

Puck

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

A comedy written somewhere between 1595 and 1599, the action takes place in Athens as preparations are being made for the wedding of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

At the same time there is unrest in the Fairy Kingdom. The Fairy King, Oberon, has quarrelled with his Queen, Titania, over the possession of a little Indian boy whom she has taken under her protection. To punish her, Oberon sends his attendant sprite, Puck, to find a magic flower known as 'Love in Idleness'. Oberon squeezes the juice of this flower into Titania's eyes as she is sleeping in her secret bower, so that when she awakes she will fall in love with the first thing she sets eyes on.

In a wood nearby a group of Athenian workmen, lead by Bottom the weaver, are rehearsing a play – *Pyramus and Thisbe* – to be performed before the Duke on his wedding day. As Bottom finishes his scene and walks away from his fellow actors, Puck spies him and quickly places an ass's head on his shoulders.

In this scene Puck returns to tell Oberon his news. Titania has woken in her secret bower as Bottom entered through a brake in the hedge and has straightaway fallen in love with 'an ass'.

Published by Penguin Books, London

Puck

My mistress with a monster is in love.
 Near to her close and consecrated bower,
 While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,
 A crew of patches, rude mechanicals
 That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,
 Were met together to rehearse a play
 Intended for great Theseus' nuptial day.
 The shallowest thickskin of that barren sort,
 Who Pyramus presented, in their sport
 Forsook his scene and entered in a brake,
 When I did him at this advantage take.
 An ass's nole I fixèd on his head.
 Anon his Thisbe must be answerèd,
 And forth my mimic comes. When they him spy –
 As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye,
 Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,
 Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
 Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky –
 So at his sight away his fellows fly,
 And at our stamp here o'er and o'er one falls.
 He 'Murder!' cries, and help from Athens calls.
 Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,
 Made senseless things begin to do them wrong.
 For briars and thorns at their apparel snatch,
 Some sleeves, some hats. From yielders all things catch.
 I led them on in this distracted fear,
 And left sweet Pyramus translated there;
 When in that moment – so it came to pass –
 Titania waked, and straightway loved an ass.

Tony Lumpkin – aged 17–20

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER OLIVER GOLDSMITH

This 18th century comedy was first produced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London, in 1773. It is set in the Hardcastles' country mansion and parodies the sentimental comedies popular at that time.

The action revolves around the arranged match and courtship between the Hardcastles' daughter Kate and Young Marlow, and the practical jokes played on family and friends by **Tony Lumpkin**, Mrs Hardcastle's son by a former marriage. **Tony** has been ordered by his mother to marry his cousin, Constance, but he wants nothing to do with her. When he discovers she is in love with Marlow's friend, Hastings, he is only too delighted to help the lovers elope together. His mother discovers the plot and insists on accompanying Constance to her Aunt Pedigree's home, 30 miles away. **Tony** takes charge of the coach journey, driving them round and round the neighbouring countryside, finally tipping everyone into the local duck pond. Here he describes the adventure to Hastings, whose only concern is for Constance's safety.

Published by New Mermaids

Tony

Ay, I'm your friend, and the best friend you have in the world, if you knew but all. This riding by night, by the bye, is cursedly tiresome. It has shook me worse than the basket of a stage-coach . . . Five and twenty miles in two hours and a half is no such bad driving. The poor beasts have smoked for it: rabbit me, but I'd rather ride forty miles after a fox, than ten with such varment . . . Left them? Why where should I leave them, but where I found them? . . . Riddle me this then. What's that goes round the house, and round the house, and never touches the house? . . . Why, that's it, mon. I have led them astray. By jingo, there's not a pond or slough within five miles of the place but they can tell the taste of . . . You shall hear. I first took them down Feather-bed Lane, where we stuck fast in the mud. I then rattled them crack over the stones of Up-and-down Hill – I then introduced them to the gibbet on Heavy-tree Heath, and from that, with a circumbendibus, I fairly lodged them in the horsepond at the bottom of the garden . . . No, no. Only mother is confoundedly frightened. She thinks herself forty miles off. She's sick of the journey, and the cattle can scarce crawl. So if your own horses be ready, you may whip off with cousin, and I'll be bound that no soul here can budge a foot to follow you . . . Ay, now it's dear friend, noble Squire. Just now, it was all idiot, cub, and run me through the guts. Damn your way of fighting, I say. After we take a knock in this part of the country, we kiss and be friends. But if you had run me through the guts, then I should be dead, and you might go kiss the hangman . . . Never fear me. Here she comes. Vanish. She's got from the pond, and draggled up to the waist like a mermaid . . . *[Enter Mrs Hardcastle]* Alack, mama, it was all your own fault. You would be for running away by night, without knowing one inch of the way.

<i>smoked</i>	galloped at speed
<i>rabbit me</i>	like 'drat me', a meaningless oath
<i>varment</i>	vermin; hence, objectionable people (first usage). He is talking about his mother and cousin
<i>circumbendibus</i>	roundabout process
<i>cattle</i>	stable slang for 'horses'
<i>draggled</i>	dirtied by being dragged through wet mud
<i>quickset</i>	hedge a hedge formed of 'quick' – i.e. living – plants

Dog

THE WITCH OF EDMONTON THOMAS DEKKER,
JOHN FORD & WILLIAM ROWLEY

A tragicomedy written in 1621 and often performed at The Cockpit in Drury Lane. One of its more recent productions was by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Other Place in Stratford in 1981.

Old Mother Sawyer – the Witch – has sold her soul to the devil, who appeared to her in the shape of a black Dog, so that she might be revenged on all those who harmed her. At the same time Dog has befriended Cuddy, a simple village boy, who has no idea that his friend 'Tommy' is in reality the devil in one of his many disguises. Now 'Tommy' has gone missing for several days. The Witch's powers have begun to wane and she is captured and condemned to hang.

In this scene Dog appears to Cuddy for the last time as a white dog. Cuddy recognises him by his bark and stops to speak to him. Dog boasts of his devilish exploits. He explains to Cuddy how he lured him into Edmonton marsh when they first met, by changing into the shape of Kate Carter, the village girl Cuddy was chasing after.

Published by New Mermaids

Dog

Hast thou forgot me? . . . [*Barks*] I have deluded thee
For sport to laugh at. The wench thou seekst
After thou never spakst with, but a spirit
In her form, habit and likeness. Ha, ha! . . .
I'll thus much tell thee. Thou never art so distant
From an evil spirit, but that thy oaths,
Curses and blasphemies pull him to thine elbow.
Thou never telst a lie, but that a Devil
Is within hearing it; thy evil purposes
Are ever haunted; but when they come to act,
As thy tongue slandering, bearing false witness,
Thy hand stabbing, stealing, cosening, cheating,
He's then within thee. Thou playst, he bets upon thy part;
Although thou lose, yet he will gain by thee . . .
The old cadaver of some self-strangled wretch
We sometimes borrow, and appear human.
The carcass of some disease-slain strumpet,
We varnish fresh, and wear as her first beauty.
Didst never hear? if not, it has been done.
An hot luxurious lecher in his twines,
When he has thought to clip his dalliance,
There has provided been for his embrace
A fine hot flaming Devil in her place . . .
Why? These are all my delights, my pleasures, fool . . .
Ha, ha! The worse thou heardst of me, the better 'tis.
Shall I serve thee, fool, at the self-same rate? . . .
I am for greatness now . . .
Hence silly fool,
I scorn to prey on such an atom soul.

<i>Thou . . . thee</i>	Since the Devil's agent is giving conventional Puritan doctrine here, the speech is both polemical and satirical
<i>twines</i>	embraces
<i>When . . . dalliance</i>	when the Devil embraces the lecher
<i>ducking . . . delight</i>	The use of water spaniels for duck hunting was a popular sport
<i>atom</i>	tiny, irrelevant

A Word about the Translations

Except where indicated after specific texts, all translations in this volume are by the editors. At the end of the volume there is a 'Play Source' that points you to a published reading version of each script.

Libation Bearers (The Oresteia)

(c. 458 BC) Aeschylus

Mycenae. Before Agamemnon's palace.

Orestes (18–20s) has been sent home by the god Apollo to avenge the death of his father King Agamemnon at the hands of his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegisthus. He does this with the aid of his friend, Pylades. In this moment the palace doors are opened. The dead bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are revealed, wrapped in the same bloody cloth which they used to murder Agamemnon. Orestes stands beside them and speaks to the Chorus.

ORESTES.

And so dies the tangled tyranny of Argos.

They murdered my father, seized the kingdom's bounty,
proudly usurped their thrones; now here they lie,
lovers still, embraced in death.

Double oaths were sworn: to kill my father,
to love each other even to the grave.

Both oaths are honoured.

He points to the bloody cloth.

Do you require evidence? Look, here it is:
the trap they used to ensnare him.

Look – here were his hands fettered, here his feet.

Unwrap it, unwrap it. Gather around it.

Do you see it, father? Not Agamemnon,
but the bright Sun who is father to us all,
who sees all that we mortals do. Do you see this,
my mother's most unnatural crime?

Apollo, god of the Sun,
stand as my witness when this act is tried.

I killed her in the name of Justice.
But not him, not Aegisthus. His death was the callous

Fate

deserved by every adulterer, condoned by every law.
Yet my mother's heart was nourished by hate
of the man whose children she bore in her womb:
her love yielding to hate, hate yielding to revulsion.
What name shall I give her? Adder? Viper?
Just touching, not even biting, poisons
and putrifies: Oh that monstrous, savage heart!

He picks up the cloth.

What name shall we give it? Give me a name,
an innocent name. A trap for a wild beast?
A shroud to wind round a dead man's limbs?
A web? A hanging gown to trip a man?
A ruse a robber might employ
to enmesh a traveller and wrest his wares?
A villain's contrivance! To murder people
And then to revel in the crime! . . .
She did it! She was guilty!
This is my proof, bloodied by Aegisthus' sword.
With the passage of time, death's discharge
has rotted all this gorgeous cloth.
O Father, now must I weep.
My hands hold this bolt of bloody cloth;
My heart howls for what is done
and what is to follow; a victory most hollow.

[lines 972-1017]

COMMENTARY: The trilogy of tragedies that comprises Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, *Eumenides*) dramatizes the story of the return of King Agamemnon from the Trojan War and his death at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus; the revenge of her son Orestes who murders the

adulterous couple; and Orestes' subsequent flight and trial. The doomed fate that hovers over the mythological House of Atreus is compounded by acts of regicide and matricide in the first two plays. Madness and fury propel the third play until a jury of Athenian citizens and the goddess Athena absolves Orestes of his guilt, ending the trilogy in concord. Like so many of Aeschylus' plays, the dialogue is written primarily as a series of lengthy monologues between a principal actor and the Chorus. The speeches are highly rhetorical and require an effectively sustained vocal stamina.

Orestes, like Shakespeare's Hamlet, is an avenger. As a prince he is reclaiming the throne that is justly his and not merely killing for the sake of vengeance. The killing of his mother is preceded by a harrowing scene between the two that is reminiscent of the Hamlet/Gertrude closet scene. The monologue is written like a defence plea: Orestes lays out the evidence for the jury-like Chorus – the corpses and the great royal gown – and proceeds to justify his actions. It is all done in bright sunlight for everyone (especially the audience) to see. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are likened to tyrants and usurpers. It is important to realise that Orestes does not just see them as adulterous murderers but as political rebels who have unlawfully seized the throne. Orestes is both overwrought by emotion and filled with righteous rage. As in the great funeral oration of Mark Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Orestes uses the event, and particularly the bloody royal gown, as a means of inciting passion in his listeners. This prop, coupled with the rhetoric, is crucial to the actor. Notice how rounded and open Orestes' words are, even though nothing in the English language can quite capture the sound quality of ancient Greek. After committing such a double killing, the actor can use the speech as Orestes' expiation for shock and horror which helps to motivate his indignation. The words are flung at the Chorus in princely rage and disdain. Orestes challenges them to interpret the act in the way he wants them to. His victory is marred by an anger that is still unsatisfied, and to prepare for his own flight and pursuit by the Furies, he must also admit that it is 'a victory most hollow'. So whatever satisfaction the slaying gives him, he ends the speech with a sense of foreboding and the actor must acknowledge this.

Oedipus the King

(c. 430 BC) Sophocles

Thebes. Before the palace of King Oedipus.

The city of Thebes is in the grip of a devastating plague. The oracle at Delphi has revealed that the murder of the late king, Laius, is the cause of the plague. King Oedipus (20s) places a curse on the murderer and swears to reveal him and so save the city. During the action of the drama Oedipus pursues various suspicions, one of which focuses on the facts of Laius' murder at a place where three roads cross. In this scene with his wife Jocasta, Laius' widow, Oedipus voices fears that he may be the murderer of Laius and recounts how he killed just such a man on the road to Thebes. His fear and forebodings cause him to make other connections as well.

OEDIPUS.

I can keep it from you no longer.

Wild forebodings fill my mind and urge me to speak.

You have shared my fortune and have the right to know.

Polybus, King of Corinth, was my father,

and Merope, a Dorian, was my mother.

I was acclaimed greatest of all men of Corinth,

until one day something strange happened –

something extraordinary – though not worth the distress
it gave me then.

At a feast, a man reeling with drink accused me
in his drunkenness of being a bastard.

I held back but inside felt fury and confusion.

The next day I confronted my parents, my father and
mother,

repeating the accusation. They flew into a rage
at the drunken fool and his lies.

Their reaction gave me comfort, but still it gnawed at
me,

as the drunkard's rumour crept out and about.

Concealing it from my parents, I went to the oracle at
Delphi.

The god gave me no answers to my questions.

But he did speak of other things, dreaded and horrible
things:

that I would sleep with my own mother, and breed with
her

an incestuous brood that no man could bear to behold.

And that I would be the murderer of my own father.

Hearing this I ran away, distancing myself from Corinth,

using the stars as my measure. Yes, I fled to a place

where I would never see fulfilled the dire evils foretold at
Delphi.

And so my journey took me into that region

where you say King Laius was slain.

So Jocasta, now let me tell you the truth.

As I approached the place where three roads crossed,

I encountered a herald followed by a carriage with a man
inside

just as you described it. He who led the horses,

and the old man inside, tried forcibly to push me off the
road.

In outrage I struck the driver; the old man saw this and
waited for me to pass by him, and then he struck me with
his

stick full on my head. But swiftly I paid him back plus
more;

one quick blow from my staff sent him

reeling from his carriage down to the ground.

I killed him, and then I killed them all.

If this old man and Laius were bonded in blood
who could possibly be more miserable than I?

Who could be more hated by the gods; more reviled,
rejected and refused shelter by other men?
After all, I pronounced the curse on the murderer,
and the curse now falls on me! These very hands that
killed him
have defiled you with their touch in his marriage bed.
Am I not evil? Corrupted and unclean? So I must be
banished
and flee from Thebes. Yet not set foot in Corinth or see
my own people
for fear that I might kill my father and marry my mother,
killing that same Polybus who begot and reared me.
Surely any man would be right to say of Oedipus
that all this is the cruel fate of the harsh gods.
Hear me, hear me you gods; by the purity of your power
over all human destiny may I never see that day come!
May I be swept from men's sight before I see
that deadly mark branded on me, sealing my doom.

[lines 771-834]

COMMENTARY: Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* is undoubtedly the most celebrated of classical Greek dramas. Structured like a good detective story, it sets out to discover a guilty man and bring health back to a city besieged by plague and the wrath of the gods. Through an unfolding pattern of evidence, Oedipus gradually recognises that he is the murderer who killed Laius, his true father, and is now married to Jocasta, his true mother. The tragedy of the play comes from this discovery and its impact: Jocasta hangs herself in shame while Oedipus plucks out his eyes and transforms himself into a pariah, exiled from the city of his birth.

Oedipus defines the questing nature of any actor: who am I and what am I? Throughout the play the actor is given pieces that fill in the overall puzzle of personality and self-identification. At crucial moments the character makes significant discoveries. This speech shows Oedipus peeling away the layers of the past in order to discover what really happened. Right away you can see what

the man is like: impulsive, proud, subject to rage and fits, blundering onto the path of truth as he becomes a participant in his own doom. Oedipus is not so much a tragic hero as he is a victim of fate. He comes into the world at the wrong place and the wrong time. As an infant, fortune and an oracle separated him from his natural parents, Laius and Jocasta; fortune then saved him from certain death in the guise of a kindly shepherd; and fortune then sent him to Corinth where he was adopted and raised by King Polybus as his own son. So Oedipus is a child of fortune who gradually learns the truth of his background and he is also an outcast who will stay an outcast. Throughout the speech the playwright creates a pattern of 'sight' and insight so that the actor can point the audience towards past, present and future significances. Oedipus literally sees his doom unfold before his very eyes. The truth is so overpowering that it blinds him in the end. The monologue is a long one in which tension is layered upon tension, and Oedipus ends it on the very crescendo of a discovery.

Hippolytus

(c. 428 BC) Euripides

Troezen (near Athens). In front of the palace of Theseus.

Hippolytus (17–19), son of King Theseus, has scorned sexual love and the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, devoting himself to Artemis, the goddess of chastity and the hunt. In jealous revenge Aphrodite inflames an overwhelming passion for him in Phaedra, Hippolytus' step-mother. Driven to the limits of despair by her unrequited love, Phaedra hangs herself, leaving a suicide note accusing Hippolytus of having made an attempt upon her virtue. Theseus returns home from his travels to find Phaedra dead and believes the accusation in the letter, confronting Hippolytus in this scene. His son passionately defends himself, his honour and most of all his chastity.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, your eloquence and passion
sound convincing. You heighten your meaning
with a torrent of words, but separating sense from fury
your case is only weak and insubstantial.
I am not the kind of man who can sway a mob
with fine oratory. But in private company I can be
as eloquent as you. That is perfectly natural;
the boasting pretender who can persuade a crowd
with fiery words is justly scorned by learned critics.
Now necessity forces me to speak.
Let me reply to your first crushing accusation which
you believe is absolute and irrefutable.
You see these elements about you father – earth,
air and light – not one particle is more chaste than I,
though you would surely deny it. My golden rule
is to give honour to the gods first, and next to keep as
friends

only men without sin, not men who profane
morality and indulge in evil. I do not mock my
companions, father.

I am true to my friends whether they are in my company
or not.

If there is one thing of which I am spotless, it is the very
thing

of which you think you have condemned me.

To this day I am an absolute virgin.

Of the sexual act I know nothing from direct experience,
except what I have heard about or seen in images.

I have not done the deed. Nor do I desire to do it,
for my soul inspires obedient chastity.

If you doubt my confession of chastity,
then you must prove how your wife could have seduced
me.

Was it because she was more beautiful than other
women?

Or was I scheming to win her, and through her win
your fortune and your place as my prize?

Why, I must have been a complete fool, a dreaming
madman!

Does being king have such appeal? Not for a wise man,
unless the corrupting allure of power has infatuated him,
and turned his head. I may desire victory in sport,
in the city I have no wish to compete at all,
but I am most content in the company of choice friends.
I am free to be myself; liberation from danger
provides a greater happiness than any crown.
I have still one last argument in my defence.
If I could call on one more character witness,
if *she* were still alive and present at my trial,
then facts would come to light revealing who was the
guilty one.

As it stands, I can only swear to Zeus, the god of oaths
above,

and to the firm earth beneath my feet, that I have never
laid in sin

with your wife, nor desired or even thought of it.

Oh gods, if I have been such a guilty creature, then
may I die wretched and forgotten, a homeless and
stateless beggar

in exile. May this earth and the sea refuse me refuge
when I perish.

Whether it was fear that prompted her to take her own
life, I can't say;

indeed, it is advisable for me to say no more.

In her act she showed honour, although she was not
honourable;

I who live by honour now have it turned against me.

[lines 983-1035]

COMMENTARY: Euripides' *Hippolytus* focuses on the tragic hero of the title. Other tragedies drawn from this same myth usually focus on Phaedra. Hippolytus is central because he is tragically caught between the rivalry of two goddesses, Aphrodite and Artemis, and becomes a pawn and victim of their struggle. It is not so much that Hippolytus rejects Aphrodite in favour of Artemis, but that he makes such a cult of his virginity. He cuts himself off from the very wellspring of life and for that he is taught a mortal lesson. Phaedra is the instrument Aphrodite uses to ensure Hippolytus' doom at the hands of his father.

Hippolytus is not an easy role to play. The character is young, headstrong and defensive. He goes to such extremes to proclaim his virtue and innocence that pride and arrogance threaten to overwhelm his defence arguments. You can hear it in this speech particularly. There is no remorse over the death of Phaedra, no sense of impending danger. Self-righteousness and an abiding faith in himself are some of Hippolytus' chief weaknesses. His pronouncements and smug claims to being a 'virgin' are used as a challenge to his father's more powerful rhetoric – a tool Euripides gives the actor in this scene. Notice how Hippolytus catalogues his virtues and cuts himself off totally from any kind of political

or civic engagement; the Greek citizens would have viewed this attitude as presumptuous. This is a very angry speech. Hippolytus uses it as a chance to vent frustrations which may have laid buried for some time. The actor should look at the entire scene from which this speech comes to appreciate how masterfully the dialogue between father and son is handled: it can still shock a modern audience. Graphic accusations are hurled back and forth as the rift between these two protagonists widens and deepens. The whole scene ends with Hippolytus' banishment. (See also Racine's *Phedra* on page 74.)

atmosphere which the character enhances with his speech as he verbalises a process of discovery step by step. He first reacts to the sounds he has heard outside, and then to what appears before his eyes. He even touches on the sense of speech when he tries to get his dead son to speak to him. The scene is alive to all the senses, and the actor can use these by picking up their pattern in the speech and physicalising them. The actor should also notice that Hieronimo expresses his horror in deeply vocalised vowels, particularly the 'o' sounds: 'O poor Hieronimo, what hadst thou misdane'. It is his way of experiencing grief and transforming it into words and laments. Sorrow becomes a deeply felt emotion echoed in the very words themselves. The blank verse lines, in many instances, are exclamations or questions and in playing you should give each line the full value it deserves. The scene is a highly dramatic tableau which presents a challenge for the actor who must perform with the corpse both as his prop, and also as a second character in the scene. It is best played when Hieronimo seems to expect the corpse to speak and answer the questions he asks it in the last third of the speech. By the final sentence he realises that he has lost his son forever.

Doctor Faustus

(c. 1589) Christopher Marlowe

Act 5, scene 2. Wittenberg. Faustus' study.

Faustus (40s), learned doctor of the University of Wittenberg, is the epitome of the Renaissance Man: skilled in all the liberal arts and sciences, ambitious, probing and full of pride and wonder at his own abilities. All this conceit naturally makes him ripe for a tragic fall. Having made a pact with the devil to sell his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of earthly power and delight, Faustus has reached his final hour and awaits his doom. The clock has just struck eleven as his speech begins.

FAUSTUS.

Ah Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually.
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come.
Fair nature's eye,¹ rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.
*O lente, lente, currite noctis equi!*²
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike.
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
O I'll leap up to my God; who pulls me down?
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament.
One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my
Christ.

¹ Fair . . . eye i.e. the sun

² O . . . equi O run slowly, slowly, horses of the night

Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;
Yet will I call on him. O spare me, Lucifer.
Where is it now? 'Tis gone: and see where God
Stretcheth out his arm and bends his ireful brows.
Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God.

No, no!

Then will I headlong run into the earth.
Earth, gape. O no, it will not harbour me.
You stars that reign'd at my nativity,
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
Into the entrails of yon lab'ring cloud,
That when you vomit forth into the air
My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.

The clock strikes.

Ah, half the hour is past, 'twill all be past anon.
O God,
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet for Christ's sake whose blood hath ransom'd me
Impose some end to my incessant pain:
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd.
O, no end is limited³ to damn'd souls.
Why wert thou not a creature wanting⁴ soul?
Or why is this immortal that thou hast?
Ah, Pythagoras' *metempsychosis*,⁵ were that true,
This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd
Unto some brutish beast!
All beasts are happy, for when they die

³ limited assigned

⁴ wanting lacking

⁵ metempsychosis the theory of transmigration of souls

Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements,
But mine must live still to be plagu'd in hell.
Curs'd be the parents that engend' red me!
No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer,
That hath depriv'd thee of the joys of heaven.

The clock strikes twelve.

It strikes, it strikes! Now, body, turn to air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick⁶ to hell.

Thunder and lightning.

O soul, be chang'd into little water drops
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.

Enter the Devils.

My God, my God, look not so fierce on me.
Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile.
Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer.
I'll burn my books. Ah, Mephostophilis!

Exeunt with him.

[lines 134-191]

COMMENTARY: Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* follows twenty-four years of a life and is condensed into two hours of playing time. It is imbued with one of the great dramatic metaphors: the fall of man from the sin of pride. The play both looks back to the dramas of the Middle Ages and forward to the great Renaissance tragedies, even though Marlowe's text is quite uneven in quality. Faustus is a captivating but reckless character, flamboyant – like all of Marlowe's heroes – and exhibits only token remorse as the moment of his death approaches.

Time is wonderfully condensed for dramatic impact. This final speech begins on the hour, then the half hour and ends on the stroke of midnight. In between, Faustus makes a vain attempt to

⁶ quick alive

speech, after Balthasar's report, the mood has darkened. Romeo now believes Juliet is dead. Romance turns to desperation. The wretched apothecary's shop becomes the image and stimulus for his suicide plan and the actor can use details from the image to feed his dejection. The language has a deathly pall to it: the vowel/consonant sounds have now lowered in tone and have an ominous ring: 'green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds', etc. A world of delight has become dark and morbid.

Hamlet

(1601) William Shakespeare

Act 5, scene 1. Elsinore. A churchyard.

Hamlet (20s) has recently returned to Denmark from exile. Together with his friend Horatio he comes into a graveyard near the castle at Elsinore and encounters two gravediggers at work. Hamlet engages in comic repartee with the first gravedigger who shows him a skull. It is that of Yorick, the former jester at the court of Hamlet's late father. Taking the skull, Hamlet muses on its significance.

HAMLET.

Let me see. (*He takes the skull.*) Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge¹ rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes² now? Your gambols,³ your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning?⁴ Quite chopfallen?⁵ Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint⁶ an inch thick, to this favour she must come.⁷ Make her laugh at that. Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing . . . Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th' earth? . . . And smelt so? Pah! (*He puts down the skull.*) . . . To what base uses we may return, Horatio!

¹ gorge vomit

² gibes taunts

³ gambols playful cavorting

⁴ mock . . . grinning i.e. laugh at the comic faces you make

⁵ chopfallen (1) downcast (2) lacking a lower jaw

⁶ paint put on her make-up

⁷ to . . . come i.e. she must do this to her face

Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander
till 'a find it stopping a bunghole?⁸

[HORATIO. 'Twere to consider too curiously to consider
so.]

No, faith, not a jot, but to follow him thither with modesty⁹
enough, and likelihood to lead it. As thus: Alexander died,
Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the
dust is earth, of earth we make loam,¹⁰ and why of that
loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer
barrel?

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,

Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

O, that that earth which kept the world in awe

Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!¹¹

COMMENTARY: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a tragedy wide in its reach. The title role is also the greatest in the classical repertoire, providing some of the most memorable soliloquies in drama. In its most basic form it is a revenge play that pits Prince Hamlet against his devious uncle Claudius who has murdered Hamlet's father and married his mother Queen Gertrude. The ramifications of this fratricide and swift marriage have thrown Denmark into turmoil along with the prince himself. Hamlet's delay and subsequent decision to take revenge by killing Claudius form the main action of the play, but it also takes numerous digressions into other areas that comment on the main action and allow Hamlet to expound on various philosophical notions governing existence. The climactic duel scene kills all the main protagonists and antagonists ending the play on a sombre, moody note.

By this point in the final act, Hamlet has returned to Denmark a changed man. He does not yet know that his love, Ophelia, has

committed suicide and that the grave he is standing by is being prepared to receive her body. Before his exile, he was feigning madness and actually seemed mad, finding it hard to kill Claudius even though he had proof in hand. The delay occupied the first four acts of the play. The final act moves swiftly and Hamlet displays a new resolve. In this speech, for instance, notice how calm, simple and even playful Hamlet is in the face of death. Death's face, in fact, is that of a jester and the skull is a blackly humorous prop for the actor to use in this scene. It is a very informal scene written in prose, except for the rhyming quatrain at the end (a piece of comic doggerel). The speech also covers time, reaching back in the past to Alexander the Great and the actor must speak the speech simply, but also sound its deeper, graver resonances. Words like 'poor Yorick', 'abhorred', 'gorge', 'bore', 'chopfallen', 'earth', 'buried' give you a sense of the depth that the speech contains. They also tell you that the speech cannot be rushed; give time for Hamlet's ruminations to develop. The actor has to convey the hard fact that all of us will return in the end to dust. Do not miss, however, any chance you see for ironic humour. It is in Hamlet's nature to be both severe and frivolous simultaneously.

⁸ bunghole hole in a barrel for pouring liquid through

⁹ modesty restraint

¹⁰ loam a mix of clay and water, used in making bricks, plastering, etc.

¹¹ flaw sudden gust of wind

The Honest Whore (Part 1)

(1604) Thomas Dekker

Act 4, scene 1. Milan. A room in Hippolito's house.

Hippolito (20s), a young count, longed to marry Infeliche, the daughter of the Duke of Milan. An ancient hatred between the two houses undermined his hope of ever possessing her. She has been reported dead and as the play progresses Hippolito becomes more bitter and subject to fits of melancholy. Here his obsession with Infeliche shifts to a meditation on mortality.

HIPPOLITO (*taking a portrait*).

My Infeliche's face, her brow, her eye,
The dimple on her cheek; and such sweet skill
Hath from the cunning workman's pencil flown,
These lips look fresh and lively as her own,
Seeming to move and speak. 'Las! now I see
The reason why fond¹ women love to buy
Adulterate complexion!² Here, 'tis read,³
False colours last after the true be dead.
Of all the roses grafted on her cheeks,
Of all the graces dancing in her eyes,
Of all the music set upon her tongue,
Of all that was past woman's excellence
In her white bosom – look! a painted board
Circumscribes all. Earth can no bliss afford.
Nothing of her but this? This cannot speak;
It has no lap for me to rest upon,
No lip worth tasting; here the worms will feed,

¹ fond foolish

² Adulterate complexion i.e. make-up

³ 'tis read i.e. seen in the portrait's colours

As in her coffin. Hence, then, idle art;
True love's best pictur'd in a true-love's heart.
Here art thou drawn, sweet maid, till this be dead;
So that thou liv'st twice, twice art buried.
Thou figure of my friend, lie there. – What's here?

Puts down portrait and takes up the skull.

Perhaps this shrewd pate was mine enemy's.
'Las! say it were; I need not fear him now!
For all his braves, his contumelious breath,⁴
His frowns, though dagger-pointed, all his plot,
Though, ne'er so mischievous, his Italian pills,
His quarrels, and that common fence,⁵ his law,
See, see, they're all eaten out; here's not left one;
How clean they're pick'd away! to the bare bone!
How mad are mortals, then, to rear great names
On tops of swelling houses! or to wear out
Their fingers' ends in dirt, to scrape up gold!
Not caring so⁶ that sumpter-horse,⁷ the back,
Be hung with gaudy trappings, with what coarse,
Yea, rags most beggarly, they clothe the soul;
Yet, after all, their gayness looks thus foul.
What fools are men to build a garish tomb,
Only to save the carcass whilst it rots,
To maintain't long in stinking, make good carrion,
But leave no good deeds to preserve them sound;
For good deeds keep men sweet, long above ground.
And must all come to this? fools, wise, all hither?
Must all heads thus at last be laid together?
Draw me my picture then, thou grave, neat workman,
After this fashion, not like this;⁸ these colours

⁴ contumelious breath proud words

⁵ fence defence

⁶ so so that

⁷ sumpter-horse pack-horse

⁸ this . . . this i.e. like Infeliche's picture, not like the skull

In time, kissing but air, will be kiss'd off.
But here's a fellow; that which he lays on
Till doomsday alters not complexion.
Death's the best painter then; they that draw shapes,
And live by wicked faces, are but God's apes.
They come but near the life, and there they stay.
This fellow draws life too; his art is fuller;
The pictures which he makes are without colour.

[lines 41-95]

COMMENTARY: Dekker's *The Honest Whore* is a two-part play with an elaborate and exciting plot that includes three intrigues that gradually knit together. It is also at different points a comedy, a tragedy and a melodrama. In the main plot, the chaste hero Hippolito mourns the death of his beloved Infeliche. He is taken to the home of the courtesan Bellafront, whose advances he resists. She, however, falls madly in love with him and swears chastity as her new goal. When Hippolito learns that Infeliche is still alive he rushes away to marry her and Bellafront must content herself with marriage to another. The play is heavy on plot but contains some of the most lively dialogue and speeches in Jacobean drama. As this brief description suggests the full action of the play contains emotional twists and turns before all is righted in the end.

Hippolito, like Shakespeare's Romeo, lets unrequited romantic love gnaw at him like a melancholic obsession. This is a highly metaphysical speech which ingeniously uses two props to create twin poles in a debate about life and death, appearance and reality. The actor has quite a bit to manipulate in what is essentially a private rather than a public soliloquy. He must personalise both the portrait and the skull in order to achieve his dramatic effect. He catalogues the details of his love's face, trying to capture what the painter saw in the flesh. In the first part of the speech he is like a connoisseur appreciating Infeliche's delicate features as if they were a fine work of art. In the second, focusing on the skull, he is like a morbid surgeon coldly assessing mortality. There are touches of poetry hidden in this part of the speech but they fight against the darker features in the lines:

'What fools are men to build a garish tomb, / Only to save the carcass whilst it rots.' The actor might also notice that the speech sounds curiously like a sermon; it is as if Hippolito has taken on the characteristics of a celibate priest. References to time and decay run through the speech as reminders of the inevitability of death and you can perform these as solemn warnings for the benefit of the audience. Compare with Hamlet's speech on page 35.

their imagination. In the end their greed gets the better of them, they fall out and turn against one another, and are caught and brought to justice. Jonson conceived of the play as a kind of Aesopean beast fable with all of the characters resembling animals in their personalities and also to a certain extent in their manners: Volpone is the sly fox and Mosca the buzzing gadfly. The latter aspect is something an actor can seize upon to form a characterisation.

Mosca is a superb theatrical invention who celebrates the essence of what it means to be a parasite. His appetite for mischief is insatiable. He is an energetic 'limber' thinker and acts on stage like a quick-witted improvisatory comic. You can see in this speech how acrobatic his thought process is and how he thoroughly enjoys playing his devious tricks. In fact he sees duping others as a kind of art form or 'science' and distinguishes between himself and the common variety of criminal. Mosca uses lots of slang when he speaks but is very precise and elegant in his delivery. Note how his words are slippery with 's' sounds; the verse hisses out of him like a snake. He relishes off-colour and 'wanton' images. There are numerous sexual innuendos in what he says, although he is never overtly crude. He is nimble in thought and action and can 'change a visor swifter than a thought'. His fly-like nature flits from thought to thought: 'and be here, / And there, and here, and yonder, all at once.' It is important for the actor to remember that Mosca has a higher status in Volpone's house than that of a mere servant and his role has given him airs and ambitions which grow until they finally undo him.

Coriolanus

(1607–9) William Shakespeare

Act 4, scene 5. Antium. A hall in Aufidius' house.

Coriolanus is the honorific name of the Roman general Caius Marcius (30s), who has been banished from Rome after suffering indignities and malicious accusations from the people. In characteristic outrage he turns his back on Rome, going over to the side of his enemies, the Volscians. He arrives in their capital of Antium in disguise and discovers that his rival Aufidius, General of the Volscians, is raising a new army to besiege Rome. Here Coriolanus reveals himself to Aufidius and offers him his services.

CORIANUS.

My name is Caius Marcius, who hath done
To thee particularly, and to all the Volsces,
Great hurt and mischief;¹ thereto witness may²
My surname, Coriolanus. The painful³ service,
The extreme dangers, and the drops of blood
Shed for my thankless country, are requited
But with that surname – a good memory⁴
And witness of the malice and displeasure
Which thou shouldst bear me. Only that name remains.
The cruelty and envy⁵ of the people,
Permitted by our dastard nobles, who
Have all forsook me, hath devoured the rest;
And suffered me by the voice of slaves to be

¹ mischief grievous wrong

² witness may you may witness

³ painful arduous

⁴ memory memorial, testimony

⁵ envy malice

Whooped out⁶ of Rome. Now, this extremity
Hath brought me to thy hearth; not out of hope –
Mistake me not – to save my life, for if
I had feared death, of all the men i' the world
I would have 'voided thee; but in mere⁷ spite,
To be full quit of⁸ those my banishers,
Stand I before thee here. Then if thou hast
A heart of wreak⁹ in thee, that wilt revenge
Thine own particular wrongs and stop those maims
Of shame¹⁰ seen through¹¹ thy country, speed thee
straight

And make my misery serve thy turn. So use it
That my revengeful services may prove
As benefits to thee; for I will fight
Against my cankered¹² country with the spleen¹³
Of all the under fiends.¹⁴ But if so be
Thou dar'st not this, and that to prove more fortunes¹⁵
Thou'rt tired, then, in a word, I also am
Longer to live most weary, and present
My throat to thee and to thy ancient¹⁶ malice;
Which not to cut would show thee but a fool,
Since I have ever followed thee with hate,
Drawn tuns¹⁷ of blood out of thy country's breast,
And cannot live but to thy shame, unless
It be to do thee service. [lines 69–104]

⁶ Whooped out driven out by jeering

⁷ mere absolute

⁸ full quit of fully revenged on (i.e. be quits with)

⁹ wreak vengeance

¹⁰ maims / Of shame shameful injuries (i.e. the Roman occupation of Corioli)

¹¹ through throughout

¹² cankered infected with corruption and evil

¹³ spleen hatred, anger

¹⁴ under fiends devils in hell

¹⁵ prove more fortunes test your fortunes further

¹⁶ ancient long-established

¹⁷ tuns large barrels

COMMENTARY: *Coriolanus* is Shakespeare's last heroic tragedy. It follows on the heels of his Roman plays and features a central character who is unyielding in his anger and lust for revenge. Caius Marcius, later honoured with the title Coriolanus (to commemorate his victory over the Volscians at Corioli), is first and foremost a great warrior. When he returns to Rome scarred with victory he falls into a political struggle which his imperious temperament will not allow him either to compromise or win. He is ignominiously banished from Rome and sides with his bitter enemy and rival Aufidius to conquer the city of his birth. In the end Aufidius has him executed as a traitor.

Coriolanus is a severe and proud man. Throughout the play his colossal anger continually erupts, getting the better of him and alienating all those around him. His years on the field of battle have left him cold and callous. Only in the presence of his ambitious and politic mother Volumnia does he ever reveal a less abrasive side. In this speech he comes face to face with his worst enemy. By heaping scorn on Rome and the people he has left behind there, Coriolanus is able to come to Aufidius on an equal and not as a humble exile. Notice how strong, emphatic and challenging his words are. There are no soft phrases. Everything is harsh and blunt. The speech can be hurled like an arrogant challenge, as Coriolanus invites Aufidius to either slay him or take him in as a mercenary partner. The speech is also full of negative statements and words, all of which the actor can utter with great disdain, contempt and distaste: i.e. 'thankless country'; 'Whooped out of Rome'; etc. He is also throwing in Aufidius' face the fact that it was he who conquered Aufidius and the Volscian people at Corioli, his greatest victory. The speech is a challenge because it has to be performed in full voice in public as though it were a provocation. Remember that Coriolanus is not afraid of a fight. There is nothing manipulative, diplomatic or devious about him. He is totally upfront and uncompromising and always wears his wounds like medals of honour. Imagine how this vigorous soldier would carry himself in this scene.

Life is a Dream

(1635) Calderón [Pedro Calderón de la Barca]

Act 2. Poland. The interior of a tower on a craggy mountain top.

Segismundo (20s) is the legitimate heir to the throne of Poland. He was locked in a tower by his father King Basilio when a horoscope cast at his birth said that he would seize the throne and rule like a tyrant. As a test, Basilio has him drugged and put temporarily on the throne to see if the prophecy proves to be correct. He does become a cruel tyrant and in the second act of the play is sent back to the tower and to his captive state. Never sure if he is awake or dreaming, Segismundo in his despair delivers this philosophical speech.

SEGISMUNDO (*shackled in chains and dressed in animal skins*).

I must control this savagery,
This wild ambition, this ferocity
Of mine in case I dream again.
For surely I'll dream again
When this world seems so strange a place
That all our life is but a dream,
And what I've seen so far tells me
That any man who lives dreams what
He is until at last he wakes.
The King dreams he is king and so
Believing rules, administers,
Rejoices in the exercise of power;
He does not seem to know his fame
Is written on the wind and death
Will turn to ashes all his splendour.
O who would want to be a king
And have his power, when the dream

Of death must soon awaken him?
The rich man dreams in all his wealth,
Though riches cause him endless care.
The pauper dreams his suffering,
Complaining that the world's not fair.
The man who has success dreams too,
And so does he who strives for more.
He dreams whose heart is full of spite,
Who, hurting others, claims he's right.
The world, in short, is where men dream
The different parts that they are playing,
And no one stops to know their meaning.
I dream that I am here, a prisoner,
I dream that I am bound by chains,
When once I dreamt of palaces
Where I was king, where once I reigned.
What is this life? A fantasy?
A prize we seek so eagerly
That proves to be illusory?
I think that life is but a dream,
And even dreams not what they seem.

Translated by Gwynne Edwards

COMMENTARY: Calderón's *Life is a Dream* starts as a tragedy and ends as an uplifting lesson about man's capacity to exercise his own free will. Segismundo, heir to the throne of Poland, begins the action chained in a tower like a beast. At his birth a prophecy decreed that he would be a tyrant if allowed to become king. As a result his father King Basilio had him immediately imprisoned in the tower. However, King Basilio plans to abdicate his throne in favour of his nephew Astolfo, Duke of Moscow. Before committing himself he decides to test Segismundo by putting him on the throne for a trial period of rule. Drugged and sleeping, he is taken from his prison and awakens to all the splendour of a baroque palace. With the ferocity of a caged animal suddenly set free, he lashes out and tyrannises everyone around