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Shakespeare and English Translations of the Classics

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As Melissa Yinger and Michael Ursell’s review of ‘Shakespeare’s Books’ (chapter 1 in this volume) and William P. Weaver’s description of ‘A Classical Education’ (chapter 2 in this volume) suggest, the lack of knowledge about Shakespeare’s specific literary and pedagogic background means that conversations about his direct engagement with classical writings, in the vernacular or otherwise, often remain speculative. The following discussion of ‘Shakespeare and English translations of the classics’ thus begins by examining the general poetical and political significance of translating the classics in sixteenth-century England, before turning to some of the ways in which English translations of the classics – rather than the source texts – illuminate Shakespeare.1

‘the learning of tonges, and encrease of eloquence’

In many ways, Christian-humanist initiatives help to explain the period’s desire to translate. Richard Helgerson observes, for example, that:

Prompted by the cultural breaks of Renaissance and Reformation, sixteenth-century national self-articulation began with a sense of national barbarism, with a recognition of the self as the despised other, and then moved to repair that damaged self-image with the aid of forms taken from a past that was understood as both different from the present and internally divided.

This astute summary shows how a fear of ‘barbarism’ (‘The use of words or expressions not in accordance with the classical standard of a language, especially such as are of foreign origin’ (‘barbarism’, see the Oxford English Dictionary)) drives the Tudors’ early refutations of English deficiency. Alongside a reformed approach to biblical translation, the close engagement with Greek and Roman literature underpins sixteenth-century aspirations to linguistic and social improvement. Often referred to as translatio imperii et studii (the transfer of empire and knowledge), this pervasive humanist ideal is first embodied in the rendition of classical writings into English.

These humanist concerns for intellectual and imperial transmission appear in Laurence Humphrey’s Interpretatio linguarum (‘The translation of languages’) (1559), the first-known theory of translation written by an Englishman during the Renaissance (Rhodes 1; Schmidt 1). Published
in Basle in the second year of Elizabethan rule and some five years before Shakespeare’s birth, Humphrey’s Protestant tract asks two questions which are suggestive of wider anxieties about the impoverished state of the vernacular. ‘What’, he demands ‘is there to prevent the whole of Cicero at least from being expressed in English for English people? Why should Livy’s History and the works of Plato and Aristotle not be published in our language?’ (Kendal 291). Humphrey’s quartet of Roman and Greek authors, famed for their rhetorical, historical and philosophical prowess, is indicative of the kinds of writing that Cambridge-educated men such as Humphrey could appreciate in the original languages. However, as Interpretatio linguarum shows in detail, translation is fundamental for the development of Englishness. Taking stock of the current situation, in a section titled ‘English translators of recent times’ Humphrey provides examples of revered translations in early Elizabethan England: The fourth boke of Virgill, intreating of the loue betwene Aeneas & Dido, translated into English, and drawne into a strange metre by Henry late Earle of Surrey (1554); Euclid’s Geometry (translated by Richard Cavendish (c.1559?)), and ‘the best of Terence’, that is Nicholas Udall’s Flowers for Latine spekynge selected and gathered oute of Terence (1534) (Kendal 287–91). Virgil, the head of this small but generically diverse range of classical translations, ‘was the most highly regarded, if not necessarily the most widely read, classical author in early-modern Europe’ (Burrow 2013: 51). On the other side of Euclid’s mathematical thesis, Humphrey makes note of Udall’s Latin textbook comprising Terentian fragments. While Surrey’s partial translation was succeeded by Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne’s The whole xii. bookes of the Aeneidos of Virgill (1573) and Cavendish’s Euclid was overshadowed by Henry Billingsey’s 1570 version, Udall’s Terence ‘was reprinted several times over the next fifty years, and was a standard school text over the same period’ (Steggle 4).

In the absence of exact information, most scholars agree that Shakespeare’s works attest to the kinds of classical knowledge gained in grammar school (Martindale and Martindale 6). Early modern teaching manuals document the study of Terence and Aesop in the lower school before progressing to Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, and Seneca in the upper school (Baldwin; Barkan; Burrow 2004; Oakley-Brown 2010). John Brinsley’s Ludus Literarius, or the Grammar Schoole (1612) recommends the following authors: ‘And therefore I would haue the cheifest labor to make these purest Authors our owne, as Tully [Cicero] for prose, so Ouid and Virgil for verse, so to speak and write in Latine for the phrase, as they did’ (quoted in Burrow 2004: 12).

Brinsley’s classical exemplars of poetic achievement, Ovid and Virgil, feature in Thomas Nashe’s dedication ‘To the Gentlemen Students of both Univerisities’ in Robert Greene’s Menaphon (1589), a text including a ‘page of praise’ which singles out four Elizabethan translators: George Tuberville (Ovid’s Heroides (1567) and A plaine Path to perfect Vertue: Deuised and found out by Mancinus a Latine Poet (1568)); Arthur Golding (Thabridgment of the histories of Trogus Pompeius (1564); The first foure booke of P. Ouidius Nasos worke, intitled Metamorphosis (1564); The. xv. booke of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis (1567); The eyght booke of Caius Iulius Caesar coneyng his maritall exploytes in the realme of Gallia and the countries bordering vppon the same (1565); The woorke of the excellent philosoper Lucius Annaeus Seneca concerning benefyting (1578); The woorke of Pomponius Mela (1585); The excellent and pleasant worke of Iulius Solinus Polyhistor (1587)); Thomas Phaer (The seven first booke of the Eneidos of Virgill (1558); The whole .xii. booke of the Aeneidos of Virgill completed by Thomas Twyne (1573)), and Richard Stanyhurst (Thee first foure booke of Virgill his Aeneis (1582) (Nashe A1v-A3r)).

Such lists usefully summarise key English translators and translations which, we might reason, were available for Shakespeare to consult. Two significant publications are missing from this early modern inventory: Seneca his tenne tragedies, translated into Englysh (translated by Jasper Heywood, Alex Nevile, John Studley, T. Nuze, and Thomas Newton (1581)) and The lives of the noble Gree- cians and Romanes, compared together by that graue learned philosopher and historiographer, Plutarke of Chaeronea: translated out of Grecke into French by Iames Amyot (translated by Thomas North (1579)).
North’s translation is of special note for several reasons. First, his translation of Plutarch is the only Greek author that Shakespeare used extensively, ‘paradoxically for his Roman plays’ (Martindale and Taylor 1). Second, it is clear from the text’s title that this is not a rendition of the source text. North’s Plutarch enters the vernacular by way of Jacques Amyot’s *Les Vies des hommes illustres Grecs et Romains* (1559), thus illustrating the complex nature of Shakespeare’s engagement with classical material. Third, North’s use of an intermediary translation helps to underscore the elite status of Greek language learning in late sixteenth-century England.

If the foregoing roll-calls provide a sense of the classical texts that were subject to translation, it is also expedient to consider the processes underpinning their production. Engaging with the long-standing debates about whether to translate the word-for-word meaning or the literal sense of the source text, Humphrey’s *Interpretatio linguarum* generally promotes a ‘straight-forward but learned, elegant but faithful’ approach (that is, ‘the “middle way”’) (Kendal 268). In order to support his standpoint with current practice, Humphrey turns to a fellow Cambridge scholar John Cheke (286), Edward VI’s pedagogue and the first Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge University. Cheke was an advocate of the so-called double translation method which was favoured in Tudor grammar schools and is commonly associated with his own pupil and eventual tutor to Princess Elizabeth, Roger Ascham (Rhodes et al. 40). Ascham’s *The Scholemaster or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children, to vnderstand, write, and speake, the Latin tong* (1570) explains double translation as a process whereby classical writings are rendered ‘out of Latin into English, and out of Latin into English agayne’ (33r). But as *The Scholemaster* describes children’s acquisition of Latin in more detail, it is clear that Ascham’s techniques are not wholly concerned with perfunctory textual transfer. In Book 2 of *The Scholemaster*, for instance, Ascham states that:

There be six wayes appointed by the best learned men, for the learning of tonges, and encreace of eloquence, as,

1. Translatio linguarum.
2. Paraphrasis.
3. Metaphrasis.
4. Epitome.
5. Imitatio.
6. Declamatio.

All theis be vsed, and commended, but in order, and for respectes: as person, habilitie, place, and tyme shall require. The fiue last, be fitter, for the Master, than the scholer: for men, than for children: for the vniuersities, rather than for Grammer scholes.

(33r–33v)

According to individual circumstances – ‘as person, habilitie, place, and tyme shall require’ – the guidelines establish six stages that take Ascham’s pupils from double translation to declamation; from text to speech. As they work through the intermediary stages of paraphrasis, metaphrasis, epitome and imitatio, Ascham’s pupils evidently develop increasingly creative and subjective responses to the classical material.

From a twenty-first century perspective, Susan Bassnett reminds us that the definition of translation is by no means clear: ‘[b]y pretending that we know what translation is, i.e. an operation that involves textual transfer across a binary divide, we tie ourselves up with problems of originality and authenticity, of power and ownership, of dominance and subservience. But can we always be certain that we know what translation is?’ (27). To be sure, attempts would be made to distil translation into a method – one later example is John Dryden’s tripartite model of metaphrase,
English translations of the classics

As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid lives in melifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: So Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For Comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labours Lost*, his *Love Labours Wonne*, his *Midsummers Night Dreame*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for Tragedy, his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

As Epius Stolo said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue, if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English.

While Meres’ description makes use of the broad principles of *translatio studii et imperii* to make a claim for Shakespeare’s vernacular success, his swift shift from ‘the Latines’ to the English writer eclipses the translation procedure itself. However, it is clear that the Shakespearean canon does not sidestep the topic.

As Dirk Delabastita points out, ‘Shakespeare was definitely aware of the dramatic mileage there was to be got out of translation, as is shown by several cross-language situations in the plays’ (31). Examples include *Julius Caesar* (1.2.274–80); *Henry IV*, part 2 (Induction 6–8); *Measure for Measure* (1.2.18–24); *Richard II* (5.3.114–17); *The Taming of the Shrew* (1.3.159–60, 172–3; 3.1.31–36); *Henry V* (1.2.38–39; 3.4.29–51; 4.4.20–36; 5.2.104–20; 5.2.248–62; 5.2.328–34); *The Tempest* (1.2.365–67); *Henry VIII* (3.1.40–45); *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1.3.43–48) and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (3.1.112–13). In particular, Delabastita shows how *Henry VI*, part 2 highlights ‘the exclusion policy that eliminates people for speaking the wrong language or with the wrong accent’ (34). Indeed, Shakespeare’s ‘fortuitously named’ (Parker 29) Lord Say ‘finds out that in the wrong sort of company the sheer knowledge of foreign languages may suffice to cast fatal suspicions on your loyalty’ (Delabastita 34). His ability to ‘speak French . . . the tongue of an enemy’ (161–67) permits Cade’s supporters to call for Say’s head. Several scenes later, Say’s Latin utterances incite Cade himself to command ‘Away with him? Away with him! He speaks Latin’ (4.7.55) (Delabastita 35). By contrast, however, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* features the courtly

paraphrase and imitation as outlined in his Preface to *Ovid’s Epistles* (1680). Yet such reductive models cannot adequately marshal the range of semiotic and ideological discourses at work when shifting from source to target languages. Although Elizabethans such as Humphrey and Ascham propose tenets, in the end the sixteenth-century translator’s task is not one of equivalence but the ‘encrease of eloquence’: ‘the progression is . . . from grammar to rhetoric’ (Barkan 34). Furthermore, the stages of *translatio linguarum* to *imitatio* are so enmeshed that Theo Hermans contends that they should be viewed as a ‘continuum of different types of “rewriting”’ (quoted in Schmidt 8). Thus in the late sixteenth century John Florio referred to his rendition of Michel de Montaigne’s *Essays* (1603) as a ‘defective edition (since all translations are reputed femalls, delivered at second hand)’ (A2). In the same vein, rather than perceiving translation as a hierarchical process concerned with the demarcation of original and copy, a Shakespearean approach to the classics could profitably start from the earlier Elizabethan understanding of translation as a catalyst for rewriting and rhetorical development. In *Palladis Tamia* (1598), Francis Meres’ well-known comparative discourse of ‘our English poets, with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian’ views Shakespeare as continuing the legacy of classical literature in specific ways:

As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid lives in melifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.

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Valentine befriending and subsequently leading a group of threatening outlaws because he has language skills (4.1.30–32) (Oakley-Brown 2013). These two vignettes dramatise Shakespearean interests in the variable societal significance of linguistic difference. More graphically still, the politics of classical translation appear in Lavinia’s desperate efforts to communicate how she was raped and mutilated as she ‘tosseth’ (4.1.39) the pages of Ovid’s Metamorphoses and laboriously writes ‘Stuprum’ (Titus Andronicus 4.1.77). Shakespeare’s first Roman tragedy both foregrounds the concepts of translatio studii et imperii – for example Demetrius’s and Chiron’s terrifying attack on ‘Rome’s rich ornament’ (1.1.52) – and interrogates the efficacy of knowledge gained from a classical education. When Chiron recognises the sheath of Latin text encasing Titus’s ‘gifts’ of weapons as an extract from a Horation Ode ‘read in a grammar long ago’ (4.2.13, 23) but fails to comprehend ‘Andronicus’ conceit’ (4.2.13–30), ‘Shakespeare knew very well that reading something in a grammar long ago does not necessarily mean that one understands it, nor that one grasps the force of a quotation when it is used in a new context’ (Burrow 2013: 25).

In the three sections below, I consider how Venus and Adonis, A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Troilus and Cressida engage with The xv. bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into English meeter (translated by Arthur Golding 1567), The xi. Bookes of the Golden Asse, Conteninge the Metamorphosie of Lucius Apuleius, enterlaced with sondrie pleasante and delectable Tales, with an excellent Narration of the Mariage of Cupide and Psiches, set out in the iiiij. v. and vj. Bookes (translated by William Adlington 1566) and Seauen bookes of the Iliades of Homere, prince of poets, translated according to the Greeke, in iudgement of his best commentaries by George Chapman Gent (1598). In doing so, I examine the ways in which these Shakespearean texts offer progressively sophisticated responses to the transfer of empire and knowledge.

**Venus and Adonis and Golding’s Ovid**

The Metamorphoses appears onstage in the aforementioned Titus Andronicus when a copy of Ovid’s poem appears in the hands of Young Lucius as he takes flight from his aunt Lavinia (4.1 s.d.). Cymbeline’s Iachomo apparently sees the book in Imogen’s bedroom (2.2.45–46). In terms of intertextual references, Golding’s Ovid is the most influential translation in Shakespeare’s portfolio of writing. According to A. B. Taylor:

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 work with him, that scarcely a trace of the premier Elizabethan translation of the Heroides, George Turberville’s Heroycall Epistles (1567), has been found in his work . . . 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. (3)

Rather than foregrounding explicit connections between Golding’s Ovid and Shakespeare’s works, Taylor’s comments bespeak a shared environment of domesticated dynamism which can also be observed in Venus and Adonis. Thus, it is not that Shakespeare slavishly adheres to the vernacular translation’s technique. Rather, as it permeates Golding’s Ovid as a whole, an indigenous inclination pervades Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis.

Reminiscent of Golding’s Ovid’s prefatory dedication to the Earl of Leicester, Venus and Adonis’s address to Henry Wriothesley parallels the gendered coordinates of sixteenth-century
vernacular versions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.\(^5\) In dedicating ‘the first heir of his invention’ to the nineteen-year-old Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare conforms to the orthodox Elizabethan paradigm; men translate the complex verse of this ‘most capricious poet’ (*As You Like It*, 3.3.5–6).\(^6\) Yet the dedication’s description of the poem as ‘his invention’ may provide an indication of the ways in which the first Shakespearean publication engages with its classical sources. While ‘Ovid tells the story of *Venus and Adonis* in less than a hundred lines’ and Golding’s translation of Book 10’s narrative is a little longer than his source, Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* is over eleven times the length of the classical narrative (Bate 1993: 50).\(^7\) By contrast with Golding’s moralising agenda – a familiar mode of Ovidian transposition inherited from the medieval commentary tradition and best illustrated by the *Ovide moralisé*\(^8\) – Shakespeare’s approach to *Venus and Adonis* is indicated in its epigraph from Ovid’s *Amores* (*The Loves*), a series of elegiac couplets which tell of the narrator’s pursuit of the socially superior Corinna. Rendered into English by Shakespeare’s contemporary, Christopher Marlowe, as *Certaine of Ovids Elegies* (c.1599), ‘the first translation . . . into any modern European vernacular’ (Mann 111), this erotically charged poem was censored by the Bishops’ Ban (1599) and publicly burnt. *Venus and Adonis* escaped such condemnation, yet its Latin tag, ‘Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo/ Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua’ (‘Let base-conceited wits admire vile things,/ Fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses springs’),\(^9\) is affiliated to an Ovidian intertext which intensifies Shakespeare’s portrayal of the sweating, shaking and sobbing goddess of love (175–223) and the disdainful (241) youth.\(^10\)

Golding’s penultimate piece of advice to the general reader is ‘If any stomacke be so weake as that it cannot brooke, / The liuely setting forth of things described in this booke, / I giue him counsell too absteine vntill he bee more strong, / And for too vse Vlysses feat ageinst the Mere-mayds song’ (Aiiiir). Whereas the Elizabethan translator sets out to moralise, Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* is an exercise in parsing how ‘passion on passion is deeply redoubled’ (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen 832). And as striking similes turn Venus from forthright predator (‘like a bold-faced suitor’ (6) to maternal protector (‘Like a milch doe’ (875)), the verse concludes with the image of a ‘hollow cradle’ (1185) and a goddess who is ‘weary of the world’ (1189). After Ovid, Golding’s focus is on the flower derived from Adonis’ death. Rather differently, Shakespeare’s ‘aetiological conceit is that since the goddess of love herself has been crossed in love, “Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend” (1136)’ (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen 68).

Raphael Lyne has shown in detail how Golding’s particular attention to dialect, architecture and surroundings fashions an ‘Englished *Metamorphoses*’:

> [Golding] uses a language of heightened Englishness in translation, and his versions of Ovidian myth are often filled with highly English scenery and ideas. At times it seems as if a characteristically Elizabethan wish to promote national culture leads him, in effect, to reinvent Ovid as the author of English stories. Golding often replaces Latin words with strong and specific cultural associations with English equivalents with English associations, rather than attempting to capture the original in paraphrase.

\[(2001: 27, 54–55)\]

Unlike these examples, Golding’s own rendition of Venus and Adonis is not especially Englished. However, Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* relies on Golding’s classical translation not least in its delineation of climate and landscape. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Henry Woudhuysen observe that:

> While the central figures in *Venus and Adonis* have been stripped to their essentials, their environment has been marvellously enriched. The setting feels much more like the
Forest of Arden in Warwickshire than a grove in Ancient Greece. It was for its naturalistic evocations of light effects and of birds, plants and animals that the poem was most admired by Coleridge.

Developing earlier critical analyses that appreciate ‘English-feeling naturalism’ (64), Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen view this rustic, Anglicised mise-en-scène as the binary opposition of its urban, plague-ridden period of production,11 a trace of which erupts in the poem’s final section. Once Adonis has ‘breaketh from the sweet embrace / . . . And homeward through the dark laund runs apace’ (812–13), Venus ‘sings extemporally a woeful ditty’ (836) which leads to other kinds of nocturnal noises resounding in the rural setting:

Her song was tedious and outwore the night,
For lovers’ hours are long, though seeming short:

For who hath she to spend the night withal
But idle sounds resembling parasites,
Like shrill-tongued tapsters answering every call,
Soothing the humour of fantastic wits?
She says ’Tis so’: they answer all ’Tis so;’
And would say after her, if she said ’No.’

(841–52)

For Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, Venus’ melancholic tune ‘is rendered faintly undignified by the wood and echoes which throw back the goddess’ words . . . “Like shrill-tongued tapsters answering her call” (46). The poem exaggerates its female protagonist’s less reputable aspects, but Venus and Adonis also keeps watch on the wider society enveloping the classical duo, from Adonis’ friends (588, 718) to those invasive tones evoking the taverns’ social and commercial congress. It may be the case that Shakespeare’s intense, ‘environmentally enriched’ exploration of thwarted desire ‘out-Ovids Ovid’ (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen 59) but, as these touches of more commonplace circumstances indicate, Venus and Adonis is also indebted to Golding’s rendition.

Still, Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen’s insightful comment that the setting feels more like ‘the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire than a grove in Ancient Greece’ is further supported by the poem’s verdant landscape: ‘Blue-veined violets’ (125), a ‘primrose bank’ (151), brook (162) and hedge (1094) together with an apt bestiary comprising horses (30 ff.), hares (674, 679, 697), foxes (675), sheep (685), hounds (686, 692) and deer (689).12 To this backdrop, we could add a soundscape that features a huntsman’s halloo and a nurse’s song (973–74) alongside the aforementioned tapsters. Even the poem’s climate (it begins on a dew-laden morning13) seems redolent of Shakespeare’s native ecosystem. Strikingly, the seemingly casual placing of the bonnet on Adonis’ head (339) in the opening sections of the verse becomes an important prop for creating not just a domestic locale but, as indicated by Venus’ own grief-stricken memory in the poem’s finale, domesticating the resounding image of the classical youth itself: ‘And therefore would he put his bonnet on, / Under whose brim the gaudy sun would peep:/ The wind would blow it off and, being gone, Play with his locks’ (1086–90). For all its intense scrutiny of mythical bodies and the vagaries of sexual desire, Venus and Adonis’s addition of a familiar piece of clothing caught in the current of a summer’s breeze deftly translates Ovid’s classic tale for its English readers.
A Midsummer Night’s Dream: From Golding’s Ovid to Adlington’s Apuleius

A Midsummer Night’s Dream shares common ground with Venus and Adonis. Both narratives exploit and extend Ovidian myths of transformation. However, while the poem is inaugurated by the classical tale, A Midsummer Night’s Dream folds Ovid’s Pyramus and Thisbe (from Book 4 of the Metamorphoses) into its dramaturgy. Each Shakespearean text also features asymmetric forms of sexual desire. Instead of the tragic tale of a goddess and a boy, Shakespeare’s comedy depicts the Queen of Fairies in amorous consort with a mortal artisan magically transformed into a human with an ass’s head. In its staging of this hybrid form – that of a figure that is neither wholly man nor wholly beast – A Midsummer Night’s Dream seems especially linked to the first line of Golding’s Ovid: ‘Of shapes transformde to bodies straunge, I purpose to entreate’ (Bir).

It has become something of a critical commonplace to invoke Peter Quince’s cry of ‘Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated’ (3.1.113) whenever notions of Shakespearean metamorphoses of any kind are invoked, including linguistic and literary translation. Yet it is significant that the comedy’s connected social, superficial and sensory transportation are heightened in the dramatic body of a weaver – an occupation defined by the interlacing of fabric – and whose own semiotic valency evidently shuttles between the figurative and literal meanings of ‘Bottom’ and ‘ass’. Thus, A Midsummer Night’s Dream expertly utilises the conjoined effects of embodied and textual transformation and, in many ways, plays with the word ‘translation’ itself. Etymologically, the word ‘translation’ is simultaneously bound to the customary processes and products of moving from one language into another and to the body. Indeed, the first entry in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines the term as follows: ‘Transference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another. Spec. The removal of a bishop from one see to another; in the Church of Scotland, the removal of a minister from one charge to another; also, the removal of the body or relics of a saint to another place of interment’ (translation). The OED also records that Shakespeare’s deployment of ‘translation’ in Love’s Labour’s Lost (c.1594) 5.2.51 is the earliest use of the word to mean ‘The expression or rendering of something in another medium or form’ (translation). This definition is also at work in the opening scene of A Midsummer Night’s Dream’s as Helena desires ‘to be to [Hermia] translated’ (1.1.201). Although the play’s interest in a taxonomy of translation is made manifest in Act 3’s spectacle of human/non-human mutability, Shakespeare punctuates his comedy with a vocabulary celebrating shifts in bodily form or mood: ‘Love can transpose’ (1.1.233); heads are ‘transformed’ (4.1.63); fears are ‘Transported’ (4.2.4); feelings are ‘transfigured’ (5.1.24).

Like the translative strategies employed in Venus and Adonis, Shakespeare’s play is frankly and explicitly invented from a combination of materials, including an eclectic mix of classical and local mythologies (Paster and Skiles 275). Just focusing on Bottom’s plight alone reveals a catalogue of allied texts which attest to the sixteenth century’s interest in asinine metamorphosis. For example, Apollo’s conferment of ass’s ears upon King Midas is the first tale from Ovid’s Metamorphoses (Book 11) to appear as an individual vernacular translation (Hedley c. 1552);16 The boke of secretes of Albertus Magnus (1560) considers ‘If thou wilt that a mans head seme an Asse head’ (jviiv); Golding’s moral allegory reads Midas ‘as a foole whom neyther proof nor warning can amend’ (avv); a marginal comment in Reginald Scot’s The Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584) foregrounds how ‘To set an horses or an asses head on a mans neck and shoulders’ (315);17 John Lyly’s Ovidian-inspired play Midas was performed at court in 1589 (Hunter 15). One principal influence, however, is William Adlington’s rendition of The. xi. bookes of the Golden asse conteininge the Metamorphosie of Lucius Apuleius (1566).

D. T. Starnes and J. M. Tobin confirm the inscription of Apuleius’ narrative in ‘more than thirty of [Shakespeare’s] works’ (Carver 429–30). While none of Shakespeare’s texts seem to forge...
the association with *The xi. bookes of the Golden asse* as clearly as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*—after all, both play and prose narrative focus on the transformation of a man into an ass—the comedy’s explicit debt to either the classical source or its translation remains unclear. According to Robert H. F. Carver, in contrast to the avowedly scholarly approach adopted by Ben Jonson ‘who uses Apuleius in the manner of a scholar, to flesh out footnotes . . . Shakespeare . . . assimilates Apuleian material into the fabric of his drama so thoroughly that the original lineaments are all but defaced’ (341). Nonetheless, it is tempting to visualise Shakespeare incorporating not just Lucius Apuleius’s shift between the human and the non-human form into *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* but also gleaning detail from the paratextual matter of Adlington’s translation.

Dedicated to Thomas Radcliffe, third Earl of Sussex, ‘lord lieutenant of Ireland and courtier’ (MacCaffrey 1), Adlington’s opening address ‘To the right Honorable, and Mightie Lorde, Thomas, Earle of Sussex’ stresses the ways in which he has made the ‘iestinge and sportfull matter of the booke’ suitable ‘to be offred to any man of grauitie and wisedome’ (Adlo). Although his moralised framework is not as long or as textually dense as Golding’s, Adlington provides his aristocratic addressee with a register of familiar Ovidian allegories.18 The fables of Actaeon, Tantalus, Thiestes, Tereus and Progne, Icarus, Phaeton and Mydas are invoked as examples of unrestrained material desires (Adloii). Castor and Pollux’s apotheosis ‘into a signe in Heauen called Gemini’ depicts how ‘vertuous and godly persons shalbe rewarded after life with perpetuall blisse’ (Adloii). Hence, Adlington continues, ‘in this fable or feigned ieste of Lucius Apuleius is compre-hended a figure of mans life, ministringe moste swéete and delectable matter, to such as shalbe desirous to Reade the same’ (Adloii).

The translator takes a different tack with his preface ‘To the Reader’:

The argument of the booke is: How Lucius Apuleius the Author him selfe, traueled into Thessaly (being a region in Grece, where all the women for the most parte, be such wonderfull witches, that thei can transfourme men into the figure of beastes) wheare after he had co[n]tinued a fewe daies, by the mighty force of a violent confection, he was chaunged into a miserable Asse, and nothinge might reduce him to his wonted shape, but the eatinge of a Rose, whiche after endure[n]ce of infinite sorow, at len[g]th he obteined by praier. Verely vnder the wrappe of this transformation, is taxed the life of mortall men, when as we suffer our mindes so to be drowned in the sensuall lustes of the fleshe, and the beastly pleasure therof: (whiche apty may be called, the violent confection of witches) that we léese wholy the vse of reason and vertue (which proprely should be in man) & play the partes.

(Aiiv–Aiir)

Whereas Adlington’s address to Radcliffe aligns Lucius’ transformation with classical paradigms of moral edification and a possible positive outcome of apotheosis, his explanation to the general reader foregrounds women, witchcraft, and ‘the sensuall lustes of the fleshe, and the beastly pleasure therof’ which are engendered by ‘the mighty force of a violent confection’. Here the subordinate allegory dwells on ‘infinite sorow’ and the loss of reason. Clearly, the Apuleian themes of ardent women, enchantments and bodily pleasures are apparent in the Shakespearean plot featuring the fairies, their potion, and Puck’s transformation of the unwitting Bottom. In effect, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* chimes with both of Adlington’s bifurcated and hierarchical dedications to ‘the right Honorable, and Mightie Lorde, Thomas Stanley’ and ‘the Reader’.19 After reading Adlington’s bleak explication for the common reader of Apuleius’s transformation into a ‘miserable Asse’, the artisans’ anxieties seem justly rooted in material as well as unearthly conditions. For those who have not had the benefit of a classical education, the vernacular translation is key.
Troilus and Cressida and Chapman’s Homer

Venus and Adonis and A Midsummer Night’s Dream show how Ovid’s Metamorphoses provide late Tudor England with a metatext for exploring translation: it is ‘the book of changes in a time of change’ (Callaghan 27). Produced a decade or so after Venus and Adonis and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Troilus and Cressida (c. 1601–2?) bears witness to Shakespeare’s increasingly nuanced encounters with classical writings. If Meres’ Palladis Tamia inserts Elizabethan Shakespeare into a Roman literary genealogy, by taking on Homer’s Iliad, Chaucer’s Troylus and Criseyde, Caxton’s Recuyell of the Histories of Troy (the first book printed in the English language c. 1475), and his own generation’s investment in the myth of Troy, Shakespeare’s later play pushes itself into an extensive lineage of inter- and intra-lingual appropriation:

Roughly speaking, Shakespeare’s Trojans are more Chaucerian, his Greeks more Greek, reflecting the line which links Troy, not Athens, to King Arthur and British history (a sequence variously exploded and subverted by Shakespeare’s time but still mythically potent). Shakespeare makes sure that we feel the alien quality of this ancient matter by giving his opening Prologue a language on stilts, studded with strange words, ‘the princes orgilous’, ‘immures’, ‘corresponsive’, and Chapmanesque compound-words. This, Shakespeare’s ‘Trojan style’, was used in Hamlet (2.2.446–91) to register the space between the player’s narrative of Priam’s death and the main, Danish action. Here, it is developed symphonically, chivalric Gallicisms played against classicism. The whole is indeed complex.

(Nuttall 215)

A. D. Nuttall’s emphasis on the play’s exaggerated binarisms is especially alert to the Prologue’s elaborate semiotic qualities which set the tone for Troilus and Cressida’s expressive agenda: ‘Shakespeare makes sure that we feel the alien quality of this ancient matter’ (my emphasis). The play thus establishes a marked difference from its classical antecedents. As ever, those sources are typically elusive. Yet even a brief comparison with Chapman’s Homer begins to illustrate the extent of Shakespeare’s rewriting and the compound dramatic effects it achieves.

From its celebrated opening word ménin (anger) and the subsequent scrutiny of Achilles’ rage, Homer’s epic is an interrogation of that passion. Notably, Shakespeare replaces the Iliad’s head-word with thirty-one lines delivered by Prologue, ‘in armour . . . suited / In like conditions as our argument’ (Prologue, s.d, 24–25), a figure who talks of pride (‘orgulous’), ‘high blood chafed’ (Prologue 2) and ‘expectation, tickling skittish spirits’ (Prologue 20). ‘War is the theme announced in the prologue’ (Martindale and Martindale 93), and while this opening passage makes manifest the irritating bodily sensations initiated by ‘the chance of war’ (Prologue 31) – and in this respect Shakespeare’s play is closer to its classical origins than the medieval tradition which foregrounds the nominal love story – Troilus and Cressida swerves from Homer’s overarching emotional sensibility. In the Shakespearean narrative, it is left to the central triumvirate of Trojan characters, Troilus, Cressida and Pandarus, to quibble about anger in the opening act (1.1.103; 1.2.166; 1.2.207–8; 1.2.214). The Greek Achilles’ wrath remains subdued until Act 5 when, following the death of Patroclus, he finally declaims ‘Know what it is to meet Achilles angry’ (5.1.48). Troilus and Cressida virtually ends where Homer begins.

Obviously, anger is the emotional touchstone of Chapman’s Iliad which begins with ‘Achilles baneful wrath, resound great Goddess of my verse / That through th’afflicted host of Greece did worlds of woe disperse’ (A5). Yet Chapman’s divergent prefaces accompanying his Seauen booke of the Iliades of Homere (1598) and the later Homer prince of poets: translated according to the
Greeke, in twelve booke of his Iliads (1609) toy with the affecting co-ordinates of the poem in accordance with their respective dedicatees. Famously dedicated to the Robert Devereaux, second Earl of Essex, Chapman’s 1598 translation addresses ‘the most honored and living Instance of the Achillean vertues eternized by diuine Homere, the Earle of Essex’ (A3’), a description that is still appropriate – but only just – for the ill-fated nobleman whose reputation at court in the year of the translation’s publication was on the wane (Hammer 15). As David Bevington summarises, ‘By 1599–1600, Essex was not only the “now living embodiment of the Achillean virtues”; he was also the embodiment of a charismatic chivalry that posed a threat to the late Elizabethan regime’ (15). In the light of such detail, Chapman’s dedicatory prose makes an especially apt point. The translator suggests that Essex will ‘Note in many thinges the affinity’ the *Iliad* has with his ‘present complemetes of field: the orations, counsailes and exploits not to be exceeded by the freshest brains of this hot-spirited time’ (A5’).

Published after Essex’s execution for treason (1601) and the Stuart accession to the throne, the 1609 translation reassigns the fifteen-year-old Prince Henry ‘Thrice Roiall Inheritor the th’united Kingdomes of Great Britanne, &c’ and Queen Anne as dedicatees. On this occasion, it may be perhaps not surprising that Chapman’s prefatory verses excise the 1598 reference to the contemporaneous ‘hot-spirited time’. Instead, the opening lines to Henry announce ‘That by his power’ a Prince ‘can send to Towre, and death / all traitorous passions’ (n.p.’). Apart from verifying Chapman’s personal desire for patronage, the two prefaces show how Homer’s epic meditation on mênin is initially translated for late Tudor culture and how that translation is revised for Stuart consumption. Whereas the late sixteenth-century text acknowledges emotional turbulence, the early seventeenth-century translation is explicit about the ways in which that unrest is contained. This is not just a case of making Homer speak English; Chapman’s translations are concerned with making Homer’s mênin politically advantageous.

If we accept that the likely date of Shakespeare’s composition of *Troilus and Cressida*’s is no later than 1602, then its production will not have been influenced by Chapman’s 1609 revision. However, given the historical and thematic proximity of these texts, *Troilus and Cressida* and Chapman’s Homer are in cultural tandem with one another. Whereas the Englished *Iliads* are aware of the cultural and political import of translating that epic’s emotion, Shakespeare’s play literally relocates Achilles’ anger to initiate a distinguished scrutiny of ‘the place of violent emotion within society’ (Goldhill). Accordingly, Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* shifts from Homeric tragedy to a tone that has been notoriously difficult to interpret: ‘The whole is indeed complex.’ At the beginning of the play, Ulysses delivers a lengthy speech about the importance of order:

> O, when degree is shak’d,  
> Which is the ladder of all high designs,  
> The enterprise is sick. How could communities,  
> Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,  
> Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
> The primogenity and due of birth,  
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,  
> But by degree stand in authentic place?  
> Take but degree away, untune that string,  
> And hark what discord follows.  

(1.3.101–10)

Ultimately, however, it is that convolution of ‘degree’ which mobilises the entire play.
**Conclusion**

The sixteenth century’s translation of the classics is an insidious process which goes beyond the evidently textual. Jonathan Bate remarks that ‘English translations of classics were [the] equivalent of [the] Classical Civilisation A-Level [and] were the making of Shakespeare (Golding, North etc.)’ (2015), and yet in most cases it is difficult to establish an outside line of contact from the vernacular classical translations to the Shakespearean canon. As I have suggested in this essay, by considering concepts such as environment, education and emotion, we might begin to consider some of the distinctive ways in which Shakespeare’s poems and plays engage with ‘the learning of tongues, and encrease of eloquence’ in early modern England.

**Notes**

1. Quotations from early texts appear throughout this chapter in original spelling – contrary to the practice in other chapters of this volume – so that the look of literary English in Shakespeare’s time may remain in view.
2. I was alerted to this text by Kendal 287n58.
3. For an excellent survey of the Greek titles printed in Elizabethan England, see Milne (2007).
5. Thomas Salter warned women against reading certain ancient authors including the ‘Lasciuious bookes, of Ouide’ (Bviiv).
6. For a discussion of the gender politics of translating Ovid’s poem between 1480 and 1717, see my Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England. The quotation is from Dusinberre.
8. See further Lyne 2002 and Dimmock.
9. All quotations are from Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen.
10. For a detailed discussion of Venus and Adonis’s relationship to Ovidian and Elizabethan discourses of eroticism, see Bate 1993: 48–82.
11. Discussing Venus and Adonis and Lucrece, Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen state that ‘For those who acquired the poems as new books in 1593 and 1594 the fact of the plague was physically inescapable, for most of London’s bookshops were located on St Paul’s Churchyard’ (69).
12. For a detailed examination of these features, see Wyndham 80.
13. Wyndham suggests that Venus and Adonis ‘opens soon after sunrise with the ceasing of a shower’ (ibid.).
14. On the significance of ‘the “rude mechanics” who bear names and trades simultaneously suggestive of the artisanal and the bodily, as well as of the weaving and joining of words’, see Parker 96ff.
15. See further Watts.
16. See further Gillespie and Cummings 207.
17. All quotations are from Brooks. For a detailed discussion of ‘Sources and Antecedents’, see Brooks lviii–lxxviii. See also Paster and Howard.
18. Supriya Chaudhuri argues that ‘Compared to Golding’s Ovid, it seems far more committed to pleasure than to profit’ (672).
19. Stanley Wells suggests that Peter Quince’s immediate response to his colleague’s amalgamated form, ‘O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted! Pray, masters! Fly, masters! Help!’ (3.1.100) shows that ‘In their simplicity, Bottom’s friends believe that he has been metamorphosed as the result of supernatural agency’ (17).
20. All quotations are from Bevington. For a succinct account of the play’s sources see The Arden Shakespeare 433–64. For an excellent introduction, see James, Shakespeare’s Troy.
21. Bate is referring to the qualification taken by 16–18-year-olds in the UK (apart from Scotland). In Scotland, the equivalent qualification is Higher Classical Studies.
References


Ascham, Roger. *The Scholemaster or plaine and perfyte waye of teachyng children, to understand, write, and speake, the Latin tong*. London: John Daye, 1570.


———. ‘English translations of classics were equivalent of Classical Civ A-Level. And were the making of Shakespeare (Golding, North etc.).’ Tweet (21 June 2015, 9:10 a.m).


