‘Such shaping fantasies’

—— Metamorphosis in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* ——

David Ruzicka

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That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow!
How shall we find the concord of this discord?

１．Ovidian Metamorphosis and Arboreal Imagery

‘Ovid, and the world of the *Metamorphoses’*, as Tony Tanner notes, ‘are everywhere’ in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.[1] The central event of the play is a comic metamorphosis, the transformation of Nick Bottom the weaver into an ass, or at least into a man with an ass’s head, and this has been seen by one critic as the playwright’s most Ovidian moment.[2] Shakespeare’s most obvious direct debt to Ovid, however, surely lies in his appropriation of the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. The influence of Arthur Golding’s 1567 translation of the *Metamorphoses* is visible throughout in Peter Quince’s vocabulary.[3] Compare, for instance, Golding’s ‘The wall that parted house from house had riven therein a crany’ (IV, 83, p. 83) with Snout’s evocation of ‘such a wall as I would have you think / That had in it a crannied hole or chink […] And this the cranny is […]’ (V, i, 155–161). One of the clearest echoes occurs in Thisbe’s fatal loss of her cloak as she escapes from the lion:

> And as she fled away for hast she let hir mantle fall
> (Golding, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 25, p. 84)
>
> And as she fled, her mantle she did fall (Act V, Scene 1, 141)

Throughout the play, we find allusions to the tales told in the *Metamorphoses*. As she upbraids the chauvinistic Demetrius for his callous rejection of her love, Helena imagines an alternative

reality in which their roles are reversed. To make her point, she seizes first on Ovid's tale of Apollo's pursuit of the nymph Daphne.

> Run when you will: the story shall be chang'd;
> Apollo flies, Daphne holds the chase,
> The dove pursues the griffin, the mild hind
> Makes speed to catch the tiger—bootless speed,
> When cowardice pursues, and valour flies!
>
> (Act 2, Scene 1, lines 230–234)

Now it is the god who is pursued by the nymph, an inversion which also reassigns the gender of the lovers, as Demetrius is cast as Daphne and Helena as Apollo. The subsequent zoological examples of prey turned predator are clearly reminiscent of these lines in Golding's *Metamorphoses* from Apollo's appeal to the fleeing nymph:

> I pray thee Nymph *Penaeis* stay, I chase not as a fo:
> Stay Nymph: the Lambes so flee ye Wolves, the Stags ye Lions so:
> With flittring feathers sielie Doves so from the Gossehauke flie
> And every creature from his foe. […]
>
> (I, 610–613)

Helena's pairing of the dove with a griffin is somewhat curious insofar as one would not expect a creature as large as a griffin to prey on doves. A hawk, as in the 'Gossehauke' with which Golding translates Ovid's 'aquilam' (*Metamorphoses*, I, 506), or some other raptor would be, zoologically speaking, more plausible here. And in fact, in Henry Purcell's adaptation of the play in his 1692 opera *The Fairy-Queen*, the line is rewritten thus: 'The Dove chases the Vulture'.[4] But perhaps the point is simply that Helena's exasperation has left her confused and unable to remember her Ovid as well as she should. In Golding's version of the Philomela story, we also find the dove coupled with a hawk:

> […] as the Dove that seeth
> Hir fethers with hir owne bloud staynde, who shuddring still doth feare
> The greedie Hauke that did hir late with griping talants teare
>
> (VI, 671–673).[5]

The violence of the tone is entirely in keeping with this harrowing tale, which is explicitly invoked in the chorus of the lullaby sung to the Fairy Queen in the opening of Act 2 Scene 2:

> Philomel with melody
> Sing in our sweet lullaby

To the threat posed by the poisonous creatures warned to keep their distance from the slumbering Titania, the allusion to Ovid's tragic heroine adds a still darker undercurrent. It is a strange lullaby indeed that in its refrain recalls this disturbing story of incestuous rape, mutilation, cannibalism and murder.[6]

The Philomela tale also furnishes an example of how, in Ovidian myth, the forest becomes a place of moral chaos. Once he reaches the shores of his kingdom with Philomela, Tereus promptly leads his sister-in-law to 'a pelting graunge […] In woods forgrowen' (663–664), where she will be confined, a 'prisoner in these woods' (697) and a victim of repeated sexual assaults. Although instances abound in Shakespeare's play of the conventional patriarchal dominance of women, there is nothing that can compare with the viciousness of Ovid's Tereus. Yet there is one moment in which the violence momentarily reveals itself in thought, if not in action, when Demetrius cautions Helena that she may be unwise in trusting him not to rape her given the opportunity offered by the 'night / And the ill counsel of a desert place' (II, I, 217–218). She should not, he warns her, 'believe / But I shall do thee mischief in the wood' (236–237).

Daphne can only evade suffering 'mischief' at the hands of Apollo by imploring her father to turn her into a laurel, a part of the wood through which she is unable to flee fast enough to save herself. And Demetrius, too, in his punning declaration in his first speech to Helena that he is 'wood within this wood' (192) seems to imagine his being assimilated into the chaos of the forest. Becoming 'wood' here means to be 'mad', an acception we find in Golding's version of the death of Orpheus, where the raging madness of the Bacchanals, Ovid's *furor*, is translated by the English 'woodnesse' (XI, 32).[7] In the extreme discourtesy of his threats to Helena, Demetrius epitomizes the symbolic distance of the forest from the moral order of the court. By recasting Daphne as the hunter rather than the hunted, Helena rewrites the destiny that would otherwise have incarcerated her in the wood of unrestrained desire.

The skein of arboreal imagery in Shakespeare's play is also evident in the second of the two vegetal images employed by Titania in Act 4, Scene 1, to celebrate her union with Bottom.

> So doth the woodbine and the sweet honeysuckle
> Gently entwist; the female ivy so
> Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.
>
> (41–43)

The simile of the ivy and the elm is almost certainly derived from the tale of Vertumnus and Pomona in the *Metamorphoses*, where it is employed by the disguised god of the seasons to persuade Pomona of the necessity of marriage.[8]

Ageinst him where he sat

A goodly Elme with glistring grapes did growe: which after hee
Had praysed, and the vyne likewyse that ran uppon the tree:
But if (quoth hee) this Elme without the vyne did single stand,
It should have nothing (saving leaves) to bee desyred: and
Ageine if that the vyne which ronnes uppon the Elme had nat
The tree to leane unto, it should uppon the ground ly flat.
Yit art not thou admonisht by example of this tree
To take a husband, neyther doost thou passe to maryed bee.

(*Metamorphoses* XIV, lines 755–763)

Here, in this metaphor of the affective interdependence of husband and wife, the organic is no longer synonymous with chaos and madness, but becomes an image of slow, lovingly nurtured growth leading to fruition.

Another central element of the play which seems to be Ovidian in origin is the flower which Oberon uses to perform his magic. The myth of the flower ‘Before, milk-white; now purple with love’s wound’ (Act 2, Scene 1, line 167) is of Shakespeare’s own devising, but it seems reasonable to assume that it derives at least in part from a passage in the *Metamorphoses* relating Venus’s grief on the death of Adonis.[9] The goddess declares, ‘In a flower thy blood I will bestowe’ and, seeding his wounds with nectar, grows ‘before that full an howre expired weere’ a flower ‘of all one colour with the blood’ (X, 851–858).[10]

Oberon’s account of the flower’s genesis is also, however, a story of metamorphosis, a transformation that acts as a counterpoint to the unchanged ‘imperial votress’, blissfully unaffected in her perpetual chastity by the catalyst of Cupid’s arrow. The myth of the ‘little western flower’ thus represents a kind of displacement of a crucial motif from the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. Quince’s dramatization of Ovid’s story, for all its faithful adherence to the original narrative, makes no reference to what is essentially the myth’s self-legitimizing explanatory function. There is, in other words—and we shall return to this omission in due course—no mention of the metamorphosis that the myth serves to explain, no recollection of Ovid’s description of how the berries of the mulberry under which the lovers die were turned from white to purple-black by the blood that spurts from Pyramus’s wound.

The leaves that were upon the tree besprinkled with his blood
Were died blacke. The roote also bestained as it stoode,
A deepe darke purple colour straight upon the Berries cast.

(IV, 150–152)

Two other episodes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are referred to in the opening sequence of Act 5 by Philostrates, Theseus’s supercilious entertainments manager. His list of ‘sports’ includes ‘The battle with the Centaurs’ and ‘The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals, / Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage’ (lines 44–49).[11] The only other Ovidian protagonists to be

named in what remains of the play are Leander, paired in error by Flute with Helen rather than Hero, and Cephalus and Procris, invoked by Bottom's Pyramus as he swears, 'Not Shafulus to Procrus was so true' (V, i, 194).[12] Critics have suggested that Cephalus is also the 'morning's love' with whom Theseus recalls that he has 'oft made sport' (III, ii, 389). In Ovid's tale, Cephalus is abducted by the besotted Aurora, whose advances he rejects, averring that, in Golding's version, '*Procris* was the only Wight that I did love in deede' (VII, 910).[13]

２. Metamorphosis, Chaos and Order

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a poetry of desire and metamorphosis is the consequence of desire. The burden of the play's opening scene is to assert that it is the law which wards off the threat of desire, and that thus gives form to what might otherwise descend into chaos. The simile that Theseus employs to make this point is that of wax bearing the imprint of a seal. As construed by the legal authority of the state of Athens, Hermia's relationship to her father is such that her will is to be 'as a form in wax / by him imprinted' (I, 1, 49–50). And when the eloped lovers are apprehended by Theseus's hunting party, Egeus immediately exclaims, 'I beg the law, the law upon his head' (IV, 1, 154).[14] This is the law of the familiar patriarchal order, the law of the court and the city. And in opposition to this, there emerges the anarchic chaos of the forest, where the dark forces of magic assert themselves in support of female desire.[15] The upshot of the play's farcical shenanigans is, after all, a resolution in which the two female protagonists are united with the men they desire, rather than with the suitors their male rulers would have had them marry.

Metamorphosis, then, is an abiding feature of this chaotic and comic upending of the world in the pursuit of desire. The inversions that characterize the central segment of the play assume a darker tone in Titania's description of the environmental chaos that is the consequence of the marital discord between the king and queen of the fairies.

> The seasons alter; hoary-headed frosts
> Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
> And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
> An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
> Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
> The childing autumn, angry winter change
> Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world
> By their increase now knows not which is which.
>
> (Act II, Scene 1, 107–114)

The natural processes of change that play out in the beneficent cycle of the seasons have been themselves subjected to a perverse metamorphosis, as the seasons exchange places.

Although female desire is represented as subversive in the play, there are also feminine forces which work to cancel the unsettling effects of metamorphosis. By inflaming Apollo's heart, Cupid's arrow is the original agent of transformation that leads to the metamorphosis of Daphne. But in Oberon's myth the power of the 'fiery shaft' is neutralized by the influence of Diana.

> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon;
> And the imperial votress passed on
> In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
>
> (Act II, Scene 1, lines 161–164)

And later, as the plot of amorous confusions is winding down, the fairy king will have recourse to 'Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower' (IV, i, 154). The anarchy of the forest is dangerous, for the metamorphoses which take place within the dark wood result in an inversion of the established order. Oberon's magic works finally to restore the gendered, hegemonic relationship by which his power over his consort is once again absolute.[16] The 'imperial votress', undoubtedly an allusion to the Virgin Queen of England, Elizabeth, like Oberon provides an assurance of social stability.[17] Similarly, the chaos of metamorphosis in the play yields finally to marriage. Where the discord between the fairy king and his queen bred 'a progeny of evils' (II, i, 115), the fairies are now tasked by Oberon not only to bless the married couples but also to guarantee that their 'issue [...] shall be fortunate' (V, i, 388–389), thus ensuring hereditary continuity and ultimately shielding the polity from the threat of dynastic change.

３. Imagination and the Art of Poetry

In the well-known speech which opens the play's final act, Theseus presents a closely argued critique of the human imagination.

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
> That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;

And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

(Act V, Scene 1, 4–17)

The imagination, then, possesses a dangerous transformative power, a power which is seen as antithetical to 'cool reason'.[18] And in this respect, the function of the mind's 'shaping fantasies' is also shared by love. For, as Helena argues, the effect of love is precisely to 'transpose'.

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.

(Act I, Scene 1, lines 232–235)

The 'imperial votress', as she walks on unscathed by Cupid's 'fiery shaft', is described as 'fancy-free' (II, i, 163–164), indicating that she is free from the destabilizing effects of erotic desire. But the term also implies perhaps that she is immune from the malign influences of 'fantasy', of the frenzied workings of the imagination dissected by Theseus.

When Dante apostrophizes Ovid in the twenty-fifth canto of the *Inferno* he does so in order to assert the primacy of his own poetic gift over that of his classical precursor.

Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio,
ché se quello in serpente e quella in fonte
converte poetando, io non lo 'nvidio

(*Inf*. XXV, 97–99)

Let Ovid speak no more of Cadmus or Arethusa.
For if one into a serpent and the other into a fountain
were in his poem transformed, I do not envy him.[19]

Ovid may have crafted the verses that told of the transformation of the Theban king and the nymph into non-human forms, but this feat pales beside the metamorphosis that Dante now girds himself to depict, that of a man and snake in a mutual exchange of their physical shapes. Shakespeare's relation to Ovid, too, must surely entail similar attempts to overcome the anxiety of influence. When Helena alludes to Ovid's tale of Apollo and Daphne, the actual object of the transformation she envisages is in fact 'the story' itself. This is a literary

metamorphosis. The violence is being enacted not on the maiden but on Ovid's narrative. And this is not the only instance of the play's rewriting of Ovid. In Shakespeare's hands, Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe itself undergoes a metamorphosis as its tragic theme is transposed into a comic key, or perhaps into something in between. Peter Quince's dramatization of Ovid's narrative results in the curious hybrid of a 'most lamentable comedy' (I, ii, 10).

This dramatic work, that will in the final act advertise itself as 'very tragical mirth' (V, i, 57), functions as an interlude, a means to 'beguile', as Theseus puts it, 'this long age of three hours / Between our after-supper and bedtime' (V, i, 33–34, 40). It occupies a space between other events that overshadow it in importance. The tragic dimensions of the Ovidian original are thus denied any purchase since the performance itself can possess no finality. As Theseus wryly notes, we know when a dramatic tragedy has reached its grim conclusion because 'the players are all dead'. In Shakespeare's comedy, however, the play now returns to its suspended main plot and continues to an ending that is the opposite of tragic. If so many of Ovid's tales end with metamorphosis, it is because they end in death. But in the comic world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the irredeemable metamorphosis of death is no longer possible. And here perhaps lies the significance of Shakespeare's omission of the metamorphosis of the mulberry tree. In Ovid, metamorphosis is the inevitable epilogue to tragedy, and some reference to the 'pomo […] ater' that remains as a 'gemini monimenta cruoris' ('the mulberry fruit […] dark red' that is a 'memorial of [the lovers'] double deaths') lurks, we might imagine, in Peter Quince's epilogue.[20] Theseus, however, declines Quince's offer and his final words to the players are 'let your epilogue alone' (V, i, 344–345). In Ovid's tale, the metamorphosis of the berries becomes an indelible stain on the natural world. But in the play, similar transformations can be reversed. Remedies are applied, the ass's head removed and the experience of change made to seem like a dream, something that will rapidly fade from memory.

In a long speech at the centre of the play, Puck exults, prematurely it turns out, in the triumphant accomplishment of his mission. An extended bird simile here depicts the panicked scattering of the 'rude mechanicals' as they first catch sight of the post-metamorphosis Bottom.

> As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye,
> Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,
> Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
> Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky—
> So at his sight away his fellows fly,
> […]
> I led them on in this distracted fear,

And left sweet Pyramus translated there.

(Act III, Scene 2, lines 20–24; 31–32)

Puck employs the verb ‘translate’ to describe the transformation, echoing Quince’s exclamation in the previous scene: ‘Thou are translated!’ (III, i, 104). In Shakespeare’s exquisite simile, as it contrasts the creeping of the huntsman with the vertiginous ‘sweep’ of the choughs through the sky, we encounter another kind of translation, the translation of emotion into what T. S. Eliot called the ‘objective correlative’ of poetic imagery. In metaphor and simile, one perception of reality is translated into another.[21] It is this crossing over from one realm of experience to another that is the central theme of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a play in which, as Tony Tanner observes, there is a preponderance of words beginning with the ‘trans-’ suffix.[22] Metamorphosis becomes the essential model for the poet’s craft, and perhaps for all art, since the function of art is to transform, to dissolve reality in order to recreate it in new forms. The magical powers of the imagination, which may appear subversive to a sovereign like Theseus, can also, as Hippolyta argues, produce ‘something of great constancy’ when human minds are ‘transfigur’d so together’ (V, i, 23–27), rather perhaps as an audience is transformed by the cathartic experience of watching the play in the theatre.[23]

Like Romeo, for whom he provides the original model, Pyramus comes to grief because of a tragic misinterpretation. He misreads the signs in the forest and, cleaving to a single possibility, has no alternative but to commit suicide. Precisely the same fate befalls Cephalus, even if he is not induced by his error to take his own life. For the hunter, hearing ‘a certaine sighing’ and then a ‘russling softly in the leaves’, mistakes these sounds for that of ‘some beast’ and hurls his enchanted javelin at what turns out to be his faithful spouse Procris (VII, 1086–1090).[24] What both of these tragic lovers lack, like Romeo, is the imaginative ability to reinterpret their own experience and so find a path that will lead them out of the ‘selva oscura’ of their own worst fears. The remedy for the tragic vision lies in the imaginative capacity to transform reality, the power of ‘fantasy’, wielded by fairy kings and poets to reshape the world.

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[1] Tony Tanner, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, with a foreward by Stephen Heath (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap / Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 116. On the presence of Ovid in Shakespeare, see also the following studies: Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 118–170 (‘Comedy and Metamorphosis’); Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 92–132; William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe and their Contemporaries* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1977); Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Robert Kilburn Root, *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare*, Yale Studies in English, 19 (New York: Gordian Press, 1965).

[2] Commenting on the opening of Act IV, Scene 1, Thomas McFarland, *Shakespeare’s Pastoral Comedy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 94, writes: ‘The combination of physical metamorphosis and flower-laden language in Bottom’s transformation brings Shakespeare closer to Ovid in this episode than at any other point in his career as a playwright […]’. On the centrality of metamorphosis to Shakespeare’s comedies,

see William C. Carroll, *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), and for this theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* especially, pp. 141–177. See also Cesar Lombardi Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its relation to Social Custom* (Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 119–162 ('May Games and Metamorphosis on a Midsummer Night').

[3] Golding's text is cited here from *Shakespeare's Ovid, Being Arthur Golding's Translation of 'The Metamorphoses'*, ed. by W. H. D. Rouse (London: Centaur, 1961). The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is to be found in Book IV, lines 67–201 (pp. 83–86).

[4] See Curtis Alexander Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 325. More than half a century later, in 1758, Carl Linnaeus would assign to the Andean Condor the binomial Latin name *Vultur gryphus*. The specific epithet 'gryphus' was derived from the Greek *grupós*, meaning 'hook-nosed'.

[5] Golding, op. cit., p. 132. Ovid himself does not identify the dove's nemesis in these lines, referring only to the creature's 'avidos […] ungues' ('greedy claws') (*Metamorphoses*, VI, 529–530). The Latin text and English translations not taken from Golding are cited from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller and revised by G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library, 42–43, 3rd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977; repr. 1999).

[6] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 401–674.

[7] Golding, op. cit., p. 219.

[8] On this topos, see Peter Demetz, 'The Elm and the Vine: Notes towards the History of a Marriage Topos', *PMLA*, 73, no. 5 (1958), 521–532.

[9] On the possibility that Shakespeare relies here, albeit 'remotely', on Ovid's account of the metamorphosis of Adonis, see A. P. Riemer, *Antic Fables: Patterns of Evasion in Shakespeare's Comedies* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), p. 198.

[10] Golding, op. cit., p. 218.

[11] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII, 210–535, and XI, 1–84 (i.e. the death of Orpheus).

[12] The tale of Hero and Leander is, in fact, to be found not in the *Metamorphoses* but in the so-called *Double Heroides*, a set of paired epistolary poems generally attributed, though with some degree of uncertainty, to Ovid.

[13] Golding, op. cit., p. 154.

[14] On the relationship between Shakespeare's imagined Athenian law and the Elizabethan law of Shakespeare's day, see Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36–37.

[15] Developing an approach to the play found in the criticism of Northrop Frye, François Laroque, 'Shakespeare's Festive Comedies', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Volume III: The Comedies*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 23–46 (p. 40) writes of how, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'the unmarried young lovers find in the natural environment of the green world a locus where they freely indulge in the irrationalities of desire […]'. On desire in the play, see also Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, Rereading Literature (Oxford: Wiley, 1986), pp. 18–34.

[16] See Heidi Breuer, *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 103: '[…] the fairy forest initially presents a space for challenging normative conventions. Despite the potential for subversion presented by the forest, Oberon's magic ultimately restores a perfectly hegemonic state of affairs.'

[17] Helen Hackett, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, cit., pp. 338–357 (p. 341), notes that 'This imperial votaress is clearly Elizabeth I: the idea of her as a "vestal" devoted to virginity, her association with empire, her identification with the moon, and indeed in itself the visionary quality of her depiction all invoke the standard conventions of 1590s panegyric of the queen'.

[18] Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 48, notes that 'Theseus is here using the word "imagination" in its common Elizabethan meaning, which we express by the word "imaginary", something alleged to be that isn't. In spite of himself, though, the word is taking on the more positive sense of our "imaginative", the sense of the creative power developed centuries later by Blake and Coleridge.' On the ambiguities of Theseus's famous critique of the imagination, see Marjorie B. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 84–87. See also R. W. Dent, 'Imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15 (1964), 115–129 (reprinted in Dorothea Kehler, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays* (New York and London: Garland, 1998), pp. 85–106. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 42, notes that Renaissance thinkers considered the imagination 'to be stronger in women because

cold and moist objects are subject to metamorphosis' (cited by Hackett, op. cit., p. 353).

[19] The *Comedy* is quoted here from *La 'Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67). The translation is my own.

[20] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 161–165.

[21] On metaphor as translation, see Denis Donoghue, *Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), and Colin Burrow's review: 'What is a pikestaff?', *London Review of Books*, 37, no. 8 (23 April 2015), pp. 27–28.

[22] Tanner, op. cit., p. 125.

[23] Stanley Wells, 'Shakespeare's Comedies', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 105–119 (p. 112), writes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that 'along with *The Tempest* […] this is the play in which Shakespeare is most clearly, however playfully, concerned with his own art, with the powers of the imagination […], the creative capacity of the artist and the imaginary interplay between the dramatist, his actors and the audience'. For an argument that sees Hippolyta here presenting a view of poetry that is 'consistent with distinctively Christian teaching', see Bryant, J. A., Jr., *Hippolyta's View: Some Christian Aspects of Shakespeare's Plays* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), pp. 1–18.

[24] Golding, op. cit., p. 158.

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（信州大学 全学教育機構 准教授）

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