The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Mythic Elements in Shakespeare’s Romances

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Abstract
‘As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and hony-tonged Shakespeare, witnes his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.’ And so may the soul of Francis Meres be thought to live in critics who examine Shakespeare’s debt to his favourite poet; since Ovid’s influence is found largely in the early work it is, by implication, a youthful phase, which Shakespeare grew out of. Yet, as Ovid acknowledged through Pythagoras, ‘All things doo chaunge. But nothing sure dooth perrish. This same spright/ . . . never perrisheth nor never perrish can.’ Just so did the soul of Ovid live in Shakespeare throughout his career, to find its final expression in the four late romances. ‘[T]he most resonant echo of Ovid in the corpus’ occurs not in one of the works noted by Meres, but in The Tempest (as Prospero’s invocation, ‘Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves’ (5.1.33–50), adapts the Latin original and Arthur Golding’s translation of Medea’s speech in Metamorphoses, 7. 197–209 (Golding, II.265-77)), while it is in Cymbeline (2.2) that a copy of the Metamorphoses makes its second appearance in Shakespeare’s works.

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Being so, Shakespeare put all his knowledge, experience, and talent into it, making it one of his richest plays. The Tempest is of such significance that it is included in many Shakespeare collections and many anthologies of English and even Western literature. In The Development of Shakespeare’s Imagery (1951) a chapter is devoted to The Tempest. Malpas 2005, p. 6). In his momentous book The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature (1982), Hassan has made a table of comparison between modernism and postmodernism. This section concludes this study on postmodernist elements in The Tempest. 259 Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies, Vol. 7. No. 1, (2014) © Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.