apart by his own dogs, the Moor is led to imagine himself tearing apart the body of Desdemona.

If the dog Iago is one of Othello's own stray desires, is the chaste, the divine Desdemona a Diana? Othello might think so, in that he takes himself to be as unworthy of her as Actaeon is of the Diana upon whom he gazes. But the parallel collapses with Desdemona's love; far from holding herself disdainfully aloof in the manner of Diana, she gives herself to Othello with trust and abandon. If we are looking for an Ovidian myth that has more tonal affinity with the relationship, we would do better to turn to an exemplary tale of love, such as Ceyx and Alcyone in Book Eleven of the *Metamorphoses*. Arthur Golding makes them into the ideal married couple: 'In Ceyx and Alcyone appeeres most constant love, | Such as betweene the man and wyfe too bee it dooth behove' (Epistle, 232–3). David Armitage has pointed out that the marine language of this tale was important for Shakespeare's late romances.[25] In particular, he singles out the image

[22] 'A Satyr', in *The Entertainment at Althorp* (1603)—*Ben Jonson*, vii. 128.

[23] *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 100.

[24] *The Works of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Francis Oscar Mann (Oxford, 1912), 7.

[25] Armitage, 'The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Mythic Elements in Shakespeare's Romances', *ShS* xxxix (1987), 123–33 (p. 128).

of the waves seeming to mount as high as the clouds: 'fluctibus erigitur caelumque aequare videtur | pontus et inductas aspergine tangere nubes' (xi. 497–8), 'The surges mounting up aloft did seeme too mate the skye, | And with theyr sprinckling for too wet the clowdes that hang on hye' (Golding, xi. 573–4). Shakespeare's use of this image is not confined to Armitage's instances, for one of the most memorable is in *Othello*, when the Second Gentleman describes the storm which caused the segregation of the Turkish fleet:

> The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds,
> The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane
> Seems to cast water on the burning Bear
> And quench the guards of th' ever-fixèd Pole.
>
> (II. i. 12–15)

The image itself is a conventional one, which Shakespeare probably first encountered not in Ovid, but in the rhetorical handbook of Susenbrotus, used in schools, where 'ad sidera fluctus' ('the waves to the stars') is illustrative of hyperbole.[26] But the elaboration of it is Ovidian in its specificity: the water is made to seem truly wet, which it is not in the conventional figure. And the context is Ovidian too, with the motifs of lovers' separation, of sea-voyage and storm—Shakespeare departs from his source here, for in Cinthio the Moor and Disdemona go in the same ship and the sea is 'of the utmost tranquillity'.[27]

The affinity with Ceyx and Alcyone is strengthened by the ensuing image of Desdemona's beauty restoring the sea to calmness:

> Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds
>
> . . . .
>
> As having sense of beauty do omit
> Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
> The divine Desdemona.
>
> (II. i. 69–74)

Here she is like Alcyone, who becomes the Halcyon during whose days 'the sea is calme and still, | And every man may too and fro sayle saufly at his will' (Golding, xi. 859–60). Given this identification, Golding's characterization of Alcyone's husband becomes suggestive, for the following could as well have been written of Othello as of Ceyx:

[26] See Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, ii. 148.

[27] Bullough, vii. 243.

'His viage also dooth declare how vainly men are led | Too utter perill through fond toyes and fansies in their head' (Epistle, 236–7). The difference is that Othello puts too much faith in Iago, whereas for Golding Ceyx puts too much faith in an oracle. Similarly, Othello's metamorphosis is wrought by Iago whereas Ceyx's is by the gods. Ovid's psychological realism is retained while his supernatural agencies are removed. Ceyx and Alcyone are drowned, while Othello and Desdemona survive the storm only to be destroyed by human agency when they reach dry land. Equally, the story of Ceyx and Alcyone does not end with tragedy; the lovers' transformation into birds effects release and reunion. Yet, for all the variations of plot, there is a fundamental affinity in terms of emotional effect.

An argument in terms of plot parallels might be developed with respect to Cephalus and Procris. One of the most uncompromisingly tragic tales in the *Metamorphoses*, this story turns on the way in which jealousy, fear of infidelity, credulity, and misinterpretation precipitate the destruction of an initially joyous marriage. But if there is an influence on the plot of *Othello*, it is probably indirect, mediated through an updated version of the Cephalus and Procris story in George Pettie's *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure*.[28]

Ovid has a memorable way of fixing the moment of death. The final words in Cephalus' narration of his wife's tragic end are

> labitur, et parvae fugiunt cum sanguine vires,
> dumque aliquid spectare potest, me spectat et in me
> infelicem animam nostroque exhalat in ore;
> sed vultu meliore mori secura videtur.
>
> (vii. 859–62)

> and with hir bloud
> Hir little strength did fade. Howbeit as long as that she coud
> See ought, she stared in my face, and gasping still on me,
> Even in my mouth she breathed forth hir wretched ghost. But she
> Did seeme with better cheare to die for that hir conscience was
> Discharged quight and cleare of doubtes.
>
> (Golding, vii. 1112–17)

Golding's cumbersome fourteeners lose much of Ovid's simplicity and concentration, and, as so often, introduce a moralizing tone that is

[28] Bullough (vii. 205–6) cites Pettie as a possible source, but does not explore the Ovidian connection. It is revealing that for Pettie the story is exemplary of 'that hatefull helhounde Jealousy'—*A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* (1576), ed. Herbert Hartman (London, 1938), 186.

absent from the original. It is the original Latin, with its clear focus on a pale figure, a kiss and a look, that makes us think of the death of Desdemona or Cordelia.

From here it becomes apparent that it is in certain touches in the final scene, in the approach to death, that *Othello* is most profoundly Ovidian. When Othello addresses the sleeping Desdemona at the beginning of the scene, he speaks as if she is already dead. His images suggest that she has been metamorphosed into an object. Her skin is 'smooth as monumental alabaster': it is not that she is in her tomb, but that in Ovidian fashion she has become her tomb, her own monument. After the explicitly mythological, though not Ovidian, image of Prometheus, Othello continues,

> When I have plucked thy rose
> I cannot give it vital growth again.
> It needs must wither. I'll smell it on the tree.
>
> (v. ii. 13–15)

It is again as if she is no longer a person but an object in nature; the arresting of 'vital growth' is the process which takes place at moments of Ovidian petrification.

Having metaphorically addressed Desdemona as both stone and tree in his elegy to her, Othello introduces a further arboreal simile in his elegy on himself:

> of one whose subdued eyes,
> Albeit unusèd to the melting mood,
> Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinable gum.
>
> (v. ii. 357–60)

The New Cambridge editor says that 'The reference is to the myrrh tree and probably comes from a conflation of two passages in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*'.[29] I do not see why it is necessary to go to two sources in Pliny when in Book Ten of the *Metamorphoses*, the primary source for Shakespeare's first narrative poem, we find the following description of the demise of Myrrha:

> Her bones did intoo timber turne, whereof the marie was
> The pith, and into watrish sappe the blood of her did passe.
> Her armes were turnd too greater boughes, her fingars into twig,
> Her skin was hardned into bark. . . .

[29] *Othello*, ed. Sanders, 186.

. . . .

Although that shee
Toogither with her former shape her senses all did loose,
Yit weepeth shee, and from her tree warme droppes doo softly woose:
The which her teares are had in pryce and honour. And the Myrrhe
That issueth from her gummy bark dooth beare the name of her,
And shall doo whyle the world dooth last.

(Golding, x. 565–77)

According to my argument in Chapter 2 it is of considerable significance for Shakespeare's poem that Adonis was born from that tree. The collocation in this passage of 'tears', 'gum', and the verb 'drop' suggests that Golding shaped Othello's image, especially as a few lines earlier Myrrha has been described 'straying in the broade | Datebearing feeldes of *Arabye*' (x. 547–8). Sandys's later commentary also notes the tradition that the myrrh tree grew only in Arabia.[30]

But the source is less important than the effect. What would Shakespeare's original audience have made of Othello's image? I believe that the more educated among them would have remembered Ovid's etiological explanation of the oozing of the myrrh tree: the gum represents the repentant tears of Myrrha. It does not necessarily follow from this that Othello would have been seen as Myrrha, the exemplar of incest; but it does, I think, follow that the image would have been interpreted in terms of repentance and release from past error. After the shifts and changes of the passions, the tree finally offers something fixed and solid.

The difference between the last moments of Myrrha and those of Othello is that she is released by the gods while he releases himself through suicide. An Ovidian reading of Othello's last public speech must now take a sideways step: the richest classical source of last words and suicides is not the *Metamorphoses* but the *Heroides*, in which there was particular interest around the time of the composition of *Othello*, following the great success of Michael Drayton's imitations of them, *England's Heroicall Epistles* (first published in 1597, augmented and reprinted in 1598, 1599, 1602, and 1605). Let us suppose, then, that Shakespeare reread or recollected the *Heroides* at this time. Their relevance to Othello's penultimate speech lies not only in their elegiac content, but also in their epistolary form:

[30] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 364.

I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice.

(v. ii. 349–52)

The *Heroides* are a pattern for letters concerning 'unlucky deeds'; like Othello, Ovid's deserted heroines claim to speak of themselves as they are, nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice. What Shakespeare learnt above all from these elegies was a way of writing about grief, a language that he could give to 'heroic' figures on the point of death, and an art of double revelation in which persuasive rhetoric reveals a character's strength yet also—unwittingly on the character's part—discloses her insecurities.

Consider, for example, the second letter, 'Phyllis to Demophoon'. Phyllis asks, 'Dic mihi, quid feci, nisi non sapienter amavi?' (ii. 27), 'Tell me, what have I done, except not wisely love?' (translated by George Turbervile as 'Denounce to me what I have doone, | But lovde thee all to well?'). Whether or not we see this as the actual source of Othello's 'one that loved not wisely', the two characters share a desperate desire to justify themselves. The more they protest that they 'nothing extenuate', the more it becomes apparent that extenuation is a prime purpose of their speeches. Phyllis and Othello both lament at how they have been beguiled by the words of others; both her letter and his speech try to assuage present catastrophic love by remembering past martial deeds (Othello his own, Phyllis her lover's father's).

They end with a similar self-dramatization. Phyllis closes with the words that she wishes to be inscribed on her tomb: 'PHYLLIDA DEMOPHOON LETO DEDIT HOSPES AMANTEM; | ILLE NECIS CAUSAM PRAEBUIT, IPSA MANUM'. The language here is extraordinarily compressed—to render it in English, Turbervile had to expand twelve words into twenty-three,

Demophoon that guilefull guest,
made Phyllis stoppe her breath:
His was the cause, and hers the hande
that brought her to the death.[31]

[31] George Turbervile, *The Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso, in Englishe Verse* (1567), from *Heroides*, ii. 147–8. I attach no special significance to 'the cause', since I have found no evidence that Shakespeare used Turbervile as he did Golding (he would have had little trouble understanding the *Heroides* in their original Latin).

The translation loses not only Ovid's compression, but also the drama in the way that 'ipsa manum', 'her own the hand', is held back to the very end. Ovid's original offers a rhetorical stroke exactly analogous to Othello's dramatic 'And smote him thus'. Phyllis articulates, Othello articulates and dramatizes, the image by which they wish to be remembered. She composes her own epitaph, he his own funeral oration. They create their own myths: the confidence of their rhetorical performances serves to cover up their self-delusions and raise them to exemplary status.

III

In the foregoing account, I have frequently used the term 'affinity'. Allusion and affinity may, but do not necessarily, coexist: an allusion may signal a more far-reaching correspondence, but it may be merely incidental or ornamental; an affinity may be made apparent on the surface of the text, but it may operate at the level of the imagination. The terms broadly correspond to *paradigma* and *aemulatio*. Paradoxically, the most profound affinities may be the least demonstrable precisely because they go deeper than the explicit local parallel. The problem with affinities is that if you're looking for them they're easy to find, but if you're not they cease to exist. They don't have the solidity of overt mythological allusions. The search for them may be defended on historical grounds: as I suggested in the opening chapter, there is no more typical Renaissance intellectual activity than the quest for parallels between the present and the past, the moderns and the ancients. As Plutarch wrote his parallel lives of the most noble Grecians and Romans, so that inveterate reader of the classics, Shakespeare's Fluellen, searches for parallels between Harry of Monmouth and Alexander the Great. 'For there is figures in all things', he reminds Gower (*Henry V*, IV. vii. 32): it is accordingly by no means far-fetched to imagine a Renaissance reader finding Ovidian figures in Shakespearian things.

But some of Fluellen's grounds for comparison are flimsy: he 'proves' that Henry V is another Alexander the Great because the former was born in Monmouth, the latter in Macedon, there is a river in each place, 'and there is salmons in both' (IV. vii. 30). Richard Levin has shown how Fluellenism is open to ready abuse by literary critics since it 'can be used to equate any two objects in the universe, by searching through all the facts about them and seizing upon those that represent similarities, regardless of their importance, while ignoring all the rest'.[32] It would be a simple matter for the Fluellenist to 'prove', say, the influence of the *Metamorphoses* on *King Lear*.

If it is accepted that Shakespeare converts literal Ovidian metamorphoses into metaphors, the play's recurrent canine imagery, its sense of people being reduced to the level of dogs, could be derived from Ovid's story of Hecuba (which, as we know from *Hamlet*, is an archetypal tragic set-piece). A representative passage could be singled out:

> But shee was dumb for sorrow.
> The anguish of her hart forclosde as well her speech as eeke
> Her teares devowring them within. Shee stood astonyed leeke
> As if shee had beene stone. One whyle the ground shee staard uppon.
> Another whyle a gastly looke shee kest too heaven. Anon
> Shee looked on the face of him that lay before her killd.
> (Golding, xiii. 645–50)

The power of silence, the notion of extremity of emotion impeding utterance, the stress upon the heart, the corrosive quality of tears, the image of being turned to stone, the look to the heavens, the final concentration on the face of the dead child (her youngest-born): each element may be referred to *Lear*.

Alternatively, Lear holding the body of his child and cursing the heavens may be related to Niobe in Book Six of the *Metamorphoses*; after all, it is Niobe who most famously literalizes the image implicit in Lear's 'O, you are men of stones' (V. iii. 232). Or again, Lear's character could be illuminated by means of reference to Narcissus. 'So great a blindnesse in my heart through doting love doth raigne' (Golding, iii. 561): does not Lear's blindness arise from Narcissus-like self-love? As the Fool recognizes, Lear becomes his own shadow—a fate for which Narcissus offers the archetype. More locally, when Lear swears by 'The mysteries of Hecate and the night' (I. i. 110), it might be recalled that in Golding Jason swears to Medea 'By triple *Hecates* holie rites' (vii. 136). And so one could go on. The problem with this approach is that such topoi are common in the Renaissance. Many of them may have been learnt by Renaissance writers from Ovid more than from any other source; many of them are used by Shakespeare

[32] Levin, *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago, 1979), 97.

with a freshness, a precision, and a dramatic power that seem closer to Ovid than any other source. But none of them can be identified as uniquely or definitively Ovidian.

Consider, for example, the moment when Lear identifies with the elements because the storm is less unkind to him than his daughters. I know of no passage closer to this in manner and tone than the following in the *Heroides*:

> hiemis mihi gratia prosit!
> adspice, ut eversas concitet Eurus aquas!
> quod tibi malueram, sine me debere procellis;
> iustior est animo ventus et unda tuo.
> . . . .
> duritia robora vincis . . .
> (vii. 41–4, 52)

Let the storm be my grace! Look, how Eurus tosses the rolling waters! What I had preferred to owe to you, let me owe to the stormy blasts; wind and wave are juster than your heart. . . . in hardness you exceed the oak . . .

But I cannot prove that the image in *Lear* is actually learnt from Ovid or that a Renaissance audience would have associated it specifically with Ovid. All one can say is that the spirit of the Roman poet has been caught in a way that licenses our applying Meres's remark about the soul of Ovid living in Shakespeare to works other than 'his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets'.

Yet there is some harder evidence in the text of *Lear*. Fluellenism consists of the ingenious critic perceiving connections that others have not perceived (he is always likely to perceive them because once he has found one he hunts hard for others in order to support his case). It is a different matter if we make connections that the text asks us to make. Metamorphosis takes place when identity breaks down; it is the process we see Lear undergoing from Act III, scene iv onwards. In that scene, he begins to lose a sense of his own self ('Does any here know me? This is not Lear'—I. iv. 208), then by the time he exits the image of metamorphosis is explicit:

> Thou shalt find
> That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
> I have cast off for ever.
> (I. iv. 288–90)

To the educated Elizabethan, Ovid's book of changes was the central

point of reference for the notion of transformation—witness Spenser's use of the *Metamorphoses* in his cantos on 'Mutabilitie' and Shakespeare's borrowings of Pythagoras' discourse in his sonnets on time and change. Given this centrality, I do not see how audiences could have avoided calling the *Metamorphoses* to mind in response to Lear's image of shape-shifting. And, given the Renaissance reading of Ovidian metamorphosis as metaphor for monstrous human behaviour, Albany's castigations of Goneril, such as 'Thou changèd and self-covered thing, for shame | Bemonster not thy feature' (Q: xvi. 61–2), would have evoked a similar response.

Lear's involuntary psychological metamorphosis is accompanied by Edgar's controlled, if forced, transformation into Poor Tom through disguise:

> I will preserve myself, and am bethought
> To take the basest and most poorest shape
> That ever penury in contempt of man
> Brought near to beast.
> (II. ii. 169–72)

With Gloucester, Edgar works through a series of roles or metamorphoses, including an imaginary one that transforms him into a fiend with eyes like full moons, a thousand noses, 'Horns whelked and waved like the enridgèd sea' (IV. vi. 71). Although the idea of a fiend tempting one to commit suicide is Christian, the description is more mythological. This is Shakespeare's only use of the word 'whelked'; given the context, it is likely that he remembered it from Golding's translation of some lines in the *Metamorphoses* concerning the Libyan god Ammon: '*Joves* ymage which the Lybian folke by name of *Hammon* serve, | Is made with crooked welked hornes that inward still doe terve' (V. 416–17). The verbal parallel suggests the association in Shakespeare's mind; the finished image does not overtly allude to Ammon, but does summon up a monstrous pagan creature of supernatural power like Ammon. Ovid is much preoccupied with monsters in Books Four and Five of the *Metamorphoses*: the reference to Ammon comes shortly after the story of Perseus, which may itself lie behind another image of monstrousness in Lear,

> Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
> More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
> Than the sea-monster.
> (I. iv. 238–40)

Critics have had some difficulty identifying this sea-monster.[33] I would say that the image conflates two of the monsters slain by Perseus: 'marble-hearted' and 'hideous' come from the grotesque Gorgon's head which turns to stone, and the sea-monster itself is that from which Perseus saves Andromeda.

Such mythological allusions create an Ovidian context for the play's imagery of people becoming as beasts or behaving like monsters. Probably the most telling allusion of this sort is Lear's powerful and painful comparison of women to centaurs: Ovid was the *locus classicus* for centaurs. Their 'duplex natura' (*Metamorphoses*, xii. 503) was the perfect image for humankind's double nature as both beast and rational creature; as 'semihomines' (xii. 536) and 'biformis' (ix. 121), they are arrested in a perpetual state of semi-metamorphosis, an emblem of the process which is Ovid's theme.[34] All this also makes them an ideal emblem in *King Lear*, Shakespeare's fullest exploration of dual nature, of humanity's approximation to the bestial.

Lear obviously has his daughters in mind when he makes his comparison: does this implicitly make him into the father of the centaurs? The mythologically literate Elizabethan would have known that the centaurs were begotten by Ixion and a cloud-form sent by Jupiter in the shape of Juno, whom Ixion aspired to love. As a punishment for his presumption, Ixion was bound on an ever-turning wheel in the underworld. When Lear contrasts the heavenly state of Cordelia ('Thou art a soul in bliss') with a sense of his own punishment ('I am bound | Upon a wheel of fire'), the fate of Ixion is evoked. This moment is a characteristically Renaissance combination of the Christian and the classical: the fire suggests medieval images of Hell and Purgatory, the idea of being bound on a wheel the figure of Ixion.[35] What was Ixion's punishment taken to symbolize? Sabinus

[33] H. H. Furness's Variorum edn. (1880, p. 86) proposes the hippopotamus, the whale, a monster at Troy, and a picture said to be portrayed in the porch of the temple of Minerva at Sais. The most convincing of these possibilities is the monster from which Hercules rescues Hesione at Troy, alluded to as 'the sea-monster' in a passage of *The Merchant of Venice* discussed in my previous chapter—here again, the source is Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, xi: 'a monster of the Sea'; Golding, xi. 237).

[34] For a characteristic Renaissance view of the centaur embodying man's dual nature (from the wisdom of Chiron to the destructive drunkenness of the battle with the Lapithae), see Natalis Comes, *Mythologiae* (1551; repr. Venice, 1567), p. 215^{r}.

[35] Who is, incidentally, alluded to in Harsnett's Declaration of *Egregious Popish Impostures*, to which the vocabulary of Lear owes much (see Kenneth Muir's New Arden edn. (1952), 255).

refers it 'ad homines in Republica irrequietos', 'to men restless in matters of state':[36] Lear is thus paying the price for tampering with the running of the state by dividing his kingdom. Sabinus also offers a psychological reading of the punishments in Ovid's underworld: 'Genera suppliciorum allegorice ad animi perturbationes relata' (p. 137). Sandys expands upon this: 'all these forementioned punishments are allegorically referred to the perturbations of the minde. . . . *Ixions* wheele, to the desperate remembrance of perpetrated crimes, which circularly pursue, and afflict the guilty.'[37]

Not only is the 'perturbation of the minde' a fitting phrase for Lear's state at this point, but the specific interpretation of Ixion's punishment is appropriate to both the awakening scene, where so much turns on Cordelia's forgiving response to Lear's 'desperate remembrance' of his own errors, and the last part of the play in general, where we see perpetrated crimes circularly pursuing and afflicting the guilty. Ixion's wheel is a powerful symbol for this process of crime catching up on the perpetrator: Edmund recognizes at the end that 'The wheel is come full circle' (v. iii. 165). The image picks up on the Fool's 'Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after' (II. ii. 245–8). There is an interesting variant here in that this is an image of going up and down rather than round in a circle: the wheel has perhaps been displaced from Ixion and applied to the figure who is adjacent to him in Ovid's underworld, Sisyphus 'that drave against the hill | A rolling stone that from the top came tumbling downeward still' (Golding, iv. 569–70).

O. B. Hardison argued in a learned article that the myth of Ixion is actually an important source for *King Lear*.[38] He established a considerable number of correspondences between the play and Renaissance interpretations of the myth: Ixion was read as a symbol of the desire for pomp without responsibilities and as a type of ingratitude, the thunderbolt that hurls him to hell was interpreted as a symbol of both sudden disillusionment and providential justice, the centaurs were seen in some interpretations as both Ixion's offspring, representative of lust, and his hundred unruly retainers (this reading derives from the false etymology *centum armati*; it is an especially

[36] Sabinus, *Metamorphosis seu Fabulae Poeticae*, 137.

[37] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 163.

[38] Hardison, 'Myth and History in *King Lear*', *SQ* xxvi (1975), 227–42.

striking correspondence given that Lear's followers are not numbered one hundred in any of the play's direct sources).

Hardison's argument is attractive—it would make the myth of Ixion into the 'pattern' for *King Lear* as that of Philomel is the pattern for *Titus Andronicus*—but it depends on the synthesis of several mythographic sources. Even if it is accepted that Shakespeare made this synthesis, it seems unlikely that he would have expected his audience to do so. I think it is more probable that the allusive pattern is focused on Ovid, as it is in *Titus*, where the references to Philomel are accompanied by allusions to other metamorphoses, such as those of Hecuba and Io. The centaur and Ixion allusions come too late in Lear for the audience to read the whole play in terms of a sustained correspondence. I believe that, rather than impose a retrospective pattern of single analogy, they combine with the language of transformation, bestiality, and monstrousness to release the potential that is already there for the *Metamorphoses* to be brought to bear upon the play. They perhaps offer confirmation of earlier glancing intuitions that Lear might be a Narcissus or a Niobe. They certainly validate the claim that Ovid presides over not only the magical changes wrought by love in Shakespearian comedy, but also the dehumanization wrought by extremity of emotion in the mature tragedies.

This is a good point at which to pause and reflect more generally on the consequences of these mythological figurations for our conception of the kind of artist that Shakespeare was.[39] A. W. Schlegel and S. T. Coleridge in the early nineteenth century, then A. C. Bradley in the early twentieth, invented an idea which is still held by many theatregoers and students: that Shakespeare's most monumental achievement was in tragedy and that four tragedies in particular—*Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*—are his greatest plays. Their greatness was supposed to reside primarily in their unique depth of characterization; in the nineteenth century, Hamlet became the most famous character in world literature. In more recent times, *King Lear* has taken the palm and is lauded as Shakespeare's supreme achievement, on grounds less of characterization and more of its overall vision of how the world goes.[40] But whether the emphasis is on

[39] In the following reflections I have been helped obliquely by Marion Trousdale's informative *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982).

[40] See R. A. Foakes, *Hamlet vs. Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge, 1993).

character or total conception, what is made paramount is the *singularity* of these works. They are praised for their uniqueness, their incomparability—or their comparability only to a few other massively canonical texts, such as the masterworks of Tolstoy. The sublimation of influence is conventionally seen as a mark of this singularity. *Lear* is a greater tragedy than *Titus* because it does not depend on precedent as the earlier play does, it triumphantly casts off the skin of the old chronicle play of *Leir*—so the argument might go (and everyone would agree with at least the last part of it: everyone, that is, except Tolstoy, who, perhaps due to some anxiety of his own, claimed to prefer the old chronicle play).

At first sight, the development from *paradigma* to *aemulatio*, from allusion to affinity, which I have proposed in my readings of two of the 'four great tragedies' would seem to support views of this kind. Shakespeare has reached the highest form of imitation, where the classic exemplars have been fully *digested*. Petrarch's famous letter is so apt that it may be quoted again: 'Thus we writers must look to it that with a basis of similarity there should be many dissimilarities. And the similarity should be planted so deep that it can only be extricated by quiet meditation. The quality is to be felt rather than defined.' But, on further reflection, an enormous gulf between the Petrarchan and the modern position becomes apparent. It is best perceived at the level of metaphor: the Renaissance ideal is of consumption and transmutation, while the Romantic and post-Romantic one is of creation or generation. Of course *ingenium* is there in the Renaissance, as it is there in classical rhetoric, but it is always the sister of *imitatio*. In post-Enlightenment aesthetics, on the other hand, *genius* (the new word for extreme artistic creativity) is characterized above all by originality, the mark of which is the uniqueness, the singularity, of the artwork. 'Originality' originally suggested a return to a source; by the late eighteenth century, it implied newness, sourcelessness.[41] That is why students are nearly always puzzled when they discover that Shakespeare, whom they have been told is the essential artistic genius, based nearly all his plays

[41] For the shift from Renaissance quests for origins in an authoritative, ultimately a divine, 'source' to the Enlightenment desire for originality, and Milton's pivotal position in this development, see David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven, Conn., 1983). On genius, see my chapter, 'Shakespeare and Original Genius', in *Genius: The History of an Idea*, ed. Penelope Murray (Oxford, 1989), 76–97.

on prose romances, plays and poems by other people, and history books. Fortunately for our cherished idea of Shakespeare's genius, even once this painful discovery has been made it is still possible to find all sorts of singularities in the character of Lear which are not there in Leir and in Othello which are absent from Cinthio's Moor (and, conveniently, the old *Hamlet* play is lost).

The normative way of watching and reading the 'four great tragedies' in our culture remains that of Coleridge and Bradley: we seek to build up a rich, unified conception of, say, Othello as a character; we proceed from the parts to the whole, according to the Schlegelian–Coleridgean model of the organic artwork. But the way of reading I have been proposing *fragments* the characters. It seeks not to build them up as unified consciousnesses, but to break them down into constituent parts. My concern is with the Ovidian constituents—there are of course many others. One can easily imagine a hostile response to such a procedure: 'we are interested in what makes Othello Othello, not in how here he is like Actaeon and there he is like Phyllis, how he resembles Ceyx one moment and Myrrha the next'. Such hostility would, however, be historically naïve. In Shakespeare's own time the pleasures of discovering singularity in the plays would have been outweighed by those of recognizing exemplarity. Novelty is viewed with suspicion; it is the appeal to experience that is valued. And experience, as Puttenham wrote, 'is no more than a masse of memories assembled'.[42]

Rhetoric is an art of memory which is a means of ordering experience and guiding the audience. The formal arrangement of verbal and visual languages has a suasive effect upon the viewer and listener. How do the viewer and listener know the 'right' response to a particular stage action or passion? By the force of example. That is to say, we would have been shown at school the example of Hecuba and told, 'This is how a person would speak and act in extremity of grief'. The boy in *Titus* has been taught this very lesson. Our education in tropes and figures would have given us a vast repertoire of categories which would enable us to classify the language we heard in the theatre. Thus, for example, we would have learnt that the effect of emotional stress on language is persuasively expressed by *aposiopesis*, which would have been exemplified in certain lines from Virgil and Ovid, such as Medea's 'ausus es—o, iusto desunt sua verba

[42] *The Arte of English Poesie*, bk. I, ch. xix, p. 239.

dolori!— | auses es. . .' ('you have dared—but I cannot find the words which are adequate to my just grief—you have dared. . .').[43] This knowledge would have given us a category into which to fit Lear's 'I will do such things— | What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be | The terrors of the earth' (II. ii. 454–6).

Character and play are, then, constituted through the artful combination of pre-existent patterns or figures—not just the figures of rhetoric narrowly conceived as a patterning of syntax, but also the exemplary figures of history and myth, for, as Erasmus said, 'Most powerful for proof, and therefore for *copia*, is the force of *exempla*'. *Exemplum*, or, to use the Greek term as Puttenham did, *paradigma*, is a master-trope in the history of rhetoric. According to Aristotle, 'all orators produce belief by employing as proofs either examples [*paradeigmata*] or enthymemes and nothing else'. *Paradigma* is nothing less than the rhetorical equivalent of logical induction: 'the proof from a number of particular cases that such is the rule, is called in Dialectic induction, in Rhetoric example [*paradeigma*]'.[44] The 'proof' of Othello's passion is his resemblance to his exemplars; he becomes paradigmatic partly by virtue of his recognizability in terms of previous paradigms. The Renaissance mind took a particular pleasure in such recognitions. That pleasure is as old as ancient Greek culture, yet perpetually renewable:

> And I like the way of weaving:
> The shuttle runs, the spindle hums,
> And—flying to meet us like swan's down—
> Look, barefooted Delia!
> Oh how meagre life's weft,
> How threadbare the language of happiness!
> Everything existed of old, everything happens again,
> And only the moment of recognition is sweet.[45]

Thus Osip Mandelstam, remembering Ovid in 1918 (did he somehow

[43] *Heroides*, xii. 133–4. The most frequently cited example of *aposiopesis* was Virgil's 'Quos ego—sed motos praestat componere fluctus', 'Whom I—but it is better to calm the troubled waves' (*Aen*. i. 135).

[44] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I. ii. 8–9. See further, the introductory ch. of John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton, NJ, 1989).

[45] 'Tristia', trans. James Greene, in the collection *The Eyesight of Wasps* (London, 1989), 55.

know that twenty years later he would follow his master into frozen exile and die in a transit camp in Siberia?).

Like all Renaissance artists, Shakespeare liked the way of weaving. Even plays superficially far distant from classical precedents offer moments of recognition. Lady Macbeth summons the spirits of darkness and is subliminally linked not only to Hecate and the weird sisters within the play, but also to Ovid's Medea, the great classical exemplar of the woman who unsexes herself in an appeal to night and to Hecate.[46] The willingness of the 'fiend-like queen' to dash out her baby's brains thus becomes recognizable as Medea's infanticide, whilst at the same time the recognition of the sisterhood of the two reveals that they are not mere fiends because they tell the truth about what they want in ways that their equivocating husbands, Macbeth and Jason, do not. Othello's sexual imagination is stirred and he loses control: he is Actaeon. He is torn to pieces within, as Actaeon is dismembered in the exemplary text. Everything existed of old, everything happens again: the recognition of the paradigm is itself a type of constancy in a world of mutability.

This last point is of great importance, for it ensures that we do not make the mistake of supposing that the fragmentation of character denotes the 'decentering' of 'man'. To acknowledge the role of rhetoric in the creation of Othello is not to lock him in the prison-house of language. Problematic as Renaissance theoreticians took the relationship between *verba* and *res* to be, they did not share the radical scepticism about *res* which is the characteristic of postmodern literary theory. The functioning of those master-narratives which we call 'myths' is of the essence here. The story (Actaeon, Narcissus, Hecuba, Niobe) translates into *verba* the *res* of desire and grief; it may be more or less successful in doing so (that will depend on the art of the translator), but no one questioned the existence of desire and grief as constituent parts of human nature. The modern theoretical disappearance of the *res*, the supposition that desire and grief are solely linguistic constructs, would have been incomprehensible in both classical and Renaissance culture.

This is not to say that nothing changes—everything changes, says

[46] For possible links between *Macbeth* and Seneca's, as opposed to Ovid's, Medea, see Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'The Fiend-like Queen: A Note on *Macbeth* and Seneca's *Medea*', *ShS* xix (1966), 82–94. As usual, Shakespeare synthesizes a range of sources: another of Ovid's witches, Tisiphone, may provide the weird sisters with an infernal brew including a filleted snake from the fens and a hemlock stalk (Golding, iv. 617–23); then

Ovid. In particular, modes of rhetoric change. Thus the Player's speech in *Hamlet* is not the play's characteristic pattern of grief. Hamlet is impressed by the Player's capacity to move himself and his audience, but Shakespeare is also parodying the overblown rhetoric of the previous decade's drama; he is implicitly suggesting that what really moves an audience is his own more supple, less showily formal, poetic language—this language is, however, still a supremely rhetorical language, full of doublets and amplifications. *Lucrece* finds a rhetoric in Hecuba which advances on that of the *Mirror for Magistrates*; *Hamlet* finds a still newer rhetoric which advances on that of Hecuba. Stylistic development of this sort is a form of Darwinian evolution: the fitter elements of the old style are adapted to a new environment and the species is able to mutate. *Hamlet* mocks the inflated epic idiom of 'The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast' and the hoary mythological display of 'Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round | Neptune's salt wash and Tellus orbèd ground', but when Hamlet, looking 'As if he had been loosed out of hell', turns 'his head over his shoulder' to gaze one last time at Ophelia before he sunders his love from her, the audience is given the pleasure of a recognition of Orpheus' glance back at Eurydice and in that recognition a confirmation of the truth of the old stories.[47] This Orphic glance occurs in a scene which Shakespeare does not dramatize: it is narrated by Ophelia. The allusion is possibly more readily recognizable as narrative than it would have been as stage image. Where in the late plays Shakespeare seems to move towards the dramatization of myth, here he detaches himself from the Player's crude enactment of Trojan matter and gives Hamlet's parting a quality that is rendered mythic by virtue of its very distance from immediate performance.

IV

As befits their subject-matter, the Roman plays revert to more explicit mythological allusiveness. Mars, the god of war, is written into the name of the warrior Caius Martius, later known as

a few lines later in bk. 4 of the *Metamorphoses* there is a murdered infant which serves Lady Macbeth: 'he snatched from betweene | The mothers armes his little babe . . . and dasht his tender head | Against a hard and rugged stone' (iv. 636–40).

[47] *Hamlet*, II. ii. 453, III. ii. 148–9, II. i. 84, 98.

Coriolanus. When the third Volscian servingman says that Caius Martius is 'so made on here within as if he were son and heir to Mars' (IV. v. 196–7), an audience member would have to be obtuse indeed not to make the connection. The end of Coriolanus' martial career is signalled by the moment when Aufidius denies him his right to appeal to Mars as his god:

CORIOLANUS. Hear'st thou, Mars?
AUFIDIUS. Name not the god, thou boy of tears.
CORIOLANUS. Ha?
AUFIDIUS. No more.
CORIOLANUS. Measureless liar, thou hast made my heart
Too great for what contains it. 'Boy'? O slave!
(V. vi. 102–5)

For Coriolanus, to be deprived of the name 'Mars' and given that of 'Boy' instead is the ultimate insult. But of course Aufidius is not being a measureless liar in performing this switch of names, for when Volumnia persuaded Coriolanus not to attack Rome his response was signally that of a boy, a son, not a Mars.[48]

At his moment of capitulation outside the gates of Rome, Coriolanus says 'Behold, the heavens do ope, | The gods look down, and this unnatural scene | They laugh at' (V. iii. 184–6). A Jacobean audience would have been more likely than we are to recollect the most celebrated moment in classical mythology when the gods collectively look down and laugh. When Mars is caught *in flagrante delicto* with Venus, the other gods' reaction is to laugh at the indignity of the scene ('superi risere'—*Met*. iv. 188). In Thomas Heywood's *The Brazen Age*, the scene is staged in a way that makes the parallel with *Coriolanus* easy to see:

All the Gods appeare above, and laugh,
Jupiter, Juno, Phoebus, Mercury, Neptune.

MARS. The Gods are all spectators of our shame,
And laugh at us.[49]

[48] In a strange half-echo during the battle in which he gains the name Coriolanus, the overreaching *Martius* seems to become not Mars but a different kind of overreacher, the Ovidian *Marsyas*, flayed for his misjudgement in challenging Apollo to a singing contest (vi. 382 ff.): 'Who's yonder, | That does appear as he were *flayed?*' (I. vii. 21–2, my emphasis).

[49] *The Brazen Age*, Act IV, *Dramatic Works of Heywood*, iii. 237.

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Coriolanus* is the one in which Venus, erotic love, is least present. Sexual desire only seems to impinge at the charged moment when Aufidius embraces Coriolanus. Caius Martius himself seems immune to it: to perceive his humiliation at the hands of his mother as the play's equivalent of Mars' humiliation in the toils of passion is to see how the erotic is displaced into the filial.

Though Martius is manifestly under Mars, and Volumnia could conceivably be identified with Venus in her role as *genetrix*, *mother* of all things, the play does not invite us to imagine mother and son lying together like Venus and Mars in Vulcan's net. For the image of the gods of love and war in each other's arms, we must turn to *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the very first speech of the play, Antony is compared to 'plated Mars' (I. i. 4). The audience is then informed that he has been trapped by desire, transformed from warrior to lover. The idea immediately evokes the entanglement of Venus and Mars, for which there are many classical sources, among them the *Ars Amatoria*, where it is introduced as follows:

Fabula narratur toto notissima caelo,
Mulciberis capti Marsque Venusque dolis.
Mars pater, insano Veneris turbatus amore,
De duce terribili factus amator erat.
(*Ars Am*. ii. 561–4)

There is a story, most famous over all the world, of Mars and Venus caught by Mulciber's [Vulcan's] guile. Father Mars, plagued by frenzied love of Venus, from a terrible captain became a lover.

Philo's opening image of Antony establishes the same movement from great military leader ('His captain's heart, | Which in the scuffles of great fights . . .') to slave of sexual desire ('To cool a gipsy's lust'). The play as a whole, down to its closing speech ('No grave upon the earth shall clip in it | A pair so famous'—V. ii. 353–4), celebrates the fame of the lovers, seeks to make their story 'toto notissima caelo'. Lest the connection with the gods of love and war should be missed, there is a reminder of it towards the end of the first act, in the playful context of the eunuch Mardian who can 'do nothing' sexually himself, but who has 'fierce affections' and can 'think | What Venus did with Mars' (I. v. 18–19, 'do' is of course slang for 'copulate with'). Cleopatra responds by thinking what she would like Antony to do with her, namely mount her as he does his horse ('O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony'—I. v. 21). If this image of Antony and

Cleopatra lying together is conjoined with Mardian's imagining, it becomes proleptic of the lovers' downfall, for to think of what Venus did with Mars is also to think of what Vulcan did to the two of them, namely snare them in his net and make them the laughing-stock of the other gods. The love of Cleopatra and Antony is symbolic of cosmic harmony, as that of Venus and Mars was sometimes interpreted to be, but it is also undignified to the point of risibility.

In Golding's moralization, 'The snares of Mars and Venus shew that tyme will bring too lyght | The secret sinnes that folk commit in corners or by nyght' (Epistle, 111–12), and for Sandys, 'adulteries are taxed by this fable: which how potent soever the offenders, though with never so much art contrived, and secrecy concealed, are at length discovered by the eye of the Sun, and exposed to shame and dishonour' (Sandys, p. 157). But Antony and Cleopatra make no efforts to conceal their affair, and although Maecenas refers to the 'adulterous Antony' in the context of the dishonouring of Octavia (III. vi. 93), Octavius and his fellow-Romans disapprove of the liaison with Cleopatra primarily because they believe that Antony is wasting his martial powers and abnegating his duty to Rome. *Antony and Cleopatra* is anything but a fable taxing adultery. The allusions to Venus and Mars need to be read in other ways: first of all, they assert the god-like status of Antony and Cleopatra, and secondly they suggest some of the terms cited by Sandys elsewhere in his synthesis of Renaissance interpretations of the story: '*Mars* exciteth greatnesse of spirit and wrath in those in whose nativity he predominates; *Venus* ruling infuseth the effects of love; and *Mars* conjoyning, makes the force of that love more ardent.'[50] Antony, then, is Mars-like in his combination of greatness of spirit—his magnanimity is repeatedly stressed—and wrath, the latter manifested most vigorously in his treatment of Thidias.

His anger has two faces, for when wielded in battle it brings him glory, yet when indulged arbitrarily it debases him. This is Cleopatra's point when she describes him as a perspective painting, 'Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon, | The other way's a Mars' (II. v. 117–18). The Gorgon embodies the negative aspect of anger, as described by Ovid in the *Ars Amatoria*:

[50] Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 157. Compare Abraham Fraunce's interpretation in *The Third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch* (1592), where Venus is 'Wantonnes' and Mars is 'hoate and furious rage' (p. 32ʳ).

Pertinet ad faciem rabidos compescere mores:
Candida pax homines, trux decet ira feras.
Ora tument ira: nigrescunt sanguine venae:
Lumina Gorgoneo saevius igne micant.
(*Ars Am.* iii. 501–4)

It is becoming to the appearance to hold wild moods in check; fair peace suits men, fierce anger beasts. The face becomes swollen with anger: the veins grow black with blood, the eyes flash more savagely than Gorgon fire.

The juxtaposition with Mars, representative of wrath in its positive aspect, suggests that Shakespeare expected his audience to read the allusion to the Gorgon in terms of rage, to interpret it along the lines of Thomas Elyot's gloss on the passage in the *Ars Amatoria*, 'This Gorgon that Ovid speaketh of is supposed of poets to be a fury or infernal monster, whose hairs were all in the figure of adders, signifying the abundance of mischief that is contained in wrath.'[51] According to Elyot, the man who aspires to be a governor should be without ire: Antony's implacability is thus revealed as the source of both his military strength and his failure as a ruler.

While Mars is Antony's divine type, his semi-divine one is Hercules. In Plutarch's 'Life of Marcus Antonius', Antony claims descent from Anton, son of Hercules; to Shakespeare's Cleopatra he is a 'Herculean Roman' (I. iii. 84). His allegiance to the greatest of the mythical heroes is strengthened by the strange scene in the fourth act, when music of hautboys is heard under the stage and the second soldier offers the interpretation that 'the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, | Now leaves him' (IV. iii. 13–14; in Plutarch, the music and the Antonine allegiance belong to Bacchus, to wine and revelry). The image of Antony and Cleopatra wearing each other's clothes, the 'sword Phillipan' exchanged for the woman's 'tires and mantles' (II. v. 22–3), may suggest not only the cross-dressing of Mars and Venus, a topos in Renaissance painting, but also that of Hercules and Omphale, as described in the *Heroides*:

nec te Maeonia lascivae more puellae
incingi zona dedecuisse putas?
. . . . . .
Haec te Sidonio potes insignitus amictu

[51] Elyot, *The Governor*, ed. Lehmberg, p. 112, cited by Waller B. Wiggington, '"One way like a Gorgon": An Explication of *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. v. 116–17', *Papers on Language and Literature*, xvi (1980), 366–75, to which my paragraph is indebted.

dicere? non cultu lingua retenta silet?
se quoque nympha tuis ornavit Iardanis armis
et tulit a capto nota tropaea viro.
('Deianira to Hercules', *Her.* ix. 65–6, 101–4)

And do you not think that you brought disgrace upon yourself by wearing the Maeonian girdle like a wanton girl? . . . These deeds can you recount, gaily arrayed in a Sidonian gown? Does not your dress rob from your tongue all utterance? The nymph-daughter of Iardanus [Omphale] has even tricked herself out in your arms, and won famous triumphs from the vanquished hero.

David Bevington notes that the story of Omphale and Hercules, in which the hero is subdued and put to work spinning among the maids of the Lydian queens, 'was widely used in the Renaissance as a cautionary tale of male rationality overthrown by female will'.[52] Thomas Heywood's dramatization of the story in *The Brazen Age* makes the parallel with *Antony and Cleopatra* easy to see: the hero who dominates the 'triple world', the bearer of the 'pillars' of Atlas, is brought under the spell of a 'Strumpet' and 'attired like a woman'. 'Hence with these womanish tyres, | And let me once more be my selfe againe', he cries out: the play dramatizes Hercules' ultimately doomed attempt to break free from the female will, just as Antony struggles to break free from his strong Egyptian fetters.[53]

Shakespeare's Antony explicitly compares himself to Hercules shortly before his attempted suicide. Rage is again the key emotion:

The shirt of Nessus is upon me. Teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o'th' moon,
And with those hands that grasped the heaviest club
Subdue my worthiest self. The witch shall die.
(IV. xiii. 43–7)

('Alcides' is, of course, another name for Hercules.) Although the Hercules plays of Seneca provide a possible confirmatory source,

[52] New Cambridge edn. of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1990), 9. Bevington does not, however, cite the *Heroides*, which I take to be the likeliest source for Shakespeare's knowledge of the story. In 'The Comparison of Demetrius with Antonius', Plutarch notes that 'Cleopatra oftentimes unarmed Antonius' and compares this with 'painted tables, where Omphale secretlie stealeth away Hercules clubbe, and tooke his Lyons skinne from him' (Bullough, v. 319): this is a precedent for the linking of the two pairs of lovers, but the idea of mutual cross-dressing is not introduced.

[53] *The Brazen Age*, Act V, *Dramatic Works of Heywood*, iii. 242–7.

Shakespeare would have derived his knowledge of the hero's madness primarily from Ovid's accounts in the ninth book of the *Metamorphoses* and Deianira's letter in the *Heroides*.

Several parallels between Hercules and Antony are suggested by Deianira's letter. The idea of the warrior finally destroyed by love is expressed with great economy: Venus is his nemesis ('nocuit Venus'); he whom no military enemy could overcome is overcome by love ('vincit amor'). Hercules is seen as a superhuman figure, who once held up the earth on behalf of Atlas; Antony is 'The triple pillar of the world' and in Cleopatra's dream of him in the final act 'his reared arm | Crested the world'. The hero's death is precipitated by a mistake on the part of the woman: Deianira sends the shirt of Nessus under the impression that it is impregnated with a potion that will rekindle Hercules' love, whereas in fact it is poisoned; Cleopatra sends a false report of her own death with the same intention of reawakening love, but it has the effect of making Antony take his own life. Once her beloved is gone, the woman makes a series of farewells and takes her own life. But there are also certain variations: Hercules for a time brought universal peace ('se tibi pax terrae'), an idea which the play displaces on to Octavius ('The time of universal peace is near'); Deianira imagines with disgust the captive Iole, who has herself captured Hercules' heart, being paraded through the streets, while Cleopatra imagines with disgust herself being paraded in Rome as the captive of Octavius.[54] These changes are bound up with a shift of the balance of power to Octavius, who at the end of the play becomes Augustus, seen by Rome as another incarnation of Hercules.

More significant than any association of content between Deianira's letter and the play is the way that the voice which Ovid gives to the woman provides a model for Shakespeare in his giving of a voice to Cleopatra: although she is ultimately a character of pathos who lacks Cleopatra's power, Deianira serves as a precedent in terms of emotional range, as she veers between tenderness and scorn, anger at her lover for leaving her and pride in his achievements. The *Heroides* are important for *Antony and Cleopatra* because they see the male hero from the woman's point of view. More generally, they provide Shakespeare with examples of female characters who are witty as well as amorous, not merely moody but also full of vitality, linguistically

[54] Parenthetic quotations in this paragraph: *Heroides*, ix. 11, 26, 15; *Antony and Cleopatra*, I. i. 12, V. ii. 81–2, IV. vi. 4.

adept and good at arguing. Plutarch's interest is firmly in the life of Marcus Antonius; Ovid's letters of Deianira and Dido are female 'lives'. History is restructured, with the death of the woman, not that of the warrior, becoming the climax of the story. In each text the female character is made to define herself in relation to the man whom she loves and admires; once she has pushed him to his death, there is nothing left in life for her. But despite this, the female perspective stands in opposition to the male epic voice which orders the march of history.

Antony's direct allusion to Hercules and the shirt of Nessus looks as if it is based on the *Metamorphoses*, and its version of the story would certainly have been the one most familiar to those members of Shakespeare's audience who understood the reference. Lichas is the messenger who bears to Hercules the poisoned shirt which Deianira mistakenly believes is a love-token. Like Antony with Thidias and Cleopatra with the messenger who brings news of the marriage to Octavia, Hercules vents his wrath on the hapless go-between:

> Behold, as *Lychas* trembling in a hollow rock did lurk,
> He spyed him. And as his greef did all in furie woork,
> He sayd. Art thou syr *Lychas* he that broughtest untoo mee
> This plagye present? of my death must thou the woorker bee?
> Hee quaakt and shaakt, and looked pale, and fearfully gan make
> Excuse. But as with humbled hands hee kneeling too him spake,
> The furious *Hercule* caught him up, and swindging him about
> His head a halfe a doozen tymes or more, he floong him out
> Into th'*Euboyan* sea with force surmounting any sling.
> He hardened intoo peble stone as in the ayre he hing.
> (Golding, ix. 259–67)

In the blindness of his anger, Antony does not see the irony of his allusion. Hercules' fury at Lichas is a sublimation of his fury at Deianira, for she is the one who is the worker of his death; Antony, too, blames the woman, stigmatizing her as a witch and condemning her to death. He forgets that Deianira was innocent, that she was motivated only by love for Hercules, just as Cleopatra is innocent of the charge of deliberately selling Antony in battle to 'the young Roman boy' (IV. xiii. 48).

In appealing to Hercules to teach him anger, Antony is also preparing for his own suicide. The context of the allusion is decisive: immediately after flinging Lichas into the air, Hercules sets about preparing his own funeral pyre. He goes to his death rehearsing his

own past glories, in the style of the stoic hero; in Antony's phrase, he 'subdues his worthiest self'.[55] But the manner of Antony's death is profoundly messy: he does not manage the deed with the style of Hercules or Othello. Cleopatra's assurance to him that he has not been vanquished by Caesar, that 'none but Antony should conquer Antony' (IV. xvi. 17), rings not a little hollow, for the botched suicide is hardly a mode of conquest to be proud about. It may not be a coincidence that the phrase echoes the suicide words of Ovid's Ajax: 'That none may *Ajax* overcome save *Ajax*'.[56] Ajax is another hero who is reduced in stature and comes to an ignominious end, in his case killing himself in a fit of pique after he has been routed by Ulysses in the argument about who deserves the arms of Achilles. He is also another figure with whom Antony claims affinity ('The seven-fold shield of Ajax cannot keep | The battery from my heart')[57] in terms of martial greatness, but this is yet one more affinity which rebounds unfavourably, in so far that Ovid, followed by Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*, had reinvented Ajax as a blustering figure outwitted by the crafty Ulysses. So too is Antony outmanœuvred by the pragmatic Caesar.

Antony construes his own end as a dissolution, a watery metamorphosis: like a cloud, he 'cannot hold this visible shape' (IV. xv. 14). But in her dream of him as emperor bestriding the ocean, his body metamorphosed into cosmic forms, Cleopatra transforms his decease into an apotheosis. She reinvests Antony with Herculean qualities; her dream is the equivalent of the climax of the Hercules narrative in Book Nine of the *Metamorphoses*:

> so *Hercules* as soone as that his spryght
> Had left his mortall limbes, gan in his better part too thryve,
> And for too seeme a greater thing than when he was alyve,
> And with a stately majestie ryght reverend too appeere.
> His myghty father tooke him up above the cloudy spheere.
> (Golding, ix. 323–7)

This is one of Ovid's grandest transformations, but it is also one of his more particular allusions, for it has a political sub-text which is not

[55] IV. xii. 47, adapted to third person. For a fine account of the stoic subjugation of the self in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, see Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* (New Haven, Conn., 1985).

[56] Golding, xiii. 472. Heywood's Hercules in *The Brazen Age* kills himself with the same vain assertion: '*Alcides* dies by no hand but his owne' (*Dramatic Works*, iii. 254).

[57] IV. xv. 38–9, probably derived from Ovid's description of Ajax as 'The owner of the sevenfold sheeld' (Golding, xiii. 3).

caught by Golding. The Elizabethan translator read Hercules as a type of virtue rewarded with heavenly glory, but Ovid also had a specific figure in mind: the original of Golding's line 'And with a stately majestie ryght reverend too appeere' is 'coepit et augusta fieri gravitate verendus' (ix. 270), in which 'augusta' is clearly meant to suggest Augustus and 'gravitate' the *gravitas* which Ovid's Caesar espoused. An association is thus being drawn between the universal peace brought by Hercules and the *pax Romana* under Augustus: the line anticipates the close of the poem, in which Ovid imagines Augustus himself ascending to the heavens.

Ovid is finally more interested in his own art than in praising Augustus. The imagined immortality of the latter is the penultimate, not the last, of the metamorphoses, for the poem ends with the apotheosis of the poet, not the *princeps*. The phrase that was applied to Hercules in Book Nine, 'parte sui meliore' (Golding's 'his better parts'), is reiterated in the envoi to Book Fifteen with the pronoun now in the first person: 'parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis | astra ferar', 'Yit shall the better part of mee assured bee too clyme | Aloft above the starry skye' (*Met.* xv. 875–6; Golding, xv. 989–90).

That said, the *Metamorphoses* were the product of a literary culture in which the patronage of the Emperor was all-important (consider what happened to Ovid when he lost it), so in this sense George Sandys may be said to have been following Ovid's example when he dedicated his translation of the *Metamorphoses* to King Charles, and prefaced it with a panegyric in which he imagined the king holding 'Augustus' Scepter'. Sandys's summary account of Hercules' greatness also serves as praise of the Augustan aspirations of the Stuart monarchy: '*Hercules* better deserved a Deity then all the rest of the *Heroes*: who conquered nothing for himselfe: who ranged all over the world, not to oppresse it, but to free it from oppressors and by killing of Tyrants and Monsters preserved it in tranquillity' (Sandys, p. 329). This is the sort of thing that Renaissance monarchs and empire-builders liked to hear.

Given King James's well-known propensity to think of himself as another Augustus, it has been tempting to read *Antony and Cleopatra*, which ends with the establishment of the Augustan empire, as a play written in praise of the Stuart court.[58] If Cleopatra's apotheosis of

[58] See e.g. H. Neville Davies, 'Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Shakespeare Studies*, xvii (1985), 123–58.

Antony is read as a *translatio* of Ovid's apotheosis of Hercules, this reading is complicated interestingly. As Ovid locates Augustan greatness in the dead Hercules, so Shakespeare finds it in the dead Antony more than in the Octavius who will become Augustus. The Augustan myth is thus held open to question. Shakespeare performs a destabilization which is quintessentially Ovidian: *Antony and Cleopatra* moves bewilderingly between a panegyric and an ironic tone, just as Ovid does in the Hercules narrative. Book Nine of the *Metamorphoses* at one moment has Hercules transformed into a god and into Augustus, then within a few lines moves on to the metamorphosis of Galanthis into a weasel. It is, to say the least, a bathetic juxtaposition. The bathos accords with the larger sense in which the *Metamorphoses* is ambivalent in its relationship to Augustus: the Emperor is specifically compared to Jove in the first book,[59] yet the rapacious Jove is hardly a role-model for the Augustus who sought to return Rome to moral austerity. And if there is a Jove in *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is the sexually active Antony, not the calculating Octavius—'Your Emperor | Continues still a Jove', says a soldier to Enobarbus, in recognition of Antony's magnanimity (IV. vi. 28–9). Later, Cleopatra wishes she had 'great Juno's power' so that Antony could be raised and set 'by Jove's side' (IV. xvi. 35–7). Like Jove and Juno, Antony and Cleopatra are supreme in everything including their bickering.

Ovid also destabilized another of the founding myths of the Roman empire, that of 'pius Aeneas'. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the exemplary Augustan poem, Aeneas has to leave Dido in order to fulfil his destiny and establish Rome; the seventh letter of the *Heroides* questions this necessity by telling the story from Dido's point of view. 'Certus es, Aeneas, cum foedere solvere naves, | quaeque ubi sint nescis, Itala regna sequi?' (vii. 7–8, 'are you resolved, Aeneas, to break at the same time from your moorings and your pledge, and to follow the realms of Italy, which lie you know not where?'): here Aeneas is made to seem anything but 'pius' in his desertion of Dido. The pursuit of empire, rather than the pursuit of love, is made to seem wayward and unpredictable. Ovid appropriates Virgil's ruling adjective, *pius*, and gives it to Dido, associating it with her love instead of Aeneas' duty: 'Uror, ut inducto ceratae sulpure taedae, | ut *pia* fumosis addita tura focis' (my italics, vii. 23–4, 'I am all ablaze with love, like torches of

[59] 'nec tibi grata minus pietas, Auguste, tuorum | quam fuit illa Iovi' (i. 204–5)—'Nor is the loyalty of your subjects less pleasing to you, Augustus, than that was to Jove'.

wax tipped with sulphur, like pious incense placed on smoking altar-fires').[60] This Dido has a Cleopatra-like ability to blaze with love one moment and to be manipulative the next: her claim that she may be pregnant and that Aeneas is thus destroying his son as well as her is a clever means of making him feel guilty (vii. 133–8). It is also a clever revision of Virgil, for in the *Aeneid* Dido merely wishes that she had a baby to remind her of Aeneas and thus give her comfort (*Aen.* iv. 327–30). Where Virgil's Dido elicits pathos, Ovid's is admirable for her wit and inventiveness. Cleopatra is manifestly closer to the Ovidian version—indeed, her feigning of sickness in Act I, scene 3 might even suggest a pretence that she is pregnant.

Dido and Aeneas are mythico-historical precedents for the North African queen who distracts the Roman general from his imperial duty in Shakespeare's play. But Shakespeare, like Chaucer,[61] follows Ovid in revising the official version of the story by giving the dominant voice to the woman and to love. His Cleopatra echoes the language of Ovid's Dido: her scorn at Antony's enslavement to Fulvia, 'What, says the married woman you may go? | Would she had never given you leave to come!' (I. iii. 20–1), is a witty reduction of Dido's scorn at Aeneas' enslavement to Jupiter, '"Sed iubet ire deus." vellem, vetuisset adire'—' "But," [you tell me], "the god says you must go." Ah, would he had forbidden you to come' (vii. 139). At least Aeneas could claim he was obeying the will of a god; with Antony it is just another woman.

The final scenes of the play seem to take the revision further than Ovid and to endorse the un-Roman love of Antony and Cleopatra to such an extent that they are allowed to believe that they will be reunited after death. When Antony imagines himself in the Elysian fields with Cleopatra he says, 'Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, | And all the haunt be ours' (IV. xv. 53–4). But Dido and Aeneas did not end up together in the Elysian fields: in the underworld sequence of Book Six of *The Aeneid*, the dead queen turns away from the visiting Aeneas and rejoins her husband Sychaeus (*Aen.*

[60] For a good account of *Heroides*, vii, as a revision of Virgil, see Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's 'Heroides'* (Princeton, NJ, 1974), 76–93.

[61] The *House of Fame* includes a Dido-centred, Ovidian reading of Aeneas' desertion (i. 239–432). See the fine analysis by Jill Mann in her *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), 8–13: 'When Dido reappears in the *House of Fame*, however, this Ovidian mode uncompromisingly reasserts itself—and it does so all the more powerfully in that it grows with a quasi-spontaneous momentum out of a Vergilian narrative.'

vi. 469–74). Ovid's Dido (a.k.a. Elissa) in the *Heroides* also turns back to Sychaeus:

> hinc ego me sensi noto quater ore citari;
> ipse sono tenui dixit 'Elissa, veni!'
> Nulla mora est, venio, venio tibi debita coniunx.
> (*Her.* vii. 101–3)

From [the shrine to Sychaeus] four times have I heard myself called by a voice well known; he himself calling in faint tones, 'Elissa, come!' I delay no longer, I come, I come thy bride, thine own by right.

Shakespeare replicates the reciprocal call between husband and wife ('veni! . . . venio, venio') but gives it over to the adulterous lovers in Antony's 'I come, my queen' (IV. xv. 50) and Cleopatra's 'methinks I hear | Antony call. . . . Husband, I come. | Now to that name my courage prove my title' (V. ii. 278–9, 282–3). Dido is Sychaeus' wife by legal right ('debita') and in her suicide she returns to him, whereas Cleopatra aims to prove her spiritual right to be Antony's wife by virtue of her courage in committing suicide.

These revisions of the received story might be seen to reflect ironically on the characters of Antony and Cleopatra. Perhaps the point is that Antony is deluded in his hope that he and Cleopatra will end up hand in hand where souls do couch on flowers: the audience members who know their *Aeneid* will know that Dido and Aeneas do not provide a precedent for reunion after death. The same goes for Cleopatra: the audience members who know their *Heroides* will know that the husband who calls Dido to her suicide is Sychaeus, not Aeneas. There is much in the play to support a reading that would make Antony and Cleopatra into self-deluding dotards. But such a reading is deaf to the language of the suicide speeches, which seeks to give the lovers the transcendence they imagine for themselves and each other. Through the power of metaphor to work metamorphically upon the imagination, the theatre audience may come for a moment to believe that Cleopatra is leaving her baser elements, that she undergoes the most refined of transformations, not into a bird or a flower but into 'fire and air'. To read the allusions to Dido and Aeneas as purposeful remakings is to read with the grain of the text. For Shakespeare, as for Ovid, myth is a creative resource, not a set of prescriptions: to believe Antony's 'Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops' and Cleopatra's 'Husband, I come' is to believe in the possibility that history, which these myths encode in archetypal form,

can be rewritten. To make Aeneas not Rome's but Dido's—'*her* Aeneas'—is to question the primacy of empire.

So too with the play's final revision of the image of Venus and Mars. Octavius says that the dead Cleopatra looks 'As she would catch another Antony | In her strong toil of grace' (v. ii. 341–2). The image of being caught in a net ('toil') reintroduces the memory of 'What Venus did with Mars'. But this time the net belongs to Venus, not to Vulcan, and the sexual toil does not make the lovers a laughing-stock. Instead, it elevates them to a state of grace. Such revisions of received myth proclaim, as Helena does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with her 'Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase', that 'The story shall be changed'.

Shakespeare and Ovid

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