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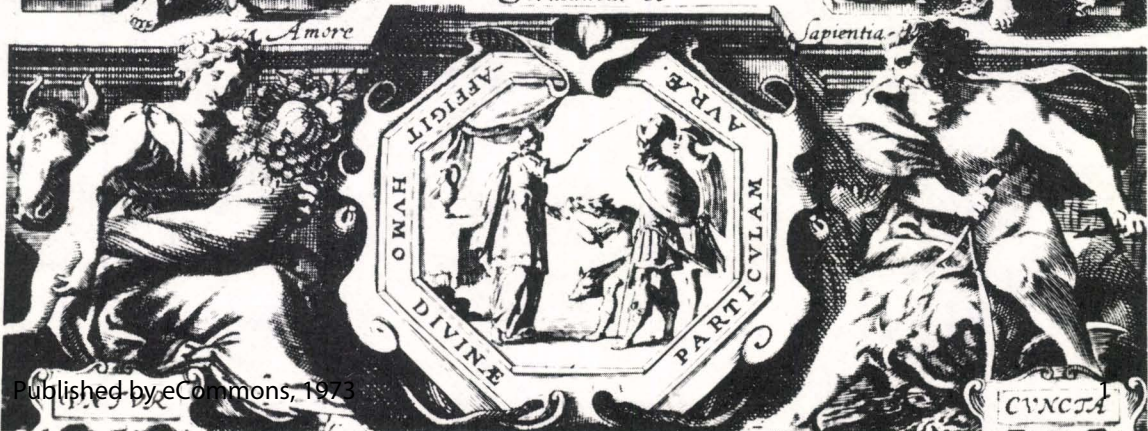
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Dramatic Significance of the 'Figures' Prefacing Each Book of Sandys' Translation of *Ovid's Metamorphosis*

Marie A. Powles

Although it is probably commonplace to suggest that the truly representative figures of any given literary period are not necessarily those normally regarded as possessors of extraordinary powers of creative ability, the truth of this statement is unquestionably borne out when we consider the grace of expression, imaginative creativeness and overall productivity of George Sandys, poet, translator, traveller and pioneer.¹ Certainly those usually regarded as the most outstanding representatives of the Renaissance are Sidney, Marlowe, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. George Sandys, however, proved to be not only much more than an exceptional translator, who through his biblical and Ovidian translations came to understand how to make use of the heroic couplet to the fullest advantage, but a prose writer whose commentaries to his translation of *Ovid's Metamorphosis* (1632 and 1640 editions), constitute an eclectic encyclopaedia of information about the Seventeenth-Century way of thinking concerning all matters related to the cumulative culture of the human race.² Additionally, although Sandys reveals that he is strongly influenced by Renaissance philosophical concepts, he also shows himself to be astonishingly perceptive about the workings of the human mind, and unfailingly demonstrates that, apart from the sophistication he acquired while travelling throughout the Middle East and the New World where he helped establish the Virginia colony, he possessed an uncommon amount of common sense and patience, qualities which were to aid him in his painstaking journey through the sometimes illuminated, sometimes darkened labyrinth of the human intellect. It is his gift of insight into man's psyche, perhaps, more than any other characteristic that helped shape Sandys' acute awareness of Ovid's dramatic flare—a distinctive feature of the Roman poet's works perceived and adopted by an endless stream of dramatists and poets from Chaucer to Milton. A careful survey of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, for example, shows it to be immensely enriched through Chaucer's skillful combination of Ovidian legend with basic plot-line. Ovid provided an equally useful source to both Molière and Jonson, the former having adapted the Ovidian "spirit of comedy" in his *Ampiteyon*: the latter (who apparently like Molière recognized the dramatic potential offered in the *Metamorphoses*), having produced a reflection of Ovid's description of the Four Ages of Man entitled *The Golden Age Restored* in masque form.³ Shakespeare drew on Ovid for plot, humor and characterization, and as Wilkinson points out, "there is scarcely a play which shows no trace of . . . [Ovidian]

influence."⁴ Spenser and Marlowe likewise gained much useful material from the *Metamorphoses*, the enchantment with Ovid reaching a peak in 1595.⁵ Finally, Milton's debt to the *Metamorphoses* is clearly demonstrated in *Paradise Lost*, a work in which the last outstanding Renaissance scholar "humanizes nature by means of mythology," and dramatizes situations linking the behavior of the gods with that of frail mankind.⁶ Ovid, then, proved popular in drama because he was obviously conceived of dramatically. It is Sandys, however, who not only intuited the dramatic in Ovid but saw how this dramatic quality could provide a bridge between art and literature. The announcement on the title pages of both the 1632 and 1640 editions of the *Metamorphosis* to the effect that this Ovidian translation is not only "Englished," but "represented IN Figures," makes it immediately apparent that it would be sensible to carefully scrutinize the two Engravings preceding the text as well as the fifteen illustrations which have been purposely placed before each book.

My examination of the first Plate preceding the title page of Sandys' 1640 edition of a translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* will not only attempt to explain the symbolic content of the Plate serving to portend the history of the various tales making up the text, but more importantly, how Sandys the poet, Clein the artist, and Savery the engraver, contrived together to present Sandys' version of the *Metamorphoses* in a unique way, namely, as a play to be staged and interpreted by the gods.

The first Plate preceding the title page includes the names of the artist and engraver. This Engraving as a whole is more than a little suggestive of the rather complex Elizabethan stage for which the artist, as shrewdly as any Renaissance stage director, has cleverly prepared every part so that the way of the world may be displayed upon it. The area beneath the platform usually termed "cellerage" or "hell" is occupied by a miniature engraving of Circe changing Ulysses' men into swine, or allegorically speaking contains a centralized drawing symbolizing man creating his own hell on earth. As in the case of the original Elizabethan stage, Clein's pseudo-stage houses most of the drama. From a pictorial or artistic point of view, that this is so, can be deduced from the fact that Venus and Minerva occupy this elevated stage proper, and from a literary viewpoint the same two characters create much of the drama in the *Metamorphoses* itself because Venus, natural love, or passion, and Pallas wisdom, or virtue, are constantly in a state of conflict throughout the whole work.

To further support the idea that this Figure is based on the architectural lay-out of an elaborate Elizabethan stage we should note that both Venus and Minerva are standing between two pillars, the capitals of which suggest a Corinthian style of architecture, a luxurious elaborate type of decor.⁷ These two sections each framed by two columns and containing Venus and Pallas are also very like the two doors at the rear of an Elizabethan stage which served to provide all the entrances and exits. During a performance on an Elizabethan stage, of course, while a character left by one exit, another would come on stage through the other. Once again, in terms

of the *Metamorphosis* this is exactly what occurs, when Venus takes over completely, Reason exits and vice-versa. The pillars, which supported the projecting roof, also served a further purpose, they provided a useful stage prop on a sceneless stage which made it possible for spies, murderers or thieves to furtively slink around them, or wait in hiding for some unsuspecting victim. Between the rear doors of the stage proper was situated an inner stage which was probably provided with a traverse curtain, though this curtain was usually utilized for rather different purposes than that for which it is used on a modern stage. Upon this inner stage a play within a play was often performed, while the curtain would sometimes serve to conceal some dramatic event to come. This inner stage with its traverse curtain could be said to have its counterpart in the Clein drawing. Cupid is peering somewhat furtively from behind Venus and in front of the column next to Venus' left hand holding the flaming heart, and appears to be about to place an arrow in his bow to shoot at a potential human target he has in view. The "traverse" curtain in the Engraving hangs below Apollo and carries an introduction to the "drama" to follow. Behind this curtain lies the play within a play or the text itself which will shortly display a highly universal cast. Venus and Pallas are each placed slightly turning towards the traverse curtain almost like two producers preparing to introduce the performance about to take place.⁸

Immediately above Venus and Pallas and in the center, or in Elizabethan stage terminology above the inner stage, we find Apollo occupying that section of the upper stage used as a curtained alcove, which was (and appropriately so for our Figure), generally occupied by a few musicians who began playing about an hour prior to the commencement of the play, and played at intervals throughout the dramatic presentation. Above the alcove and in the third layer of the Renaissance theater was a small terrace or balcony, which was often made to represent the wall of a castle or city. In Sandys' figure the balcony or balconies are occupied by Jupiter on the left side and Juno on the right side which seems appropriate because from this elevated position in a Shakespearian production, for instance, kings, queen or great warriors (counterparts of the gods, euhemeristically speaking) would orate to, or direct the "rabble," and in the myths to come we shall find that the gods do, indeed, most cruelly manipulate the mob or frail mankind from the lofty heights of Mount Olympus. The highest part of the Renaissance theater was a kind of small attic or storeroom above the balcony which added a fourth story to the overall structure of the theater. As a rule, this room was the domain of a stage hand who hoisted a flag to announce that a play was to be performed that day. This section is utilized in a very different fashion in Clein's illustration because the artist has replaced the storeroom with a sketch of the heavens which contain a drawing of Phaeton driving reinless across a mass of cloud and Phaeton is more than just a legendary character in the *Metamorphosis*, his tale symbolizes, or announces in a sense, the central theme of the whole work, that of Chaos.⁹

To turn from the general to the particular, we must now review the specific gods and goddesses which have been included in this Engraving. At one level all the

mythological figures appearing in this first Plate are major characters whose exploits are constantly reported in the text, and each of them is symbolically representative of one important element or another which to a degree aids in the formation of the overall philosophy on which the *Metamorphosis* is based. At another level the figures appearing in this illustration signify some of the motifs or themes which weave their way in and out of Sandys' encyclopaedic textural summation. These structural components are often based on accepted Renaissance beliefs, and Sandys' genius emerges when he not only skillfully integrates several levels of meaning at once, but is able to contribute many new ones. At the mythological level this first Engraving includes Jupiter, king of the gods, and god of fire, seated rather jauntily in the upper left-hand corner of the Engraving with a salamander, a mythical animal having the power to endure fire without harm, pictured to his left, while Phaeton, symbolizing chaos and shown attempting to drive his father's chariot, but lacking the rein of control is centered between Jupiter and Juno with the phrase "AD AETHERA VIRTUS" (toward the heaven's virtue) engraved on the clouds surrounding him. Below Phaeton sits Apollo the god of Poetry, Music and Medicine, who has the tag "DOCVIT QVAE" (He teaches those things) inscribed beneath him, while below the sun god with a flaming heart in her left hand, and her right hand clutching a loosely draped robe across her body so that her breasts are prominently revealed and her lower sexual parts just barely covered, stands Venus with Cupid at her side and the word "Amore" (by love) imprinted at her feet, to face Pallas. Pallas Athene stands holding a lance in her right hand and a shield decorated with the contorted features of Medusa in her left hand with the word "Sapientia" (by Wisdom) at her feet. The whole Latin tag "DOCVIT QVAE Amore formantur et Sapientia" (He teaches those things that are formed by love and by wisdom) spells out the traditional debate between Reason and Passion. Below Venus and on the left side sits Ceres goddess of fertility embracing an enormous cornucopia of fruit and vegetables including grapes, while a bull peers around her right shoulder, and the last part of the "ORIVNTUR" is engraved beneath her right hand. On the right side and below Minerva an old man sits astride a dolphin with a pair of reins in his right hand and a three-pronged trident in his left, who appears to signify Neptune. The word "CVNCTA" at his feet completes the tag "EX HIS ORIVNTVR CVNCTA" (from these all things arise.) The area between Ceres and Neptune, is appropriately occupied by a small medallion portraying Circe waving her wand over the heads of two of Ulysses' men who have not yet totally succumbed to her influence while two others have reached various stages of swinish degeneration, one already totally a pig, another gradually turning into a pig and holding his head downwards as he drains the magic draught. The notation surrounding this octagonal centerpiece reads "AFFIGIT HVMO DIVINAE PARTICVLAM AVRAE" (weakens from the ground—a small part of the divine breath) which undoubtedly denotes, in view of the legend pictorialized—sensual appetite.

Taken as a whole this Engraving may be interpreted at several levels: at one, it introduces a number of important gods and legends in which they took a leading role, for example Phaeton and the runaway chariot is shown, reminding the reader

of the myth about his pride and fall, Pallas with the shield recalling the Medusa myth is present, Juno is shown with both a weasel and a peacock both reminders of legends in which she takes part (namely, the fable concerning Galanthis, Iola and Lucina as well as the Jove/Io/Argus myth), and Circe with Ulysses' men turned into swine is given a prominent position in the Figure. At a second level the same pagan deities symbolically represent the four Elements (Jupiter, Fire, Juno, Air, Ceres, Earth, and Neptune, Water), while Ceres the fertility goddess is also symbolic of propagation, and the bull leering over her shoulder is a reminder of Jove's lustful pursuits as well as of the source of the cornucopia. A third implication stems from the positioning of the figures. Venus (natural love), a sense often linked with Appetite and Mutability in the Renaissance mind is positioned opposite Pallas or Wisdom, an abstract quality associated in the Platonic sense with immortality, and even more significant is the fact that Venus (who because she is natural love can signify passion) is stationed opposite Pallas (who can also figure as Reason), significant because Passion in conflict with Reason is one of the most common themes to receive attention in both the Renaissance and Sandys' commentaries. Finally, the position of Ceres to the left and Neptune to the right of the medallion containing the Circe/Ulysses legend is no accident. Ceres is not only clasping all the fruit grown in the Garden of Eden and cultivated by Adam and Eve after the Fall, but grapes occupy a dominant position among the fruit displayed, a fruit linked with Bacchus, riot and disorder, while Neptune signifying the ebb and flow of human tides has been placed on the opposite side of the medallion. The accuracy of this interpretation, is I believe, supported by the caption on the two sides of the Circean/Ulysses medallion already considered.

A medallion enclosing a portrait of Ovid occupies a central position in Figure Two, and above this a winged figure of Fame is shown blowing a horn held with the right hand, and holding a quill pen in the other while he reclines on a bank of cloud. Above him is the tag "Carmina quam tribuunt, Fama perennis erit" (Songs bestow what Fame will everlasting be), and below him "Mercurius Lingua, Plectro ditavit Apollo Omne tulit punctum: bina trophaea gerens" (Mercury by tongue, Apollo enriched by harp carried every section: together bearing the trophies.) Apollo with his lyre, and crowned with laurel, stands on the left side of the medallion: Mercury grasping his caduceus in his left hand stands on the opposite side. Both figures have arms extended, Apollo his left; Mercury his right, so that their hands touch the laurel wreath situated just above the circular drawing of Ovid, which besides symbolizing victory and peace, signifies excellence in literature and the arts. Below the central drawing, and to the left and right respectively of a poetic tribute to:

The' sweet-tong'd Ovids Counterfeit behold,
Which noblest Romans wore in rings of gold
Or would you yt, which his owne pensil drew'.
The Poet, in his deathless Poems view,¹⁰

are two smaller medallions, the first "in silver" contains a further portrait of Ovid:

the second "The reuers of ye Medall" depicting a seated figure whose left hand branches into a forked twig doubtless symbolic of metamorphosis. With this illustration we see the poet continuing to forge several layers of allegorical material together as a link with the text, and to connect it with the prose section on Ovid's life which follows. Ovid, the nucleus of this Engraving, is fittingly united with those mythological figures representative of the levels of meaning which will become components in the commentaries. Apollo has the gift of prophecy, and is leader of all the Muses: his exploits throughout the *Metamorphosis* are numerous, and he also possesses the gift of music, healing and expertise in archery. Mercury represents both science and commerce, and is also the patron of travellers, rogues, nomads or vagabonds and thieves. Between them, they touch every point, every section of the books of the *Metamorphosis*.

Like a good director, then, Sandys sets the stage upon which frail mankind will become the victim of a variety of metamorphoses. In so doing, he adroitly fuses Christian and Pagan elements together, connects art with literature, and combines the real with the imaginary, at the same time claiming, as Sidney had done before him, that imaginative literature can move men's minds. The Elizabethan interest in the "inner" as well as the "outer" man constantly provide a rich layer of allegory, and what really happens when Sandys interprets the *Metamorphosis*, is, that the translator through a kind of allegorical magnification, exposes and then indirectly dramatizes the psychological depth of meaning already present in the work, and does so armed with an understanding of man and his environment acquired through a wide knowledge of current intellectual ideas as well as personal experience during his travels. In this way, then, George Sandys, like the great Elizabethan dramatists who would follow after him, with the aid of an artist and an engraver, probed men's souls, seeking human complexities for presentation through his translated interpretation of the original Ovid, and in his commentaries.

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NOTES

- ¹ Richard B. Davis, *George Sandys: Poet Adventurer* (London, 1955), presents extensive coverage of Sandys' life and works, and includes information about both Clein and Savery.
- ² George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis: Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures* by G. S. London, 1632. STC 18966, and George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis: Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures. An Essay to the Translation of Virgil's Aeneis* by G. S. London, 1640. STC 18968.
- ³ See Edward K. Rand, *Ovid and his Influence* (New York, 1928), pp. 160-61, and Stephen Orgel, ed. *Ben Johnson: The Complete Masques* (New Haven and London, 1969), p. 26.
- ⁴ L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 92-93.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Charles G. Osgood, *The Classical Mythology of Milton's English Poems*, ed. Albert S. Cook (Reprinted, New York, 1964), pp. xxxv1-x1vii.
- ⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary* being a corrected reissue of *A New English Dictionary . . .* (1933)

ed. James A. H. Murray *et al.* II, 992. As a matter of interest the following comments concerning both Corinth and Corinthian are contained in the *Oxford*; interesting because they could, allegorically speaking, bear some symbolic relationship to the overall meaning of the Figure which is, in effect, dealing with the licentiousness of both the gods and mankind with whom they interact. "Corinthian . . . effrontery or shamelessness, such as that attributed to the Corinthians." p. 992. "Corinth. Name of a city of ancient Greece celebrated for its artistic adornment, and for its luxury and licentiousness; p. 992; "Potter *Antiq Greece* ii. 12 (T.) To act the Corinthian, is, to commit fornication, according to Hesychius." p. 992. "To act the Corinthian: to live voluptuously and licentiously." p. 992.

⁸ Although the Clein drawing provides evidence to support the idea that a stage curtain existed between the stage doors, the primary intent of this article is neither to prove or disprove this highly controversial issue which has already been discussed at length by many critics whose findings have to be inconclusive. See for example: Glynn Wickham, *Early English Stage 1300-1660*. 2 vols (London, and New York, 1959-1963). Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe 1599-1609* (New York, 1964). Richard Hoseley, *SQ*, VII (1957). Alois M. Nagler, *Shakespeare's Stage* (New Haven, 1958). However, evidence to support the idea a curtain was used may be found within the plays themselves, for example, *The Merchant of Venice*, II, ix, 1, *Merch.* II, vii, or *The History of Henry the Fourth* (Part One), II, iv, 505.

⁹ Wickham, *Early English Stage 1300-1660*.

¹⁰ Sandys *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, p. xii.

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