The Dismemberment of Hippolytus: Humanist Imitation, Shakespearean Translation

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tragedy to a festive comedy, coupled with the critical tendency to "find the concord of this discord" (5.1.60), has produced commentary that insists upon concord at the price of suppressing discordant elements. Shakespeare suppresses and displaces the violence and passion from the Senecan subtext for the sake of ordering the civic and for the parallel imperative that the play have its comic resolution. But the still discernible traces of these impulses—displaced and hidden so that they will be less threatening—remain, like hysterical symptoms as Freud described them, the price the civic and the comic must pay to preserve their formal integrity. In the remainder of this essay I will explore the significance and consequences of this suppression.

A typical example of Shakespeare’s translation of Seneca can be found in the scene where Theseus and Hippolytus discuss their hunting hounds at the edge of the wood. Shakespeare clearly took this scene from the opening scene of Hippolytus:

But in your leashes Syrs keepe up your eiger Mastifs yet,  
Kepee on their Collers still, that doe their galled neckes yfret:  
The Spartayne Dogges eiger of pray and of courageous kynd  
That sone can singe out their game, wherto they bee assyngd,  
Tye shorter up within your leash: to passe tyne shall it bring,  
That with the youlping noyse of houndes the hollow rocks shal ring.  
(p. 138; lines 32-38)  

suggestive comments concerning the relationship of A Midsummer Night’s Dream to Seneca; he discerns “a discourse of anxious misogyny which persists as an echo within Shakespeare's text, no matter how much it has been mated or transformed.” Larry Langford, in “The Story Shall Be Changed: The Senecan Sources of A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” CahiersÉ 25 (1984): 37-51, suggests that the Senecan allusions serve as a vehicle for the theme of sexual possession and dominance.


11 For Freud’s important idea that civilization is built upon suppression and repression of sexual instincts and aggressive impulses, see Civilization and Its Discontents (1930), tr. Joan Riviere and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 44 and passim. For the psychical significance of hysterical symptoms as displaced expressions of suppressed thoughts, see Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1905), ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963), 57 and passim.

C. L. Barber’s influential notion that Shakespeare’s “festive comedies” are based on native satiricism traditions of the popular theater and popular holidays, of the kind alleged by Puritan Philip Stubbes to be under the aegis of Satan (Shakespeare’s Festive Comedies [Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1959], 21-23) parallels my argument that the play is concerned with libidinal instincts and their suppression.

12 All quotations from Seneca’s Hippolytus are taken from John Studdley’s translation, in Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English, ed. Thomas Newton [1581] (Bloomington: Ind U Pr, 1966). Since Studdley does not give line numbers, I have added the standard references to the text of Seneca.

The dismembrment of Hippolytus

The final lines of this passage proleptically point to the time when “A piteous signe is to bee scene by tracing long of gore: / His howling Dogges their Maisters limmes with licking follow still” (p. 176; lines 1107-1108). More generally, this scene dramatizes Hippolytus’ allegiance to Diana, goddess of chastity and of the hunt—he takes his hounds’ baying as an auspicious sign from his goddess (lines 81-84)—and sets the stage for the inevitable violent conclusion of the play. Shakespeare not only transposes these lines from Hippolytus to his parents, Theseus and Hippolyta, thereby inverting the filiation of his text to the anterior Senecan subtext, he also transforms this ominous and forboding scene into one that serves as a turning point necessary for the play’s comic resolution:

The. My love shall hear the music of my hounds.  
Uncouple in the western valley; let them go;  
We will, fair queen, up to the mountain’s top,  
And mark the musical confusion  
Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

Hip. I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,  
When in a wood of Crete they bay’d the bear  
With hounds of Sparta; never did I hear  
Such gallant chiding; for besides the groves,  
The skies, the fountains, every region near  
Seem’d all one mutual cry; I never heard  
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

The. My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,  
So flew’d, so sanded; and their heads are hung  
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;  
Crook-knee’d and dewlap’d like Thessalian bulls;  
Slow in pursuit, but match’d in mouth like bells,  
Each under each: a cry more tuneable  
Was never holla’d to, nor cheer’d with horn,  
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.  
(4.1.105-125)

Here at the edge of the wood, away from the imperative to maintain order and control in the city, we witness the only instance in which Theseus appears to accept confusion and discord. It is not surprising, then, that immediately after this scene Theseus overrules Egeus in favor of the young lovers, thus making the comic ending possible. Shakespeare thus translates the hounds’
The Dysregulation of Hypothalamus

(1) 1.33-299

Because in order to be so or because,
And therefor is love said to be a thing
Wings and no ears. Lest thou desire
Not shall love and of my imagination;
And this is the, said, Corn's poem's thing
And love is not with the ears, with the mind:
Love can express to you and of what?
That time you said, the boat, no quantity.
Time, time, time, the sitting, no quantity.

(2) 1.75-169

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
But is that, a madness, no, madness, no, madness.

(3) 1.119-129

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
But is that, a madness, no, madness, no, madness.

(4) 1.119-129

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
But is that, a madness, no, madness, no, madness.

(5) 1.119-129

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
But is that, a madness, no, madness, no, madness.

(6) 1.119-129

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
But is that, a madness, no, madness, no, madness.

(7) 1.119-129

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
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(8) 1.119-129

And madness call I love-permanence.
Before me, with my love, with my love.
If in there it is, it is, for, for, for.
Yet, which, which, which, which, which.
In another mind, or the mind makes.
And madness call I love-permanence.
Goodness in the best, in the best, in the best.
But is that, a madness, no, madness, no, madness.
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