Renaissance Tales of Desire

Renaissance Tales of Desire: *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*, *Theseus and Ariadne*, *Ceyx and Alcione*

Edited by

Sophie Chiari
with a Preface by Sarah A. Brown

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Renaissance Tales of Desire: *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, Theseus and Ariadne, Ceyx and Alcione,*
Edited by Sophie Chiari with a Preface by Sarah A. Brown

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1420-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1420-1

In memory of my father.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edition is not based on any previous edition. As such, I am much indebted to classical, medieval, and Renaissance writers as well as to the invaluable help of a vast number of critical sources, far too numerous to be quoted here. But all the names duly appear in the bibliography at the end of the volume.

My main goal in choosing to edit these three Ovidian tales for Cambridge Scholars Publishing was to try and learn how to do it, and learnt I certainly have. While my main interest has always been ancient myths and their translation into other texts or other images in the Renaissance, I have progressively come to understand that they were still very much alive for Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

In fact, it is while I was working on another project, a book-length study of the image of the labyrinth in early modern England that I realized to what extent Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had influenced such a high number of mainstream and of so-called minor Elizabethan texts, as well as my own research. Indeed, in the successive metamorphoses of this manuscript, I have be given the opportunity of working with people who have helped and advised me and to whom I would like to express my personal gratitude.

Yves Peyré suggested the idea of this edition, and I am grateful to him for this. But if this volume has now come into being, it is also due to François Laroque, whose constant encouragements and many suggestions proved quite stimulating and helpful. I would also like to express my personal thanks to Sarah A. Brown who has kindly agreed to write a Preface to this edition and whose corrections and comments were really invaluable. Finally, my gratitude also goes to my friends and colleagues at the University of Provence (Aix-Marseille I, France) as well as to LERMA (Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur le Monde Anglophone), the research team which I am a member of.

My warmest thanks, though, must go to my family, to my two daughters and to my husband who have patiently put up with my metamorphic—and fairly unpredictable—moods while I was working on these Ovidian tales which have made me spend part of the summer of 2009 sitting behind my computer screen.

Finally, my debt to my father, to the memory of whom this book is dedicated, is greater than I could express.

PREFACE

SARAH ANNES BROWN

When we think of the Elizabethan Ovidian erotic narrative the two texts which most immediately spring to mind are Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. These polished and sophisticated works of the 1590s owe a debt, not only to the *Metamorphoses*, but to a pervasive culture of English Ovidianism created in part by many earlier English poets, most of them almost unknown today. This welcome volume brings together three striking poems by earlier Elizabethan writers. All three, surprisingly, were only published once, yet each one is a fascinating example of Ovid's rich and varied influence on English poetry.

Although they are products of an earlier, and poetically less sophisticated, age than that of Shakespeare and Marlowe, these poems are not without their own wit and subtlety. This is perhaps particularly true of Thomas Peend's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*. Although the narrative ostensibly condemns the idle nymph Salmacis and sympathises with Hermaphroditus' disdain for her, there are indications, as Sophie Chiari points out, that the poet's real position may be a little more uncertain. Is he in fact rather attracted by the idea of the nymph and youth uniting to form a single androgynous being? It is certainly striking that the poet concludes with an extended admiring address to Tiresias yet does not once mention that the prophet was himself (in a sense) a hermaphrodite. Even the very helpful glossary of names provided by Peend at the end of his text only offers a revealingly brief note: "An olde Prophet of the Cytie *Thebes*, in *Boetia*, a countrey in *Attica*. And is nowe called *Vandalia*." It is almost as though Peend is staging an anxiety about disclosing too much about Tiresias, replacing the true facts of his story with a stuttering accumulation of superfluous geographical detail. Perhaps the textual apparatus supplied by Peend, like that appended to another poem with a Tiresian narrator, *The Waste Land*, needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.

The poem's refusal to identify Tiresias as an hermaphrodite, when coupled with the fact that the poet clearly feels an affinity with the

prophet, may encourage the reader to look again at the actual moment of metamorphosis in Peend's poem. In the original story Ovid describes how the gods accede to Salmacis' plea that she and Hermaphroditus may be united forever. But Peend alters the original, asserting instead that "Venus then" was "moued with theyr mone" (ll. 305-06). The word "theyr" oddly fuses the apparently quite opposed wishes of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, and the fact that it is Venus who intervenes seems particularly surprising considering that she is Hermaphroditus' own mother. Why would she work against her child? But perhaps she doesn't. The reader who knows Ovid's version will probably assume that Peend's Hermaphroditus is devastated to be transformed. Yet Peend employs a more neutral vocabulary than Ovid to describe both the coalescence of Hermaphroditus with Salmacis and the subsequent transformation of the waters. In the *Metamorphoses* the waters are changed "incesto [...] medicamine," a phrase which might be translated by "an impure drug," whereas Peend (l. 329) uses the phrase "vertue straunge" (strange). Even though the resonances of the word "virtue" were less unequivocally positive in the XVIth century the wording used by Peend still seems softer than its Latin equivalent. The recasting of a curse into a blessing appears to be confirmed when Peend wraps up the story:

> Thus both in wysh they did agree:
> And now contentyd well they bee
> (331-32)

The tone of calm content seems at odds with the stern moralising which follows. Peend warns young men against being drowned in "fylthy sinne" (l. 384) and paints a picture of a bitter fallen youth who will spitefully "ioye to see his wyshe / on others in like sort" (ll. 394-95). It is as though, rather as is the case with the final Salmacis/Hermaphroditus compound itself, there are two voices in the poem struggling for mastery, one of which disapproves of sexual looseness and ambiguity, and another which finds the teasing liminality of the myth rather alluring. This ambivalence, this readiness to see two sides of any story, is typical of an age in which the practice of composing arguments *in utramque partem* dominated education. If Peend's poem seems unsure what to make of itself it can be read as a precursor to later more complexly and famously ambiguous texts such as Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* or *Coriolanus*. The Elizabethans, like Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, typically looked at the world "with parted eye when everything seems double" (4.1.188-89).

The second poem included in this edition, Underdowne's *Theseus and Ariadne*, is similarly ambiguous. As Chiari notes, the text's surface misogyny seems (at least partly) satirical or playful. In the preface Underdowne addresses the reader with a careless sprightliness, and in his prefatory poem, "A Rule for Women to Brynge up their Daughters," he advises mothers to visit terrible punishments, including death, on their recalcitrant offspring but rather undermines the advice by concluding:

> Therfore ye Mothers, if ye vse
> and kepe my Rules in mynde:
> Daughters you shall haue none at all,
> or those of Phenyx kynde.
> (21-4)

Many readers will want to discover what new light these poems might shed on Shakespeare's own Ovidianism. Chiari identifies an intriguing little clue to a possible link between *Theseus and Ariadne* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play in which Theseus of course appears. In Underdowne's "Preface to the reader," she suggests, there is an echo of St Paul's letter to the Corinthians which just might have caught the eye of Shakespeare, and fed into Bottom's own memorable misquotation of the passage. A number of parallels between various aspects of the Theseus story and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have been identified by critics. As Peter Holland notes, "naming Hermia's father Egeus cannot [...] be a completely innocent act" (Holland 1994, 146).[1] Holland goes on to link Aegeus' near (accidental) murder of his son, a story which can be found in Book VII of the *Metamorphoses*, with Egeus' tyrannical willingness to have his daughter Hermia put to death. The metamorphosis of Bottom suggests a double point of contact with the Theseus legend. Bottom has frequently been compared with such victims of metamorphosis as Apuleius' Lucius and Ovid's Actaeon. But he also has affinities with two related characters from Theseus' story. His hybrid form suggests the minotaur as readily as Actaeon and, as the bizarrely inappropriate object of desire for a powerful female, he also recalls the minotaur's father, the bull who is persuaded to mate with Pasiphae.

If we take up Sophie Chiari's invitation to speculate about the influence of Underdowne on Shakespeare we can identify further possible affinities between his particular version of *Theseus and Ariadne* and *A*

[1] Although Theseus' father's name is spelled "Aegeus" today, the spelling "Egeus" was common in the XVIth century.

Midsummer Night's Dream. We've already seen that the poet invokes (but almost certainly dismisses) the possibility of a parent treating a wayward daughter with the utmost severity. Before he finally undermines his own advice through ridicule, in the stanza quoted above, he toys with some pretty horrific scenarios. The mother is advised to cut off her daughter's hands, blind her, sew her lips together, break her legs, and finally put her in the grave, if she fails to obey. The invocation of extreme harshness which is then comically undercut might recall the threat of execution which hangs over Hermia, a threat which is finally dismissed by Theseus' fiat. Underdowne, like Peend, doesn't seem quite sure what to make of his material, his characters. In his preface he inveighs against Phaedra's treacherous treatment of her sister. Yet in the poem she seems sensibly cautious and perfectly well disposed towards Ariadne. His portrait of the two sisters might provide us with another possible clue that Shakespeare was familiar with Underdowne. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we are offered a similarly contradictory depiction of two girls, Hermia and Helena, who begin the play bosom friends, "two lovely berries moulded on one stem" (3.2.211), yet are transformed into bitter rivals. And by transposing his Ariadne into an English idiom and setting, Underdowne reveals her similarities with Shakespeare's Hermia, similarly scared and abandoned:

> Amyd a Forest wylde and wyde,
> For Beares or Wolues a pray
> He leaueth me a sleepe, and he
> Falsely doth go his waye.
> (525-8)

Both Demetrius and Lysander temporarily play the part of Theseus, forgetting their first love to run after a girl who seems still more attractive. It is possible that the presence of Theseus in the play, at one very specific moment in his life, distracts readers from noting parallels with different episodes in his story, parallels which, as here, temporarily cast a different character in the Theseus role.

There is perhaps less in Hubbard's *Ceyx and Alcione* to make us wonder whether Shakespeare might have had access to the poem. Yet it too may encourage us to reconsider the relationship between Shakespeare and Ovid, for it serves as a reminder of the way in which, although the *Metamorphoses* has proved one of the most continually influential poems in Western literature, readers from different ages have valued different episodes from the work. Today myths such as those of Arachne, Daphne

and Pygmalion are most likely to be recognised and appreciated. Renaissance readers would have been well acquainted with these stories, but would have been equally enthusiastic about episodes which are now comparatively little known. These include the section on Pythagoras from Book XV—and the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone. Perhaps because this moving story of a devoted married couple who are parted by death but reunited by metamorphosis is comparatively little known today, its influence on the works of Shakespeare has been examined less intently than the impact of Pygmalion or Actaeon, although Jonathan Bate has analysed its presence in *Othello*.

One passage from Shakespeare which is said to derive from Ceyx and Alcyone is Imogen's description of her leavetaking of Posthumus in *Cymbeline* (1.3.17-22, *Met* XI.466-73). Reading Hubbard's extended retelling of the myth may encourage the reader to think further about the relationship between Ceyx and Alcyone and *Cymbeline*. It may be that Imogen's poignant speech isn't simply an isolated Ovidian spangle but just one aspect of a more pervasive influence. Hubbard's response to the tale is typical of its time in displaying some reservations about the behaviour of Ceyx, reservations not present in the original *Metamorphoses*. His wish to consult foreign oracles is cast as a credulous delusion by Hubbard (as it is in Golding's translation). If we attend to the Elizabethan reception of Ceyx' character, as a man whose judgement is flawed, we are more likely to see how his story aligns with that of Posthumus, who is similarly led astray by bad council. Imogen hints that she, like Alcyone, has been visited by a vision of her husband:

> What is it to be false?
> To lie in watch there, and to think of him?
> To weep twixt clock and clock? If sleep charge nature,
> To break it with a fearful dream of him,
> And cry myself awake? That's false to's bed, is it?
> (3.4.38-42)

Alcyone also "cries herself awake" after she receives her own vision of her husband (XI.677). Later Imogen will yet again be disturbed by a simulacrum of Posthumus when she finds the headless body of Cloten dressed in her husband's clothes. Alcyone, too, is mistaken about the nature of her encounter with her "husband." Although the vision which appears to her seems to be Ceyx' ghost it is really only a counterfeit forged by Morpheus. The loving couple in *Cymbeline* are parted by distrust rather than death, and are reunited in life rather than in miraculous metamorphosis.

Yet there are many points of contact between their story and that of Ceyx and Alcyone, particularly if, like Hubbard, our instinct is to think Ceyx's wish to consult an oracle a sign of foolishness rather than a proof of *pietas*. Of course Posthumus' credulity has a different focus. He believes his wife unfaithful to him. But we can find a link between these two apparently quite different types of credulity in another of Shakespeare's late plays, *The Winter's Tale*. Here Leontes, mistrustful of his wife Hermione, sends his messengers to consult an oracle. And in the play by Shakespeare whose links with Ceyx and Alcyone have perhaps been established most clearly, *Othello*, the husband's credulity is also focused on his wife's supposed infidelity rather than on superstitious errors. "Yet, for all the variations of plot, there is a fundamental affinity in terms of emotional effect," concludes Bate at the end of his account of the links between *Othello* and Ceyx and Alcyone (Bate 2001, 186). It could be argued that his words are still more applicable to the connections between Ovid's story and *Cymbeline*.

But it would be a pity if these poems were only read as anticipations of Shakespeare's own Ovidianism, as footnotes to his more celebrated works. They repay attention in their own right. Although very different from one another all three poems reveal characteristics common both to Ovid and to the later Elizabethan age, helping to explain why Ovid was so central to the literature of this period. They are all preoccupied with the feelings, thoughts and actions of women in the throes of passion, women whom they may view with sympathy, disapproval or (more commonly) confused ambivalence. Another characteristic shared by all three poems is their use of intriguing gaps, jumps and ellipses, demanding that the reader work hard to identify—and perhaps create—the text's tone and meaning. Like Ovid's original *Metamorphoses*, they seem to accommodate different perspectives simultaneously. As Chiari observes, despite their emphasis on passion it is water rather than the fire which is the key element in these poems and all of them are characterised by a certain textual fluidity as well, a shifting quality which ensures that these texts, like their model, elude, yet also of course invite, definitive interpretation.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1593), Lavinia probably turns the pages of the *Metamorphoses* as she glances through the pages of her own life.[1] If early modern educated women read Ovid's verse, male readers certainly delighted in the subtle titillation of pagan joys and polymorphous desire. Studies in Ovidianism show how deep the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* penetrated into early modern literature and thus contributed to the refashioning of England's cultural identity. This took place at a time when medieval values and representations were still deeply ingrained in the minds of Shakespeare's contemporaries, while important geographic and scientific discoveries allowed a new world and new world pictures to emerge. Ovidian paganism pointed to a revival of hedonism and to an ideal of refinement and eclectic cosmopolitanism among an enlightened or aristocratic élite.

Because of the flexibility of his myths and because he had always been subject to incessant rewriting and reformulation over the centuries, Ovid allowed artists to bridge the gap between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. So, his *Metamorphoses* were all the more appealing since they had become a vast cabinet of curiosities, seeking to portray Love in all its various forms as well as to embrace the world's profusion within the space of one book.

Ovidian myths were not just part of a highbrow culture, even though the numerous bookish references to Ovid in the literature of the time could only be aimed at the learned part of the population. For the illiterate (roughly 80 per cent of the population), the signs of inns and public houses, the garden designs, plays alluding to Ovid's stories, engravings reproducing scenes from the *Metamorphoses* or the mythical symbols and representations on the portraits of the Virgin Queen had made these images, or themes, into familiar elements that had progressively become part of their environment.

On the one hand, most of the authors like Marlowe, Shakespeare or Chapman, who most relied on Ovid, tended to focus on a rather materialistic vision of existence, insofar as one can use the term

[1] Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, 4.1.42-43: "*Young Lucius*: Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. / My mother gave it me."

"materialistic" to define a much more complex perspective on life, emphasizing love and carnal pleasure, and which necessarily implied repeated violations of decorum. Asserting one's interest for Ovidian paganism may have been an implicit means of professing one's belief in a hedonistic conception of life while declaring one's atheism at a time when it was perceived as a most serious charge which was nearly the equivalent of treason. Since Elizabeth I[rst] had become the head of the Church, any form of opposition to the Church of England *ipso facto* meant an opposition to the Queen herself. Marlowe is indeed strongly suspected to have favoured both Ovidianism and atheism (Honan 2005, 184-85 and 245-48), as a member of the so-called "School of Night"[2]—a group of free-thinking intellectuals under the patronage of Sir Walter Raleigh with such eminent figures as Thomas Harriot, John Florio and John Dee.

While his *Hero and Leander*[3] reverberates throughout Shakespeare's own narrative poetry and reveals a subtle Ovidian mode, one may wonder whether some early minor literary texts belonging to the same vein influenced Marlowe's or Shakespeare's verse and, if so, to what extent. In Hubbard's *The Tragicall and lamentable Histoire of two faithfull mates: Ceyx Kynge of Thracine and Alcione his wife*, for instance, one can notice intriguing similarities with the myth of Hero and Leander. In both cases, while the woman stands ashore waiting for her beloved, the man is swallowed by the sea and drowns. Hero simply inverts Alcyone's demeanour in the sense that she wants her lover to swim across the Hellespont to meet her, whereas Alcyone tries to convince her husband that he should not leave. In the end, the result is the same: lovers are sacrificed by the gods. Myths always echo one another, which is not due to their Renaissance interpreters. If Marlowe had read Hubbard's text, he could have found some stimulating passages reminding him of Hero and Leander and giving him food for thought. In the same way, if Shakespeare had been acquainted with Hubbard's translation together with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he could have noticed elements which may have inspired his conception of the characters of Othello and Desdemona. The features they have in common with Ceyx and Alcyone have been called attention to by Jonathan Bate (Bate 2001, 184-86).

---

[2] The expression actually derives from a passage in Act 4 of William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, in which the King of Navarre says "Black is the badge of hell / The hue of dungeons and the school of night" (4.3.252-53).

[3] Licensed for publication in 1593 but not published until 1598.

On the other hand, authors such as Giordano Bruno,[4] Edmund Spenser[5] or Francis Bacon[6] were keen to cultivate a more spiritual approach based on neo-Platonism, discussing sexual love in terms of spiritual bonds, as reflecting the relationship between the individuals and God. Of course, one should nuance such an assertion by acknowledging the fact that the three authors just quoted were also deeply attracted by Ovidianism, though in a different, more explicitly erudite way.

Where the adepts of Ovidianism pleaded for a de-christianisation of fundamental values, the philosophical outlook of such Neo-Platonists as Marsilio Ficino attempted to christianise pagan myths. Towards the end of the XVIth century, some English writers appeared to be convinced by the idea that matter was in itself mere inertia, so that the body depended on the soul to be endowed with a shape and with life. In other terms, the higher realms necessarily informed the lower ones.

Thomas Peend's, Thomas Underdowne's or William Hubbard's concerns—always related to carnal sin and to feminine rebellion—are in fact more pragmatic and reminiscent of the medieval *Ovide Moralisé*.[7] What is immediately striking, when one reads them, is their unique blend of medieval didacticism and Ovidian transgression, two different facets which co-exist without apparent difficulties. They are also poles apart, though, if one considers the latent eroticism of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and its explicit condemnation by medieval commentators. Actually, the deviances which are here highlighted by the three Renaissance translators are matched by an equally strong textual control. In other words, these authors probably felt free to write on discord provided that their own

[4] In his works Bruno expounded a system of philosophy in which the principal elements were neo-Platonism, materialistic monism, rational mysticism (after the manner of Raymond Lully), and the naturalistic concept of the unity of the material world (inspired by Arabic treatises and by Copernican astronomy).

[5] On Spenser's neo-Platonism, see Yates 1983, chap. IX.

[6] On the frontispiece to the 1640 edition of Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, one can notice an oval plaque above Bacon's head surrounded by a wreath of bay leaves—the poet's crown of laurels. The inscription on the plaque reads "Tertius a Platone, Philosophiæ Princeps," which translates as "The Third from Plato, the Leader of Philosophy." This implies that the first Plato was, of course, Plato himself, and the second Plato was the XVth century Italian scholar Marsilio Ficino.

[7] On could also quote Pierre Bersuire's *Reductorium morale* which appeared later in the XIVth century and which summarized and allegorized Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Latin prose.

literary style emphasized concord, thus applying the rules of *discordia concors* praised by Horace.[8]

One could further argue that, albeit unconsciously, they were placing their works within the *non finito* tradition of Mannerist art. The three poems evoke the unfinished through their digressive narratives, their descriptions of never-ending rites of (failed) passage from "sexual innocence to sexual experience" (Smith 1991, 253) and their continual deferral of endings which remain elusive. The author of *The Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* does not directly voice Hermaphroditus' desperate injunctions to his parents as he is transformed by the gods, but he summarizes them in a few lines so as to devote his energy to the moralization of the tale. As for Thomas Underdowne, he alludes to Aegeus' tragic fate in his Preface but chooses to ignore it once Ariadne has been "translated" into the sky. And similarly, the translator of the Ceyx and Alcyone episode does not dwell on the halcyons once the lovers' metamorphoses have taken place, considering that his tale must stop at this point. Imperfection and incompletion are here inextricably linked to early modern poetry, a subtle form of art where the gaps are to be filled by the reader's imagination.

What is also worth noting is the incredible wealth of these poems with their numerous, compact mythological allusions, so much so that these "creative translations" amount to making Ovid speak English, as it were. This is true of a free adaptation like *The Excellent Historye of Theseus and Ariadne* where interpolations and commentary are part and parcel of Underdowne's translation, but it is also relevant for more faithful rewritings such as *The Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*, or *The Tragicall and lamentable Histoire of two faithfull mates: Ceyx Kynge of Thracine and Alcione his wife*, in which the speaking voice of the translator never completely disappears, all the more so as in myths, there is no such thing as a fixed, transparent meaning.

However, at a time when popular Ovidian texts (and more specifically translations) such as Golding's *Metamorphoses* (1567) appeared on the market and were often re-issued, our tales were published only once. This may be why they have generally been overlooked or underestimated, even though some critical attention has been paid to them. The three poems may in fact have been part of the first early "materialistic" trend of the 1560s, mainly concerned with transgressive love affairs. Should this be the case,

[8] See Horace's *Epistles*, I.XII.16-19: "Quae mare compescant causae; quid temperet annum ; / Stellae sponte sua jussaeve vagentur et errent ; / Quid premat obscurum Lunae, quid proferat orbem ; / Quem velit et possit rerum concordia discors."

they would then be foreshadowing the more refined or sophisticated productions of Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare. One is indeed intrigued, to say the least, that some of the striking images or ideas so skilfully used by these playwrights should appear in the translations edited in the present volume.

All of them, based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, consist in a rewriting of already well-known narratives while offering masculine constructions of female desire. However, while Ovid seemed at ease with the depiction of sensual characters in quest of love, his Renaissance translators are aware that desire is also political and that there is such a thing as sexual politics. They reveal a deep anxiety about feminine bodies which have time and again been rejected or "abjected" by the authors in Kristeva's use of the word (Kristeva 1980). This may account for the misogyny which pervades Thomas Underdowne's version of the Theseus and Ariadne story, where mothers are warned against the lasciviousness of their own daughters—who should be killed rather than be allowed to live in a world of carnal sin. As one is both drawn to and repelled by the abject, the extended depiction of the luxury of women implies that men are both titillated and frightened by a transgressive female sexuality. In the economy of desire, there is no place for chastity. Traditional male lust, increased by the deferral of desire, is now rewritten as a typically feminine feature.

Such a reading coexists with a homoerotic perspective that looks ahead to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1592-93), where the effeminate young man is a handsome but coy ephebe resisting the advances of a determined, masculine Venus, or to Marlowe's *Edward II* (1593) where Edward's minion, Gaveston, disguises himself as one of Diana's nymphs in order to please his kingly lover. If homoeroticism is not present as such in Underdowne's and Hubbard's texts, it is certainly suggested in *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*. Peend's rewriting features a metamorphic male eroticism in which Salmacis plays the part of the male wooer: this is part of a comic and erotic tradition which blends mythological elements with sexual disguise and involves cross-gender identities.[9]

The three tales actually propose a number of role-reversals: Salmacis is the teaser trying to exert her powers on Hermaphroditus while Ariadne's transgressive desire for Theseus will lead her to her own doom. As for Ceyx's affliction, it stimulates Alcyone's love. In all these different cases, frustration metamorphoses the lovers and transcends or sublimates the love-sick figures.

[9] On issues related to boy actors, cross-dressing and homoeroticism in the early modern era, see Orgel 1996.

The latent eroticism is felt in the limitations of language, which veils (more than it reveals) desire, and in the lovers' difficulties in remaining in touch with the beloved, whose conquest or contact always remains somehow problematic. According to Lucretius, various factors may spark off desire: physical maturity (*De rerum natura*, IV.1030-38), the stimulus provided by an attractive form (1032-34, 39-40, 49-56), the seminal distention of the genitals (1041-48), and the anticipation of pleasure.[10] These physical as well as mental processes seem to fascinate our three Renaissance translators, who describe them in suggestive lines where passionate *amor* seems to predominate over physiological *umor*.

If the burning brands of desire may be discovered in the three texts, it is water more than fire[11] which is the recurring element linked with the vagaries of desire. Ovid's lovers always move "in shady circles," "en *eaux* troubles," as the French put it. In an otherwise poor landscape[12] scarcely detailed by Ovid's translators, water does not purify anything; it serves to veil an enticing nudity while revealing it at the same time, as in the case of Hermaphroditus. Water also separates the lovers, as in Ceyx's shipwreck. Finally, water is a promise of escape which eventually brings nothing but isolation and regrets on a desert island in the case of Ariadne's misfortunes. Therefore, the three tales in this edition refer to water as a means of suggesting the perturbation of the human mind, but also as a signal for the troubling elusiveness of desire.

"Venus," Natale Conti claims, "is nothing else than that hidden appetite for sexual union which Nature has instilled in all creatures so that they may reproduce" (*Mythologiae* 4.13).[13] In the tales of *Hermaphroditus and*

---

[10] A manuscript version *De rerum natura* (written in the 1rst century B.C.) had been found in an Alsatian monastery in 1417. This was followed by the publication of the princeps edition at Brescia in 1473. Baptista Pius brought out a new edition at Bologna in 1511, then again at Paris three years later. In 1563, Denis Lambin published a new edition at Paris, based on a collation of several manuscripts. British scholars and noblemen are known to have possessed the Lambin edition. See Pollock 2009, 167-68.

[11] Heraclitus (ca 510 B.C.) gave fire a central place, claiming that this element exists in itself and may change into the other three elements. See "On Nature," 28: "There is exchange of all things for fire and fire for all things, as there is of wares for gold and of gold for wares."

[12] The *OED*'s first recorded use of the word "landscape" sends us back to Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's *A Tracte containing the Artes of curious Paintinge Carvinge & Buildinge*, translated by Richard Haydocke in 1598. The term, therefore, is slightly anachronistic here.

[13] "Hihil est autem aliud Venus, quam occultum coitus desiderium a natura insitum ad procreandum."

Salmacis, *Theseus and Ariadne*, or *Ceyx and Alcione*, Venus rules the world and her vital force urge women to satisfy their natural appetite, even though procreation is never alluded to. Yet, because water plays a central part in the translations which are presented here, birth and death are themes which subtly permeate all three texts. When he describes the birth of Aphrodite in his *Theogony* (190-200), Hesiod explains that she was born from the foam produced by the contact between Kronos's severed genitals and the waves of the sea near Cytherea. Water is thus presented both as a matrix and a grave, a womb and tomb. It destroys and creates at the same time. In the first narrative poem by Thomas Peend, there is no bloody fountain. Blood only colours the cheeks of angry characters or of those who feel ashamed. But the water, first depicted as "cleare," eventually becomes "playne." Like Kronos, Hermaphroditus is emasculated[14] in water, but his irremediable loss gives way to the birth of an eerie creature, both pitiful and enviable, embodying discord for some and concord for others. The disturbing hermaphrodite actually symbolizes the status of the boy-actor who had to impersonate a girl or a young woman during the "two hours' traffic" of early modern peformances on the London stages.[15] As to Ariadne, she is—even though metonymically—a kind of hopeless Venus lost in the middle of the sea, reminiscent of the goddess depicted in the sixth Homeric hymn.[16] Aphrodite had indeed appeared golden-crowned, all by herself in sea-set Cyprus, and the poet insists on the well-wrought diadem placed on her immortal head. Underdowne's forlorn heroine, by begging the gods that she be translated "into the starrye skye," actually demands to become the very crown of Venus, a remote deity careful not to be hurt by love but eager to make her lovers suffer. Now refusing the wound of love, the *vulnus amoris* (Lucretius, I.34), Ariadne longs for her rebirth or, at least, for a state in which anxiety yields to an abiding tranquility. She therefore seeks her comfort in a world where *jouissance* does not exist. For if eternity is a protection from death, it also bars all access to pleasure. In order to undergo the delightful torments of the *petite mort* (the little death) one has indeed to be mortal. Ceyx and Alcyone gain immortality too—through water.

---

[14] It should however be specified here that Hermaphroditus's is essentially a symbolic castration while Kronos has his penis actually cut by the scythe of his son, Zeus. On this question, with a number of significant early modern examples of castration, symbolic or real, particularly in Middleton's plays, see Taylor 2002.

[15] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, l. 12.

[16] Translated by George Chapman in 1624 at the end of his literary career. See Homer 2008.

The sea, however, has another role to play. In *Othello* (1604), a tragedy perhaps partially inspired by the Ovidian fable, Shakespeare uses the sea-storm motif to suggest the lovers' exacerbated sexuality:

> May the winds blow till they have wakened death,
> And let the *labouring* bark *climb* hills of seas,
> Olympus-high, and *duck again* as low
> As *hell*'s from heaven.
> (2.1.178-81. Italics mine)

If Othello and Desdemona sail on two different ships, the sea is what brings their feelings together and makes their love possible in spite of their physical separation. In Hubbard's story, the sea enhances the intensity of the couple's passion in a similar way.

Shipwreck, it seems, becomes synonymous with death and the *petite mort*. As Ceyx (in a context necessarily privileging male friendship) "doth make his men up hale, / the highest *mast*," Alcyone goes to bed. We are not told, though, what she actually does before she dreams of her dead husband. She sleeps, of course. She may also think of her love, desperately desiring her husband at the very moment when the storm is about to engulf him. So that, getting mad with desire, she eventually causes her own optical illusion: sweet dreams are made of this… One may think here of Lucretius' "conspiracy of sight and seamen" in Book IV of his *De rerum natura* (Brown 1987, 63), for Alcyone's vision is probably but a *simulacrum* generated by the wound of love.

Once all hope has been lost, those burning desires are drowned in an ocean of tears. The complaints voiced by the melancholy lovers, be they Salmacis, Ariadne, or Alcyone, show the strength as much as the frailty of love, so easily converted into despair. Metamorphosis, then, is the only means for Ovid's tragic heroes to escape from the fires of hell and the abyss of deep waters in order to start a new life, away from the torments of desire. Such heroes are probably not endowed yet with Hamlet's anxious self-awareness, but they nonetheless embody early moden men and women, i.e. people who were anxious to avoid the snares of lust while at the same time willing to disrupt the stereotypes of an all too patriarchal ideology. More than that, they were in fact trying to escape, albeit temporarily, the strictures of the Christian world of regulated desire. In a word, what they were claiming was a certain freedom of conscience.

PART I

HERMAPHRODITUS AND SALMACIS

AN INTRODUCTION TO *THE PLEASANT FABLE OF HERMAPHRODITUS AND SALMACIS* (1565)

1. Was Thomas Peend an impostor?

To us nowadays, Thomas Peend's life mostly remains a blank. He was a translator and poet of unknown parentage who may have been related to Stephen de la Pyend of the Inner Temple, London, and Depden, Suffolk. He was probably educated at Oxford and became a London barrister[1] with a "chamber over agaynst Sergeants Inne in Chancery Lane."

One may add, too, that 1565 was a prolific year for Thomas Peend. While rewriting the sixth tale of Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires tragiques* (1559),[2] he had also begun an English translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when Golding allegedly pre-empted him by publishing his now well-known 1565 translation, which consisted of the first four books of Ovid's text.[3] Although Peend then elected not to finish translating the entire work, he did publish *The Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*, the tale with which he had begun his endeavour.

Today, most critics tend to think that it is unlikely that Peend did his translation in 1564 (hence before reading Golding's), because the numerous parallels between the translations suggest that he knew of Golding's work (Taylor 1969, 16-20). The Renaissance scholar and specialist of Ovid, A. B. Taylor, went even as far as to accuse him of something close to plagiarism when he wrote that

> [e]ven 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

[1] Salmacis' rhetorical skills in the poem may be read as inspired by the legal pleas of the London Inns of Court.

[2] *The Historie of Iohn Lorde Mandozze* (see bibliography). This rewriting has been defined as a "metrical romance" by Scott 2008, 154. It is possible that Peend relied on proof sheets of Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, a collection of translated tales issued in 1566. Peend was also the author of a short poem prefixed to John Studley's *Agamemnon* (1566).

[3] See the dedicatory epistle in which Peend writes: "I understoode that another had prevented me."

> 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. (Taylor 2000, 3)

What makes Taylor so sure that Peend "stole" Golding's work thus making his translation a mere piece of plagiarism? If so, then we must take Robert Greene's accusations against Shakespeare *verbatim* and believe that Shakespeare was indeed an "upstart crow" (Greene quoted by Halliday 1964, 196)! So, the only thing that can truly be asserted about Thomas Peend is that he did rely on earlier translations to write his own reformulation.

2. The Ovidian myth

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IV.271-388), the myth of the hermaphrodite is initially presented as an etiological fable that opens with the promise to explain the peculiar properties of the famous fountain of Salmacis and closes on the curse that gives the fountain the enfeebling properties for which it is known (Silberman 1995).

Hermaphroditus' name is a mix that combines those of his parents, Hermes and Aphrodite. He was raised by nymphs on Mount Ida. At the age of fifteen, he left his native seat and, in the woods of Caria, he encountered Salmacis, a water nymph who was bathing in her pool. On seeing him, she was instantly overcome by lust for the boy; she tried to seduce him but the boy shied away from her advances. So she pretended to leave and, thinking he was now all alone, Hermaphroditus undressed and entered the waters of the pool. At this, Salmacis all of a sudden sprang from behind a tree and jumped into the pool. She wrapped herself around the boy, touching his breast and kissing him all over. While he struggled, she called out to the gods that they should never part. The gods heard her prayer and their two bodies were then blended into one. Hermaphroditus, literally unmanned by the sudden loss of his virility, cursed the pool and vowed that anyone bathing in it should henceforth be similarly transformed.

Hygin does not narrate the story but he does mention Hermaphroditus as one of the paragons of male beauty, together with Adonis, Endymion, Ganymede, Hyacinthus, Narcissus, Hylas and Chrysippus.[4] Even though

[4] Hygin, *Fables*, CCLXXI.2: "Qui ephebi formosissimi fuerunt": "Narcissus Cephisi fluminis filius qui se ipsum amauit, Atlantius Mercurii et Veneris filius qui Hermaphroditus dictus est, Hylas Theodamantis filius, quem Hercules amauit […]." Hygin (who had been writing at the beginning of the IIIrd century A.D.) was

M. Robinson reminds us that "the earliest evidence, both epigraphical and literary, suggests that Hermaphroditus was originally worshipped as some kind of deity," (Robinson 1999, 214) the myth was not really taken up by any of Ovid's contemporaries and is thus only found in the *Metamorphoses*. At a time when Queen Elizabeth herself displayed her own political hermaphroditism by openly acknowledging that she had "the body but of a weake and feeble woman" and "the heart and stomach of a king" (Elizabeth I[rst] 2000, 326),[5] one could still create and imagine all possible variants, meditating upon a myth which clearly posed the problem of gender, monstrosity, unrequited love and excessive passion. No wonder then that Ovid's Hermaphroditus might have provided Shakespeare with the material he needed for the characterization of his cold, effeminate boy in *Venus and Adonis*.[6]

3. Medieval influences

Peend's text comprises a version of the mythical story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, freely translated and adapted from Ovid with its usual moralizing interpretation, which is followed by an intriguing, rather lengthy glossary of proper names[7] at the end—ideally aimed at increasing the knowledge of "the unlearned." Strangely enough, apart from the various rewritings of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the myth was not taken up in English literary texts before the 1560s with the one notable exception of Nicholas Grimald's translation entitled *Marcus Tullius Ciceroes thre*

read by learned Renaissance contemporaries: the most ancient edition known today dates back to 1535. Jacopus Micyllus, who published the work in Basel together with the *Astronomica*, already relied on a damaged manuscript. The *Fabulae* were re-issued in 1549, 1570, 1578, 1599 (the year of a new edition by Hieronymus Commelinus), 1609 and so on. More details can be found in J.-P. Boriaud's Introduction to the *Fables*, xvi and xvii (see bibliography).

[5] On Elizabeth's political use of androgyny and of the myth of Hermaphrodite, see Sansonetti 2009, 37-61.

[6] On the links between the Venus-Adonis episode, the Salmacis-Hermaphroditus story and Thomas Peend's work, see Palmatier 1961, 163-69. The author notices that the entry devoted to Adonis in Peend's glossary of persons and places, which constitues the final part of his text, could well have influenced Shakespeare's depiction of the young, sullen boy pursued by Venus (165).

[7] This glossary functions as an abbreviated version of a Renaissance thesaurus, recording mythological names and places. It seems to have been neglected so far even though it sounds like an invaluable source for mythographic studies.

bokes of duties to Marcus his sonne (1556)[8]. However, the reference remains brief and is not even commented upon. Consequently, if one is looking for Peend's possible influences, one is likely to find them in a much earlier period than this.

Moreover, English poets had never been blind to the needs of public morality. Thomas Peend himself gravely declared that his fable was a moral work, particularly concerned with "that fylthy lothsome lake of lust" and the "mad desires of women, theyr rage in folysh fits." If one leaves aside the blatant misogyny of the passage, the belief that, a deceptive façade was in fact hiding some hidden truths only accessible to the happy few, dates back to the Middle Ages. This seems to be exactly what Peend has in mind when he writes:

> Now, *Ouid* here myght seeme to some,
> a tryflyng tale to tell.
> But yet it shewes a worthy sence,
> if it be marked well.
> The Poets vse in pleasaunt toyes
> great wysdome for to shew.
> A subtle sence thys tale doth beare,
> al beit perceyude of few.
> (333-40)

Such lines in fact refer to the *Ovide Moralisé*, a 72,000 line allegorical interpretation of Ovid's stories in octosyllabic couplets written at the beginning of the XIVth century. The poem was a rewriting of the Ovidian story (IV.1997-2389), which it turned into an intolerable tale of *eros*, i.e. into a vehement denunciation of feminine seduction. Similarly, Petrus Berchorius' encyclopaedic *Ovidius Moralizatus* (though independent from the French version of *Ovide Moralisé*) also originated in the XIVth century and provided a similar didactic and allegorical interpretation. Both works were very popular on the Continent. They emphasized the mutability of temporal life and the need to despise earthly goods and riches. The stability of heavenly things was the only desirable aim to reach.

Thanks to these medieval rewritings as well as to Caxton's own translation of the *Metamorphoses* (1480),[9] Ovid was still read in its medieval versions in England. Thomas Peend, for instance, resorts to such allegories as Purity (such Youthes as yet be greene, / And from the spot of

[8] "*A* goodlie great spoile at Salmacis wonne: Without anie blood, or swette was it donne".

[9] See Caxton 1968. Volume 1 (Books 1-9) is the Phillipps Manuscript. Volume 2 (Books 10-15) is the Pepys Manuscript.