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Introduction

A. B. Taylor

> The Ovid who mattered most to the Elizabethans was not the love poet but the mythographer, and the *Metamorphoses* is both his most important and most influential poem
>
> Laurence Lerner, 'Ovid and the Elizabethans'[1]

When William Shakespeare was eleven or twelve and at King's New School, Stratford, one day the master, Thomas Jenkins, in his 'lecture', introduced him and his classmates to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[2] Five or six lines were taken from the first book of the poem, set in context, read out, translated, parsed, metrically examined and explained, and praised for their style; they were then commented on at length for their moral implications and their natural (scientific), geographical, historical, cultural, or mythographical content. The lines and the master's detailed comments were noted down in the boys' commonplace books, the lines to be learned and recited next day when knowledge of the detailed comments would also be examined. This process was repeated after each of the twice-weekly lectures and at the end of the week. In the two years that followed before Ovid gave way to 'graver' poets – we do not who these were at Stratford but elsewhere they included Virgil, Silius Italicus, and Lucan – the lines rose to twelve or fourteen, and doubtless the master's comments became more detailed. From the first in the pious atmosphere of the Tudor schoolroom, morality would have been to the fore – doubtless it would not have been long before the young Shakespeare met, albeit at second hand, medieval exegesis in spirit, if not occasionally in detail. Masters also supplemented their lectures by using material from mythography manuals, older ones like Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum* (1371), more modern ones like Natalis Comes' *Mythologiae* (1551), emblem books like Alciati's *Emblemata* (1531), dictionaries like Cooper's *Thesaurus* (1565), and vol-

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uminous editorial notes on the *Metamorphoses* like those contained in the standard edition by Regius and Micyllus which, although primarily philological, also constantly cited various traditions. Whatever precise sources Jenkins used at Stratford, it is certain that the Ovid Shakespeare, and other Elizabethan schoolboys, met in school, was encumbered with a good deal of baggage, ancient and modern, Christian and pagan. His being so reflected the eclectic and copious nature of Humanism and also of the educational system designed for Tudor England by Erasmus. Of course, Shakespeare and his fellows knew more of Ovid than the *Metamorphoses*; the *Heroides*, *Fasti*, and *Tristia* all featured on syllabi, but for the playwright and his peers the poem remained the central and dominant work.

One other large factor in Shakespeare's use of the *Metamorphoses* was the premier Elizabethan translation of the poem by Arthur Golding.[3] Repeatedly echoed, there are occasions when Golding seems to have become intertwined with the Latin text in his mind. In *Titus Andronicus*, for example, he recalls Ovid's picture of man's birth in the Pythagorean Sermon with Aaron's reminder to Tamora's sons that the black babe borne him by the empress is their half-brother:

> from that womb where you imprisoned were
> He is enfranchised and come to light. (4.2.123–4)

It is no surprise to find him echoing lines from one of his favourite passages in the *Metamorphoses* where immediately after birth, the new-born infant lies without strength once it has been 'brought to light' (*editus in lucem* xv.221).[4] But the image of the womb as a 'prison' is from the puritanical Golding whose rather bleak translation of the previous line – *natura . . . eque domo vacuas emisit in auras* (xv.220; 'Nature released us into the free air from our first *home* (the womb)') becomes 'Dame Nature' 'brought us out too aire, and from our *prison* set us free' (15.242 *Italics mine*). Such examples have fuelled ill-judged speculation that the translation was committed to memory in the grammar school at the same time as the Latin lines of the original; but it is impossible that the translation with its heavy reliance on paraphrase could have been used by schoolmasters in the 'lecture' where the rule was, in the words of the Plymouth schoolmaster, William Kempe, 'word for word, and phrase for phrase'.[5] It is not impossible that it was used in gram-

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mar schools for the 'speedy running over' of those parts of prescribed texts not covered in the lecture by the master – there is evidence of its use in this way but it does not occur until 1622.[6] But it is unlikely to have been used so when Shakespeare was in the grammar school.

Golding's Ovid, published in partial form in 1565, and complete form in 1567, was a considerable and instant success. Even in 1565, Thomas Peend, a young lawyer of the Inns of Court, attempted to steal some of Golding's thunder by concocting a story of having been frustrated in a translation of the *Metamorphoses* he had already partially completed by the appearance of Golding's Ovid, while at the same time patently taking details from Golding and aping the latter's dynamic style; and it was popular at both universities – one of the young translators of Seneca at Cambridge, John Studley, regularly digressing from Seneca's text to echo Golding.[7] Shakespeare would have been at grammar school from 1571–9 so, given the understandable slowness with which new literature percolates down to the schoolroom, timing is against his having seen Golding in school. The more probable explanation lies in the Elizabethans' enthusiasm for works like Golding's Ovid, a leading work in the 'translation movement' of the 1560s and 70s which aimed to show that English was as capable of producing great literature as French or Italian. As a young writer, Shakespeare had a considerable fondness for some translations of Ovid and of other classics; but it is a reflection of the predominance of the *Metamorphoses* among Ovid's works with him, that scarcely a trace of the premier Elizabethan translation of the *Heroides*, George Turbervile's *Heroycall Epistles* (1567), has been found in his work. However, he was well acquainted with the translations of Seneca of the 1560s;[8] no one has ever suggested these were studied in grammar school for the very good reason that Seneca did not feature on syllabi. Strange though it may seem to modern readers, who understandably baulk at its metrical roughness and general awkwardness, Shakespeare seems to have liked Golding's Ovid for its vitality, vigour and 'englyshness' while being amply aware of its failings. And in his use of the work, he was joined by Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, and a host of other Elizabethan writers.[9] What accounts for the greater degree of his familiarity with the translation of his favourite poem was probably his celebrated 'small Latin'; he could read Latin, of course, but not with

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the facility of a university educated man, and found Golding convenient. A pattern is discernible early in his career; in *Titus Andronicus*, one of his earliest plays, for instance, although he knew his main Ovidian source well enough to occasionally echo the Latin, there is clear evidence he had also been reading it in Golding.[10]

But if we disengage for a moment from Golding and the considerable array of other intermediary material, we can briefly consider why the *Metamorphoses* had such enduring appeal for Shakespeare. The landscape of the poem with its constantly changing shapes, a landscape dominated by mysterious, often jealous and quarrelsome deities, had in itself a lifelong fascination for Shakespeare, as his most charming, Ovidian comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and arguably his greatest play, *The Tempest*, show. The creator of Lady Macbeth was also deeply impressed by Medea, Byblis, Myrrha and other moments where, as in the *Heroides*, Ovid reveals his deep knowledge of female psychology in extreme moments of passion. And his work was enriched by the Ovidian aesthetic, those moments when Ovid conjures images of such beauty that he has inspired generations of painters and sculptors. And particularly as a young poet, he was much taken by Ovid's wit which sparkles on every page of his great poem. This can sometimes take the form of verbal pyrotechnics but at its best, it reminds us that Ovid was a born poet with a feeling for the shape, sound and pattern of words that resulted in subtle, at times astonishing effects. Moreover, pervading the poem, even as Ovid delights in beauty and the bright things of this world, was a sense of the inexorable approach of the darkness. Ovid was one of the world's great poets on Time whether depicting it as the voracious '*Tempus edax*' or 'the swift and silent thief'. No one appreciated this more than Shakespeare.

All the colourful, wittily presented stories that filled Ovid's poem, whether they derive from Greece, Asia Minor or recent Roman history, have about them the aura of myth, often sustained charmingly but illogically by aetiology. Myth is virtually impossible to define, as G. S. Kirk recognizes,[11] but whatever form it takes, it asks fundamental questions about man's place in the world, his relationship to the gods, to Nature, to birth and death, to human functions such as sex or feeding. At once sophisticated and childish, it lends itself to pictorial art which was undoubtedly part of the attraction for Ovid. But the poet who was the darling

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of Augustan Rome, with his fondness for parody and that *ingenium* which as Quintilian remarked, was sometimes over-indulged, is occasionally so concerned to identify his audience with his subject matter that he is in danger of diminishing myth. Hence the rapacious Apollo in pursuit of Daphne becomes the Roman man about town, mindful even in the heat of the chase of the girl's poor coiffure (*Met.*i.497–8), or Jove addressing the gods is identified with Augustus (i.175ff.), an identification for which, given Jove's lustful antics, the limits are dangerously unspecified. The story of Ovid and the Elizabethans, of course, is one of translation and contains many variations, from the blunt 'englysshinge' of Arthur Golding struggling with cumbersome mid-Tudor metre and language to the glorious translation of Ovid in Shakespeare's work. There were Elizabethan writers like John Lyly who adopted a similar approach to Ovid's when handling his myths, but Shakespeare preferred Ovidian myth to have a largeness undiminished by particular local considerations. Like the Renaissance mainstream represented in the work of mythographers or writers of emblem books, he preferred myth to retain its largeness of dimension.

Because of his Humanist education, heavy use of Golding, fondness for some translations of the classics, and preference for untrammelled depth in myth, Shakespeare's Ovid is complex, drawing on a varying array of eclectic, copious secondary sources, 'englysshe', and with deep, resonant mythic undertones. This can most usefully be illustrated at this point by two small, well-known examples. Consider Richard II's comparison of himself to Phaethon as he descends to kneel before Bolingbroke at Harlech Castle:

> Down, down I come like glist'ring Phaethon,
> Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
> (*Richard II* 3.3.177–8)

As the king indulges his taste for grandiose, tragic roles, the allusion to the boy who set fire to the earth and fell when he no longer had the strength to control the horses of the chariot of the Sun, primarily derives from the Latin text of Ovid's poem where Phaethon is pictured as an ill-fated, glamorous figure. But a debt to Golding in these lines subtly mediates Ovid; the word Shakespeare uses to convey Phaethon's brilliance, 'glist'ring', is taken from the translation where it is used on several occasions but never applied

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to the boy himself. And its first and most striking use is when the Sun-god voluntarily removes his own crown,

> putting off the bright and fierie beames
> That *glistered* rounde about his head... (2.53–4)

before embracing the mortal who will take his place, and, in Golding's words, '*usurpe* that name of right' (48). Soon his successor will cause chaos, blinded by 'the *glistring* light' (231) so that all the earth 'with flaming fire did *glistre*' (320), 'Bicause he wanted *powre to rule*' the 'charge' he took 'in hand' (221 *Italics mine*). Richard's apparently glamorous epithet for Phaethon, therefore, carries ominous connotations of impending disaster. Moreover, as the king kneels 'like a frantic man' (3.3.184) before Bolingbroke, the political moral Golding drew from the myth is echoing in the background:

> how weaknesse and the want of wit in magistrate
> Confoundeth both his common weale and
> eeke his owne estate (*Epistle* 75–6)

Richard's reference to the horses as 'unruly', a word which could carry the political meaning of 'not amenable to government' (*OED*), also recalls the tradition that the uncontrollable horses pulling Phaethon's chariot represented the rebellious subjects who destroy the prince. Shakespeare could have known this from a variety of sources, but, given Richard's neurotic character and histrionic make-up, and the playwright's known familiarity with *Amintas Dale*, Abraham Fraunce is the likeliest. In his interpretation of the myth, Fraunce not only sees Phaethon as a youthful 'magistrate' ruined by his rebellious subjects, represented by the 'fierce and outragious' horses, but also describes him as one of those who 'by their owne wishes procured their owne confusion', and whose 'ambitious conceit' served only 'to comfort his destruction'.[12]

Finally, Phaethon's horses appear as 'jades' in an Elizabethan translator whose work Shakespeare knew well and who was himself so fascinated by the Phaethon story in Ovid that he repeatedly introduced it, often without the least justification, into his translations of Seneca. In *Hercules Oetaeus*, John Studley once again shows his fondness for the story with a digression in the Chorus to Act Two where, as Phaethon loses control of the horses:

> he from wonted way his *Jades* doth jaunce.
> Amonge straunge starres they pricking forward praunce,

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> Enforcing them with Phoebus flames to frye,
> Whose roaming wheeles refuse the beaten rutt:
> Thus both himselfe, and all the Cristall skye
> In peril of the soulthring fire he put. (*Italics mine*)[13]

One would discount this as having relevance to Richard's Phaethon reference were it not for its context. The passage occurs as the Chorus, taking up a familiar theme in Seneca, laments the dangers attending kings – 'every time the sunne at West goes downe, / They looke another man should clayme the Crowne'; the poor man to whom 'Fortune hath bequeath'de a slender share', can drink at leisure from a 'woodden dishe' while a king who sups from the 'goulden cup',

> ever as hee liftes his head and drynkes,
> The rebelles Knyfe is at his throate hee thinkes.

And moments before he makes the Phaethon comparison, Richard, his mind filled with 'sad stories of the death of kings', had expressed his desire to exchange his 'gorgeous palace for a hermitage', and his willingness to give 'My figured goblets for a dish of wood' (3.3.149).[14]

A second small example of Shakespeare's complex Ovid occurs with Viola's reference to Echo:

> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out 'Olivia!' (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.262–3)

What makes the reference apt is that Viola now finds herself in the same situation as Echo: confronted by a beautiful recluse whom she begs to abandon solitude and embrace love. And circumstances reinforce the parallel for in this scene Viola has no voice of her own but is reduced, as she woos for Orsino, like Echo, to 'repeat words she has heard' (*audita* . . . *verba reportat* iii.369). And if she is Echo, Olivia is Narcissus for the beautiful young countess is like Ovid's boy not only in her seclusion but in being 'too proud' to love, and in a vanity shown in the present scene in whiling away her time contemplating, albeit sardonically, her own beautiful features. Like the boy, too, she avoids the sun, 'the heat of the element', is a naïve virginal figure who does not know herself, and in her situation as his, her 'plenty makes her poor' (*inopem me copia fecit* iii.466). And after the passionate speech containing the Echo reference, like Narcissus, too, Olivia becomes inflamed with desire for the lovely, deceptive image of the boy before her.

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The reference to Echo also contributes to the strong sexual ambience of the confrontation between the two women. Today readers tend to see the nymph as shy and retiring but Elizabethan readers would have been more aware of her sexuality; she was one of Ovid's nymphs, and Ovid's nymphs, as Salmacis shows, were direct and uninhibited when it came to sex. After she has wooed Narcissus as best she could, Echo bursts from the forest and throws herself upon him with the word, *coeamus* (iii.387). As Raphael Regius reminded Renaissance readers in the standard sixteenth-century edition of the *Metamorphoses*, this signifies not only 'let us meet' but also 'let us copulate, lie down together' (*Coire . . . concumbere significat*).[15]

In addition, Shakespeare's reference to the nymph as 'the babbling gossip of the air' indirectly recalls *via* Golding a long-established Christian tradition associating Echo with illicit sexuality. At the beginning of her story Ovid tells how she used to delay Juno with *longo . . . sermone* (iii.364; 'long-drawn out talk') while Jove who had been with the mountain nymphs, made his escape; it was to punish her for this that Juno deprived her of normal speech. But while Ovid thought this wily of Echo, describing her actions as 'deliberate' or 'measured' (*prudens* 364), medieval exegetists took a sterner view; among the miscellany of interpretations of Echo *in malo* and *in bono* they proposed, one that is recurrent is that the nymph was 'a bawd'. Arthur Golding, a fervent Calvinist, fastened on this tradition when he dealt with Echo in the puritanical moralization of Ovid's poem that prefaces his translation; ignoring all other possible interpretations of the nymph, for him, she represents only 'the lewd behaviour of a bawd' who got what she deserved (*Epistle*, 106). And when he came to translate her story, Golding, irritation at her sinful loquacity still rankling, makes her a common gossip, 'A babbling nymph' who 'hearing others talke, / By no meanes can restraine her tongue but that it needes must walke' who put 'hir tatling talke' to sinful use (3.443–4 and 453). And Shakespeare picked up Golding's characterization of Echo as both a gossip and a bawd. In an early work a female go-between in an adulterous affair is like Echo, 'a long-tongu'd babbling gossip', who is punished by one who will not trust 'the air' and knows women are given to 'tattle' (*Titus Andronicus* 4.2.151 and 169).[16] And when he uses the same words to describe Echo later in his great comedy, the same undertones obtain for, albeit in

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a more polite and civilized way, Viola can be said to be seeking to 'procure' Olivia for Orsino.

If one adds to this that to the Elizabethans, Juno, the goddess the nymph betrayed was by age-old tradition 'the ayre' and that 'Eccho was alwaies taken to be Iunoes daughter',[17] the apparently simple, lyrical reference to Echo as 'the babbling gossip *of the air*' has resonant connotations of uncomfortable, sexual confusion at a profound mythic level. And again, this is apt for in the myth-like setting of Illyria at this moment a beautiful female Narcissus-figure is unwittingly being seduced by a 'boy' who is really a woman.[18]

In a recent article on 'ideational static', Stephen Booth highlighted the uncanny sensitivity and control over language that marks Shakespeare out even from great writers such as Chaucer and Milton.[19] And the incredible discipline and selectivity one finds in these small examples remind us of the complexity of the rich vein of language he derived from Ovid. In citing these small examples, I have refrained from conclusions (although my general drift will inevitably be apparent in my language). This is not because of any undue sense of the fact that like any critic, I stand upon my own particular 'bank and shoal of time', but conclusions can be contentious and the object is to focus solely upon the complex and resonant texture of Shakespeare's Ovid; it is my purpose to introduce this book by alerting the reader to its intricacy and richness as a prelude to what follows where major examples of the playwright's use of Ovid are examined throughout his career.

This book presents a comprehensive examination of Shakespeare's Ovid by various hands; there is naturally reference to Ovid's other works such as the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Heroides*, *Tristia*, but the focus is where it was for Shakespeare, on the *Metamorphoses*. The aim is to broaden and further the debate initiated by Jonathan Bate's splendid *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford 1993), which is rather surprisingly the first attempt to provide a comprehensive examination of the subject. The approach in this book is different in several important respects. Initially it sets Shakespeare's Ovid in perspective by examining the use of Ovid in early Elizabethan literature and then by focusing on an important moment when Marlowe and Shakespeare himself helped transform the Elizabethan perception of the poet. The pattern that emerges in what follows, emphasizes Shakespeare's fascination with *durus amor*, the

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rapacious love of the *Metamorphoses*, in the early work; gives more recognition to Golding as an influence on Shakespeare; the playwright's tendency to 'stage' moments from Ovid's myths throughout his career; and to tension with and, occasionally, contradiction of Ovid. There is also a critical survey of criticism and an analysis of the methodology used in this field.

The book consists of three parts. Part One examines the background to Shakespeare's Ovid in two ways: Robert Maslen analyses representative texts to show the early Elizabethan use of Ovid; John Roe focuses on *Hero and Leander* and *Venus and Adonis* and an important moment when the Elizabethan perception of Ovid was changed. Part Two which is the body of the book, examines Ovid in works throughout Shakespeare's career: William C. Carroll focuses on the influence of Ovid in the problematic attempted rape and subsequent offer at the close of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona;* I examine moralizing and metamorphosis in *Titus Andronicus;* and Pauline Kiernan completes the section on the early work with an analysis of irony and Ovidian indecorum in *Venus and Adonis*. Gordon Braden then defines a central trend in *The Sonnets* against an Ovidian, Petrarchan, and Elizabethan backcloth; in a specially revised version of the only essay in the book that has appeared before, and is now considered a classic of its kind, Niall Rudd examines Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the *Metamorphoses*; and Yves Peyré examines Ovid's substantial contribution to *Hamlet*. In the late plays, A. D. Nuttall shows how Ovid is transformed in *The Winter's Tale*; and Raphael Lyne examines the debt to Ovid in Prospero's invocation as an example of intertextuality. Finally, François Laroque reminds us of other Elizabethan authors' use of Ovid with a study of the Actaeon myth which embraces both Marlowe and Shakespeare. Part Three gives the conclusion of the book a retrospective and prospective dimension as we enter the millennium. John Velz surveys and analyses criticism of Shakespeare's Ovid in the twentieth century and looks ahead; Charles Martindale reviews methodology (including that of this book) and makes suggestions for the future.

NOTES

1. *Ovid Renewed*, ed. C. Martindale (Cambridge 1988), p. 126.
2. What follows on the Elizabethan grammar school is primarily in-

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