The Psyche Myth and
*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

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In the phantasmagoria of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* scholars have discerned and analyzed the elements of several antique fables and fairy toys, but they seem largely to have neglected the curious and extensive relationship of this dream-world to the story of Psyche and its matrix in Lucius Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*. Many will concede that though Shakespeare may have known other stories about ass-headed men, ¹ Apuleius’ account of his adventures affords the most likely source for Titania’s infatuation with a monster, as well as for some other motifs, as Sister M. Generosa has shown. ² But the relationship of the *Dream* to the story of Psyche appears deeper than that of a series of casual resemblances, such as might be based on vague recollection.

If one looks below the texture of the language, which tends to obscure the outlines of the story, one finds remarkable similarity between many events of the myth and the main adventures of the drama. In effect, it may be urged that the fundamental pattern of the myth and the patterns of the main stories in the play are similar in several interlocking ways, and that if Shakespeare did not consciously recall the Psyche tale as he wrote, he nevertheless had in mind many of its archetypal features, so that the *Dream* in part becomes yet another example of what Northrop Frye designates as displaced myth. The general impression is not that of an ordering of the play to correspond to the structure of the myth, but rather as if the mosaic of the myth had been shattered into its original *reserarc*, which Shakespeare has picked up and arranged to suit his own design. With his usual independence in deriving material from his sources, Shakespeare largely avoids borrowing the phrasing of the story, but his apparent use of a few terms suggests that he may have known the Latin text³, and the possible use of William Adlington’s preface to his translation of the work indicates that he may have also known that version (1566), which

¹ See *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare, ed. G. L. Kittredge (Boston, 1939), p. xi. My citations of the play are to this text.
² Sister M. Generosa “Apuleius and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Analogue or Source, Which?” *SP*, XLII (1945), 198-204.
³ For the Latin passages in the present study I have used the Latin text prepared by Gaselee, Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass: Being the Metamorphoses of Lucius Apuleius With an English Translation by W. Adlington*, Loeb Cl. Lib. (Cambridge, Mass., 1965). Citations of this text will follow its uses. The research of T. W. Baldwin (as Sister M. Generosa notes) makes it apparent that Shakespeare could have known the Latin text, since, assuming the availability of the work, Vives commends Apuleius to the student for logic and Erasmus recommends imitating him for matter (*William Shakespeare’s Small Laine & Lose Greeke*, II (Urbana, 1944), 26, 185, 247). It is interesting to find that Adlington may have borrowed some ideas from Erasmus for the composition of his preface “To the Reader” (*Erasmus, Opera*, I (1703), 355; Baldwin, II, 247).
was reprinted for the third time in 1596. The parallels are numerous and vary from notable resemblances to vague likenesses; but one does not have to defend the validity of all the parallels to sustain the thesis that Shakespeare probably had read The Golden Ass and that he has given the Psyche tale a truly mythic translation in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

The reshaping of the Psyche myth in the play is dreamlike and strange in its new arrangements, but yet essentially true to the original story. The tale itself in its telling is associated with dreams. Before the story begins, the captive Charites has been distressed by a shocking dream-vision (Bk. iv, sec. 27; 42-43). The "trifling old woman" set to guard her counsels her not to be afraid of strange visions and dreams, and then to revive her spirits tells her the tale of Psyche.

The Psyche image itself, the concept of the devoted woman patient in adversity and unfailingly true to her love, becomes an important construct in A Midsummer Night's Dream, involving both mortals and fairies. First let us consider it as embodied in the mortal women of the drama. It will perhaps be granted that in developing his archetypal pattern of the fair Helena and the dark Hermia Shakespeare was not interested in creating character, but rather in giving a composite impression of woman, universal woman in all her variety. The two are contrasted without prejudice (tall and short, fair and dark, phlegmatic and waspish); it is clear that one is not to be preferred to the other. For all their external differences they are "two lovely berries on one stem", and they are manifest Psyches in their unfailling constancy to their lovers (Demetrius and Lysander change their loves, but Helena and Hermia remain true). If the persistence of Helena in following the estranged Demetrius to the woods may seem at first to associate her more notably with the Psyche pattern, later on the plight of Hermia, bedraggled and torn by briars, hopelessly searching for Lysander, redresses the balance.

At the outset in the myth and in the play, Psyche and Hermia are in somewhat similar circumstances. Hermia is faced with the necessity of complying with her father's wish that she wed Demetrius or die (Theseus offers her a third choice of becoming a devotee of Diana), and she spiritedly accepts the alternatives to marriage. Psyche is seemingly faced with the necessity of marrying a Serpent, a bridal of death, arranged for her by her father (against his wishes), courageously accepts her lot, and becomes, for a period, a votaress of Venus.

Helena and Hermia make use respectively of the monster and serpent images, images of central importance to the Psyche tale and to the drama.

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4 The STC lists printings in 1566, 1571, 1582, 1596. My citations of Adlington are to the 1566 text, whose title-page reads: "The xi Booke of / the Golden Asse, / Containinge the Metamorphoie / of Lucius Apuleius, enterlaced / with sondrie pleasant and delecta- / ble Tales, with an excellent / Narration of the Mari- / age of Cupide and / Psiches, set out / in the iiii. / v. and vi. / Booke: / Translated out of Latine into English / by William Adlington. / Imprinted at London / in Fleetstreate, / at the signe of the Oliphante, / by Henry VVykes. / Anno. 1566." (STC 718, Huntington Lib. 12026, Univ. of Mich. Microfilm 1096.) Citations of this text will follow its use in this study, preceded by references to the Latin text (see note 3).

5 The numerous monster images in Shakespeare's plays preceding and following MND seem unrelated to the Psyche story except for the one notable usage in Rom. of the theme of the bridal of death and its mysterious palace: "Shall I believe / That unsubstantial Death is amorous, / And that the lean abhorred monster keeps / Thee here in dark to be his paramour? / For
These images are frequently employed by Shakespeare throughout his plays, sometimes, as with the serpent image, tracing to unambiguous sources, such as the stories of the serpents strangled by Hercules and the Serpent of Eden. The usages in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, considered singly, may seem adventitious; taken together, in conjunction with other resemblances, they seem somehow to reflect the myth. In soliloquy Helena sees herself as being like a monster: remarking that she must be ugly as a bear, she considers it no wonder that Demetrius flies from her as from a monster (II. ii. 94-97). One is reminded that all things fear the power of the fierce serpent who is to be the husband of Psyche—a slight resemblance by itself; but when one recalls the apparent fact that the monster image as applied to Bottom is based on Apuleius, the resemblance seems more plausible. But Helena will not give up her pursuit; in her unserving devotion, as she remarks earlier, Demetrius is all her world and his face banishes night (“It is not night when I do see your face”, II. i. 220-226). In comparable mood Psyche courts Cupid: “I little esteeme to see your visage and figure, little doo I regarde the night & darkness thereof, for you are my onely light” (Bk. V. 7; 50). Later, Demetrius equates Helena’s beauty with that of Venus (III. ii. 60-61), and Oberon promises that (like Psyche) Helena shall rival Venus in beauty, that she shall “shine as gloriously/As the Venus of the sky” (III. ii. 106-107).

In her turn, Hermia dreams that a serpent is eating her heart away while Lysander sits smiling at the deed (a forecast of his later mocking of her). She wakens to find Lysander gone without a word to her (“gone? No sound, no word?”), and, after almost fainting from fear, she sets out to find him or die (II. ii. 145-156). In her search she meets Demetrius and applies the serpent image to him as a possible slayer of Lysander (III. ii. 70-73). After she finds Lysander, now devoted to Helena, he mocks her and rejects her as a “Vile thing”, like a serpent (“Vile thing, let loose,/Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent”, III. ii. 260-261). In the myth, it will be recalled, Psyche is convinced by her sisters that her unseen husband is indeed the creature (“the most miserabler creature living, the most poore, the most crooked, and the most vile”, IV. 31; 44) that Venus would have her love, the dire Serpent of the Oracle of Apollo, who will devour both her and her child at its birth (V. 18; 51). When she discovers his true identity and accidentally awakes him, he flies from her “without utterance of any woord” (V. 23; 53). She catches him as he rises into the air but shortly loses her grip and falls. Cupid pauses a moment to rebuke her and mock her for her folly, and then flies away, leaving her grief-stricken and lamenting. After he is out of sight, she first attempts suicide, but presently sets out to seek her alienated husband.

And Shakespeare’s fairies, who preside over the fortunes of these mortals both in fickle love and in true love (as is fitting since there is magic in both states), exhibit action, themes, and imagery that are also paralleled in the myth. The fairies themselves have a mythic parallel in the unseen servitors who wait on Psyche and provide her with every need and luxury (V. 3; 46”). That

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fear of that I still will stay with thee / And never from this palace of dim night / Depart again” (V. iii. 102-108). There appears also no discernible relationship between Shakespeare’s other numerous uses of the serpent image and that of the Psyche story.
Shakespeare would translate these creatures to fairies follows the practice of English authors from the time of Sir Orfeo and Chaucer in reshaping classical myth. It is interesting that at the end of the play Shakespeare visualizes his fairies as attendants of Hecate: “And we fairies that do run / By the triple Hecate’s team . . .” (V.ii.390-391). Though Shakespeare’s fairies are visible to the audience, like the servants of Psyche they are never seen by any of the characters except Bottom, and he finally remembers them only as a dream. In the shaping of the drama, aspects of both Venus and Psyche are fused in the person of Titania (it will be remembered that Psyche is a surrogate of Venus in the myth, IV.28; 43), while Cupid plays a triple role in Oberon, Puck, and the Indian boy.

With his power over fickle love as well as true love Oberon is a manifest Cupid figure. His lieutenant Puck, as Sister M. Generosa has pointed out, has the propensities of Cupid added to his folklore characteristics. When Venus calls Cupid to her aid in taking vengeance on Psyche for usurping worship due her, Apuleius describes his nature in terms broadly suggestive of Puck’s behavior: “And by and by she called her winged sonne Cupide, rashe inough, and hardie, who by his evil manners, contemninge all publique justice and lawe, armed with fire & arrows, runninge up and downe in the nightes from house to house, and corruptinge the lawfull marriages of every person, doth nothinge but that whicke is evil, who although that he weare of his owne proper nature sufficient prone to woorke misichefe, yet she egged him forwarde with woordes” (IV.30;44). Puck’s delight later on in maneuvring the crossed loves completes his fashioning as a Cupid.

Venus urges Cupid to shoot his arrows at Psyche to make her fall in love with the “most miserablist”, the “most vile” of creatures. Then she goes off to the sea where sea gods and goddesses flock to her and follow her:

Sic effata . . . proximas oras reflui litoris petit, plantisque roseis vibrantium fluctuum summo rore calctato, ecce iam profundus6 maris sudo resedit vertice, et ipsum quod incipit velle, et statim, quasi pridem praceperit, non moratur marinum obsequium. Adsunt Nerei filiae chorum canentes . . . et auriga parvulus delphini Paalemon; . . . iam passim maria persultantes Tritonum catervae Talis ad Oceanum pergentem Venerem comitatur exercitus (IV. 31).

Adlington, as usual, translates very freely, omitting some significant details in the opening sentence:

When she had spoken these woordes, she . . . took her voyaige towards the sea.

When she was come to the sea, she began to call the Goddes & Goddesses, who were obedient to her voyce. For incontinent came ye daughters of Nereus singing with tunes melodiously . . . Paalmon, the driver of the Dolphin, the trumpetters of Triton leapinge hither and thither. . . . Such was the opany which followed Venus marchinge towards the Ocean sea (44*).

6 Koehler’s emendation for the early textual reading, profundi. The early texts (those that Shakespeare might have known) at this point read “ecce iam profundi maris suo resedit vertice”, a clause which seems to mean essentially, as Gascoee notes, that Venus took her seat on the sea, a meaning that does not fit the context. Koehler’s emendation offers the improved (and expected) sense that with the coming of Venus the waters became entirely calm.
Gaselee fills out the missing details in his revision of Adlington:

When she had spoken these words, she . . . took her voyage towards the shore hard by, where the tides flow to and fro: and when she was come there, and had trodden with her rosy feet upon the top of the trembling waters, then the deep sea became exceeding calm upon its whole surface, and at her will, as though she had before given her bidding, straightway appeared her servitors from the deep. . . .

Similarly, when Oberon, like Venus, wishes to take vengeance on Titania for denying him his right to the Indian boy, he calls Puck to his aid. He first reminds Puck of an earlier experience by the sea (II. i. 148-160):

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\begin{align*}
\text{Thou rememb'rest} & \\
\text{Since once I sat upon a promontory} & \\
\text{And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back} & \\
\text{Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath} & \\
\text{That the rude sea grew civil at her song,} & \\
\text{And certain stars shot madly from their spheres} & \\
\text{To hear the sea-maid's music.} & \\
\text{Puck.} & \\
\text{I remember.} & \\
\text{Ob. That very time I saw (but thou couldst not)} & \\
\text{Flying between the cold moon and the earth} & \\
\text{Cupid, all arm'd. A certain aim he took} & \\
\text{At a fair Vestal, throned by the West,} & \\
\text{And loo'sd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,} & \\
\text{As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

It seems generally accepted that Shakespeare may have remembered here impressions, however derived, from the entertainments for Elizabeth at Kenilworth (1575) and Elvetham (1591), spectacles that presented singing mermaids, dolphins, Tritons, fireworks (shooting stars), and spells supposedly calming the seas—pageants similar to the one described by Apuleius. On the other hand, Apuleius clearly provides adequate background for most of the action and imagery of this episode as part of the continuing story. In his account we have Venus' summoning Cupid to aid her in taking vengeance on Psyche, her urging Cupid to aim his arrows at Psyche so that she will love the vilest of creatures, the pageant of Venus by the sea with her calming the waters, her melodious Nereids, and a dolphin ridden by Palemon. Furthermore, Psyche

\[\text{\textsuperscript{7}}\text{In his Letter on the entertainment for Elizabeth at Kenilworth in 1575, Laneham describes a pageant in which appeared a "swimming mermayd" (a boat), along with Triton who charged the waters to be still during the Queen's presence; then Arion on a dolphin ship sang a "delectable ditty . . . well apted to a melodious noise" (John Nichols, The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, London, 1823; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, I (1966), 457-458). Gascoigne (The Privylye Pleasurys at the Courte of Kenelworth, Nichols, I, 485-523) visualizes Proteus rather than Triton as the singer on the back of a dolphin (a boat so fashioned). Gascoigne also represents Triton in Neptune's name charging the winds and waters to be calm during the Queen's presence, and both Laneham and Gascoigne remark the exhibition of fireworks over the waters (pp. 435, 494).}

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\text{Edith Rickert argues that Shakespeare was recalling instead the festival of Elvetham ("Political Propaganda and Satire in A Midsummer Night's Dream", MP, XXI (1933), 53-87, 133-154), which has a speaking Nymph of the sea, Nearth, on a ship (possibly a dolphin ship, though not so described in Nichols, III, 111); Nereus and two "Echoes" sing. Elaborate fireworks burn in the water (p. 118), and the Fairy Queen Aurola says that "amorous starres fall nightly in [her] lap" (p. 119).}
is described (in the following paragraph) as essentially a fair Vestal (a virgin of solitary life and of divine beauty). In aiming at her, as in aiming at Elizabeth, Cupid (in effect) missed his mark. All the images in the *Dream* are accounted for save for the shooting stars. In sum, though Shakespeare may have recalled the descriptions of the water pageants at Kenilworth and Elvetham, it seems very likely also that he knew this episode in Apuleius.

The Indian boy seems a marvellous objectification of one side of Oberon-Cupid’s nature, in relation to Titania as a Venus figure. The quarrel between Oberon and Titania for possession of the Indian boy clearly represents a contention for mastery, Oberon asserting his male supremacy (“Am I not thy lord?”) and Titania insisting, in her turn, on matriarchal rule (“If you will patiently dance in our round”, II. i. 140). If Oberon were to submit and allow Titania to retain the boy (a young Cupid figure who may be considered symbolic of Cupid himself under Venus’ control), he would acknowledge the matriarchal rule, very much as Cupid does, so long as he lies wounded, virtually a prisoner in his mother’s palace. But Oberon-Cupid rejects the dominance of Titania-Venus, and taking the Indian boy (the young Cupid should not remain indefinitely under feminine rule, as Juno and Ceres remind Venus in the myth, V. 31; 56), he becomes truly Titania’s lord, and the contention is over. The Indian boy, son of a votaress of Titania, seems almost a fulfillment in the play of Venus’ threat to replace Cupid with the son of one of her retainers (V. 29; 55). In her final patient submission to Oberon’s will (IV. i. 60-66), Titania becomes a Psyche, whose patient submission to the will of Venus attests her worthiness of Cupid’s love.

Titania functions also as a Venus figure in representing Nature herself. Even her name, a patronymic of Diana as Shakespeare would have known from Ovid, is one of the names used to designate “the natural mother of all things”, as Apuleius calls her (XL. 4; 117), known variously as Ceres, Venus, Diana, and other goddesses. The creatures of nature are Titania’s fairy servants (II. i. 8-15), and summer itself attends on her state (III. i. 158). Her division with Oberon has reversed the seasons and created general disorder:

Hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose;
And on old Hiems’ thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter change
Their wonted liveries; and the mazed world
By their increase, now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original.

(II. i. 107-117)


10 Ovid uses the name for Diana once (Met. III. 173) and twice for Circe (Met. XIV. 382, 438). Kittredge (p. xii) objects that Diana is not a satisfactory prototype for Shakespeare’s Titania; but Apuleius makes it clear that Diana is only one of the names and aspects of Queen Isis (XI. 5; 117). That Shakespeare was aware of the manifold nature of Diana is evident from his association of his fairies with the “triple Hecate” (V. i. 390-391; cited earlier in this study).
Even the phrasing in the last lines of this quotation seems to recall the language of Apuleius or that of his translator. Through their quarrel, Titania declares, she and Oberon are the “parents and original” of this “progeny of evils”. Early in the myth Venus is inflamed to fury by the worship of Psyche, an anger which has been the cause for the desolation and desecration of her temples (IV. 29; 43”). This disorder, though not described specifically as affecting the seasons, is reflected in all human affairs which “are now become no more gratious, no more pleasant, no more gentle, but incivill, monstrous & horrible: moreover the marriages are not for any amitie, or for love of procreatiō, but ful of envy, discorde, & debate” (V. 28; 54”). Venus’ anger is the greater since she is the mother of all, “the original parent of all these elements” (IV. 30; 44), as Adlington translates Apuleius’ phrasing, “rerum naturae priscæ parens, en elementorum origo initialis.” Shakespeare’s phrase, “parents and original”, is somewhat closer to the Latin in pattern. Later, in Book XI, Venus (to use one of her many names) speaks of herself as the “natural mother of all things, misiris and governesse of all the Elemenentes, the initial progeny of worldes”, a fairly literal translation of Apuleius’ “rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis” (XI. 4; 117). Though it cannot be proved that Shakespeare expropriated the word progeny from this source for his phrase “progeny of evils”, its use in this special context offers an interesting parallel. Possibly Apuleius’ phrase, “governess of all the Elementes”, may have begotten Titania’s epithet for the moon, “governess of floods”, in the same speech.

In the same picture of Venus, Apuleius describes the goddess as crowned like Flora with garlands interlaced with flowers (Hiems uses such a chaplet in mockery), and apostrophizes her at length as controlling the stars, the seasons, the winds, seeds, and all life. After the “divine image” has departed, all things rejoice (and a reversal of seasons is suggested): “For after the hore-frost, ensued the whote and temperat Sunne. . . . The barren and streill were contented at their shadehow, rendering swete and pleasant shrilles: The seas were quiet from wyndes and tempestes: The heaven had chased away the cloutes, and appeared faire and cleare with his propre light” (XI. 7; 118). Though Shakespeare doubtless remembered the inclement seasons of 1594-159511, these passages may have been stimulating to his imagination also, and it would appear that Apuleius’ Venus could well be the parent and original of Shakespeare’s concept of a bounteous goddess of nature which underlies his vision of Titania as the Fairy Queen.

Titania is also a Psyche figure in several aspects of the action. In the myth when Psyche is first conveyed to the paradisal garden of Cupid, she is laid on a “bedde of most sweete and fragrant flowers.” Though Apuleius does not name the flowers, he at once reiterates and emphasizes the image:

. . . florentis caespitis gremio leniter delapsam reclinat (IV. 35).

Psyche tencris & herbosis locis, in ipso toro roscidi graminis suave recubans, tanta mentis perturbatione sedata, dulce conquievit (V. 1).

. . . she was laide in a bedde of most sweete and fragrant flowers.

Thus fayre Psyches beinge sweetely couched amongst the softe and fragrant flowers, and havinge qualifiled the troubles and thoughts of her restles minde, was now well reposed (46).

After awaking from a refreshing sleep, she espies a pleasant wood of mighty trees, and in it a "Princely edifice" not built by human hands. Entering this heavenly palace, she is waitid on by unseen servants and entertained by their song and music; and after going to bed, she becomes the bride of an unseen husband, the supposed Serpent Bridegroom of the oracle, as Venus would have it, the "most vile" creature alive, "tamque infimi ut per totum orbem non inveniat miserae suae comparem" (IV. 31).

Titania's experiences are curiously akin. In the Palace woods of Theseus, Titania is lulled to sleep by fairy song on a bank of wild thyme (a resilient herbal couch) and oxlips, muskroses, and other "sweete and fragrant flowres" (as Apuleius has precondensed the exquisite excursus). While Titania sleeps, Oberon squeezes the juice of his flower on her eyelids and conjures her to fall in love with whatever she sees on awakening: "Wake when some vile thing is near" (II. ii. 35). She awakens to love, not a serpent bridegroom, but another monster, Bottom the ass-man, a mock figure of the Golden Ass12.

With this event the action and imagery relating Titania to Psyche take on a mocking tone and are applied by inversion to Bottom. As observed above, unseen servants attend on Psyche, ministering to her every desire, providing her all sorts of delicacies and wines, while invisible musicians sing and play on various instruments, giving her the impression that she is surrounded by a multitude (V. 2-3; 467-47). The palace is a storehouse of jewels and gold at her disposal. In the play Titania bids her elves and fairies wait on Bottom. They are to bring him jewels from the deep (Venus is attended, we remember, by servitors from the sea), and sing while he sleeps on pressed flowers. Does he wish to hear music? or would he like something to eat? The queries remind one of those addressed by the unseen voices to Psyche. Unlike Lucius, who retains his human appetities in food, Bottom prefers good dry oats, hay, and pease to the dainties Titania would offer him, such as new nuts from the squirrel's hoard (IV.i. 33-38). For the detail of the new nuts, as Sister M. Generosa has shown, Shakespeare probably remembers the episode immediately following the Psyche story (VI. 28; 65) in which Charites promises Lucius that if he aids her in escaping the robbers, she will splendidly dress his forehead and mane, deck him with gold to shine like the stars, and bring him daily kernels of nuts and other dainties in her silken apron.

Moreover, for the scenes of Titania's doteage on Bottom, as Sister M. Generosa has indicated, Shakespeare may also have remembered the story of the noblewoman of Corinth (X. 21-22; 109-110), who anoints Lucius' body and nose with balm, looks at him with burning eyes while uttering passionate endearments, and "eftsones embraced [his] bodie round about." In her dal-

12 Sister M. Generosa studies in detail the differences and similarities of Bottom and Lucius. She suggests that Titania's line, "Tie up my love's tongue, bring him silently" (III. i. 206), is perhaps a reminiscence of the episode in which Lucius betrays his priestly masters by braying (VIII. 29; 86). It is curious also that on his transformation into ass, Bottom fancies himself as a singer and sings a lay about various birds. Before his transformation, Lucius expects to be transformed into an owl.
liance with Bottom Titania “coys” his cheeks, garlands his head with muskroses (Lucius is always seeking for a garland of roses to eat to effect his remetamorphosis into man), and kisses his “fair large ears”. As he goes to sleep, Titania declares her doting love for him, while clasping him in her woodbine embraces. The resemblances in manner are patent, the essential difference between the two episodes being that Shakespeare’s delicate scene from its first staging up to recent times has apparently conveyed to its audiences and readers no hint of forbidden lust (Jan Kott’s view presents a Shakespeare all too modern).

It is noteworthy also that on awakening from his transformation Bottom realizes that he has had a wondrous experience, which he interprets as a “most rare vision”, a dream that no man can expound: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was” (IV.i.212-214). Bottom the ass-man has seen the Fairy Queen. Lucius is more articulate about his experience, and he too has a most rare vision. In his sleep the “quee ne of heaven” appears to him in all her glory to answer his prayers for restoration to his human shape, and when he wakes he marvels at the details of his vision (XI.7; 118). Later on, in describing his initiation into the mysteries of the goddess, he will not reveal the details lest his reader’s ears and his own tongue incur the “pain of rashe curiositie” (XL.23; 123*).

The ending of the main action of the drama and the conclusion of the Psyche myth also have an extensive dreamlike correspondence. After bewildered wandering in a drooping fog (created by Puck at Oberon’s command) as black as Acheron (a common metonymy for Hades), the lovers are overcome by “death-counterfeiting sleep”; then Puck crushes the herb of true love into Lysander’s eye (III.ii.355-369; 370-463), and after the lovers are wakened by Theseus to meet their true loves, they return to Athens to enjoy a bridal blest by supernatural beings. Oberon meanwhile tells Puck that when he saw Titania in her dotage, he taunted her, and she responded with gentle patience to his mocking and yielded him the Indian boy. Then Oberon removes the hateful imperfection from her eyes, awakens her, and after music charming the lovers into yet deeper sleep he announces his intention of blessing the house of Theseus to “all fair posterity”. In the ensuing scene, Theseus quickly overrules Egeus’ earlier objection to the marriage of Hermia and Lysander and announces the nuptial feast and the imminent marriages, which in due course are blest by the fairies in their concluding song and dance.

All these events have notable parallels in the myth. After returning from Hades, Psyche opens the box given her by Proserpina for Venus, and, according to Adlington, an infernal sleep invades all her members: “and by and by she opened the boxe, where she coulde perceave no beautie nor any thing els, save onely an infernall and deadly sleepe, whiche immediately invaded all her members as sone as the boxe was uncovered, in such sort that she fel downe on the gronnde, & lay there as a sleepeinge corps” (VI.62). The Latin is yet more pertinent: “nec quicquam ibi rerum nec formositas ulla, sed infernus somnus ac vere Stygius, qui statim coperculo revelatus invadit eam crassaque soporis nebulae cunctis eius membris perfunditur et ipso ves-
tigio ipsaque semita collapsam possidet; et iacebat immobili et nihil aliud quam dormiens cadaver" (VI. 21).

In brief, Psyche was invaded by an infernal and Stygian sleep, a dense fog of sleep (crassa soporis nebula) which poured over her entire body so that she fell to the ground like a sleeping corpse (that is, in a “death-counterfeiting sleep”). Did Shakespeare remember this metaphor when he had Puck over-cast the night with the drooping fog black as Acheron, fog that helps to produce a death-counterfeiting sleep for the lovers? In any event, when Cupid comes upon Psyche in her deathlike trance, he wipes the sleep from her face, wakens her, taunts her gently about her reckless curiosity, and then goes off to arrange all things for them with Jupiter, who overcomes the objections of Venus to the marriage by making Psyche immortal at a celestial banquet attended by the gods and goddesses, the Graces, and the Muses (VI. 22-24; 62-63).

Finally, it seems possible that in evaluating the significance of his translation of Apuleius, Adlington may have influenced Shakespeare to some degree in his summing up of the fundamental meaning of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. In his preface “To the Reader,” an apologia for the apparent frivolity of the text of The Golden Ass, Adlington expresses fear lest men may scorn his work as an idle fable and himself for his attention to such trifling toys; but he finds his justification in the praiseworthy intent of the author. Through this thing of jest, he says, men may come to know their present estate and be transformed to their better selves. But listen to Adlington:

... fearinge lest the translation of this present booke (which seemeth a meere uest and fable, and a woorke woorthy to be laughed at, by reason of the vanitie of the Author, mighte be contempted & despised of all men, and so consequently, I to be had in derisio to occupy my selfe in such frivolous and trifling toyes: but on the other side, when I had throughly learned the intent of the Author, and the purpose why he invented so sportfull a uest: I was verely persuaded, that my small travell, should not onely be accepted of many, but the matter it selfe allowed, & praised of all. Wherefore I intend (God willinge) as nighe as I can, to utter and open the meaning thereof to the simple and ignorant, whereby they may not take the same, as a thing only to jest and laugh at (for the Fables of Esope & the feigninge of Poetes, weare never written for that purpose) but by the pleasauntnes therof, be rather induced to the knowledge of their present estate, and thereby trasforme them selves into the right and perfect shape of men. ... Verely under.the wrappe of this transformation, is taxed the life of mortall men, when as we suffer our minde so to be drowned in the sensuall lusts of the fleshe ... we leese wholly the use of reason and vertue (which proprely should be in man) & play the partes of brute and savage beasts" (Aii-Aiii).

It would appear that in this passage Adlington offers Shakespeare sentiments and a pattern for some of his reflections on the fundamental meaning of his drama. After their return from the woods, Theseus and Hippolyta reflect on the meaning of the fantastic adventures of the lovers. The rational Theseus is openly scornful of “these antique fables”, “these fairy toys.” Lovers and madmen, he says, imagine such fantasies, inexplicable by "cool reason". Hip-
polyta, however, perceiving a deeper meaning to the story, protests this attack on the powers of fantasy and imagination:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images
And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable.

The experiences of the lovers were not, she says, their idle imaginings, mere fables and fairy toys; the transfiguring of their minds, their spiritual metamorphoses into their right and perfect shapes, if one may adapt Adlington's phrasing, is something that hints of cosmic mystery, truly strange and admirable. In just such a mood, Apuleius tells us, the people and the religious, moved by the miracle of his transformation, wondered at the visions that had taken place in the night, attesting the favor of the goddess: "Then the people began to mervell, and the religious honored the Goddess for so evident a miracle, they wondred at the visions which they sawe in the night, and the facilitie of my reformation, whereby they rendered testimony of so great a benefite which I receaved of the Goddess" (XI. 13; 120).

In his mythic translation of the various effects of Apuleius's story, Shakespeare seems to have accepted the moral intention of Adlington's preface as a guide, for he has refined the coarseness of the original, leaving little that could offend the most delicate sensibility. Lucius, prior to his final transformation, is lustful both as man and ass. No one can imagine a more unlustful creature than Bottom. And though Titania, an unlustful Venus, brings Bottom to her bower and coys his amiable cheeks, in her way she intends to reform his grosser nature: "And I will purge thy mortal grossness so / That thou shalt like an airy spirit go" (III. i. 163-164).