VOICE, FACE AND FASCINATION: THE ART OF PHYSIOGNOMY IN *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

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Bottom: I see a voice. Now will I to the chink
To spy an I can hear my Thisbe's face.
Thisbe?

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.191–3)

The revels have begun. After long rehearsals, the artisans finally perform their play in honour of Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding: 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth' (5.1.56–7). The play within the play provides a comic reflection of the communication situation in the theatre insofar as it creates another space-within-a-space wherein observers observe other observers observing.¹ But, as Theseus notices ("Merry" and "tragical"? "Tedious" and "brief"? (5.1.58)), it also reconciles the irreconcilable: it makes the tragic comic; it makes visible what can only be heard; and it disembodies what can usually only be seen.

In the following, I will take up Bottom's cue and provide new perspectives on voices and faces as well as their interaction and translation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As I will argue, much of the fascination with this specific play derives from the complex physiognomic discourse it reveals and with which it engages its audience(s).

I. THE ART OF PHYSIOGNOMY: ATTUNING THE EYE

The apparent confusion of eye and ear, which Bottom presents while playing Pyramus, is most prominent in his earlier reflections on his dream, which exceeds representation, partly because the

senses are awkwardly mismatched: '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' (4.1.208–11). Bottom's parodic garbling of the biblical text from 1 Corinthians (2:9–10) has been read as a refusal of 'St Paul's easy supernaturalism, with dualistic split between flesh and spirit'.² First and foremost, however, it complements the characteristic acting style of the artisans, who are prone to confusions of all kinds, as indicated by Quince's mispunctuated prologue:

If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think: we come not to offend
But with good will. (5.1.108–10)

Perhaps dreading another imperfect speech of the same category as this 'tangled chain' (5.1.124), Theseus finally curbs the amateur performance. When Bottom asks whether he would like 'to see the epilogue or to hear a bergamask dance' (5.1.346–7), he cuts the play short: 'No epilogue, I pray you' (5.1.349). Robin will eventually [a]mend what needs [a]mending by declaring all the action on-stage to be an idle vision, '[n]o more yielding but a dream' (Epilogue 6) and its actors as 'shadows' (Epilogue 1), as immaterial beings that cannot be seen – but only heard?

¹ See Dietrich Schwanitz, 'Shakespeare stereoskopisch: Die Schule des Sehens und die Optik der Praxis', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 129 (1993), 136–7.

² Harold Bloom, ed., *William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream* (New York, 2010), p. 3.

'I see a voice'. Bottom's synaesthesia exceeds the kind of mere confusion of the senses that might occur in the aftermath of a mythic experience or a vivid dream. Voices can indeed be seen, as the voice in general conveys a strong sense of presentness. As Jacques Derrida claimed,

When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that *I hear myself* [je m'entende] at the same time that I speak. The signifier, animated by my breath and by my meaning-intention . . . is in absolute proximity to me. The living act, the life-giving act, the *Lebendigkeit*, which animates the body of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression, the soul of language, seems not separate from itself, from its own self-presence.³

While we can imagine a number of situations and constellations where Derrida's assertion fails (one of the most significant for the theatre being the ability to alter one's voice deliberately, to 'make it strange'⁴), the voice accompanies visual presence. This is especially compelling in an age unfamiliar with techniques for recording or transporting a disembodied voice.

But it is also the case in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that voices are always embodied and thus visible for the audience: we have witnessed Bottom's dream; Thisbe is on-stage when Bottom-as-Pyramus announces he will 'hear my Thisbe's face' (5.1.192); and even though Theseus refuses to 'see the epilogue' (5.1.346), he ends up watching the dance performed by Bottom and Flute. In their last appearance on-stage, the working-class weaver, who is transformed into one of the most memorable and hilarious visual images in Shakespeare's plays, and Flute, the bellows-maker, whose name is the most acoustic of all characters in the play, join forces in the panopticon or panacousticon of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a non-verbal, musical act of communication: they dance before they exit the play not to appear again.

While some critics have argued for the preference of the ear over the eye as mode of perception in early modern theatres, given the lack of decoration on 'the empty stage' (Peter Brook), Shakespeare's audiences came not only to hear, but also

to see a play.⁵ In particular the architecture of the Globe allowed spectators a full view of actors' faces which offered a complex paratext in support of Shakespeare's word scenery. The gripping effect of this non-verbal communication was described by a spectator who watched a performance of *Othello* in September 1610. As he recalls, 'that famous Desdemona killed before us by her husband, although she always acted her whole part supremely well, yet when she was killed, she was even more moving, for when she fell back upon the bed she implored the pity of the spectators by her very face'.⁶ The face is the key medium of communication both in the theatre and in everyday life. In Shakespeare's time, its legibility was proverbial: due to the immediacy with which emotions are translated onto the facial surface, it was deemed to be the index of the mind,⁷ superior to verbal communication and more eloquent because it continues to 'speak' long after words have faded.

It is debatable, however, whether actors could produce various facial expressions with equal facility. A frown, a smile, an angry look – these are indeed 'actions that a man might play' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.84). When it comes to blushing, weeping, or growing pale on cue, it becomes more complicated. Tears could be produced with comparative ease, as suggested in *The Taming of the Shrew* when the boy-actor is advised to have an onion up his sleeve, whose acid will do the trick (Induction 1.122–6). Blushing, in contrast, is counted among the involuntary, somatic actions that can neither be produced nor repressed at will. The same applies to the loss of cheek colour, which results from shock,

³ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston, 1973), pp. 78–9.

⁴ See Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 11–12.

⁵ Andrew Gurr, 'Hearers and Beholders in Shakespeare's Drama', *Essays in Theatre*, 3 (1984), 30–45.

⁶ Gāmini Sālgado, *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare: First Hand Accounts of Performances 1590–1890* (London, 1975), p. 30.

⁷ See Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: The Art of Physiognomy in European Culture 1470–1780* (Oxford, New York, 2005), pp. 198 and 218; R. W. Dent, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 105.

surprise or fear, and is regarded as inimitable. Skin colour, such as the alabaster face or constant red cheeks, could be rendered by resorting to face-painting, a highly criticized, yet extremely popular practice at the time. It had Queen Elizabeth I as its most prominent exemplar: she is said to have taken great pains to keep her face *semper eadem* as an emblem of eternal youth.⁸ In contrast, the sudden change of skin colour, such as in ‘this silent war of lilies and of roses’ (*Lucrece*, 71), exceeded both artificial representation and wilful enactment.

In keeping with Shakespeare’s theatre of language, these essentially non-verbal expressions are verbalized on stage. Hence, Lysander purports to see a change in Hermia’s face after Theseus’s decree that forbids them to marry: ‘Why is your cheek so pale? / How chance the roses there do fade so fast?’ (1.1.128–9). Disregarding these physical limitations, actors were well-trained and must have been able successfully to ‘frame [their] face[s] to [almost] all occasions’ (3 *Henry VI*, 3.2.185). When this was not the case, all was not lost, as the audience was also trained to ‘piece out [actors’] imperfections with [their] thoughts’, as suggested in the prologue to *Henry V* (Prol. 23). Further, there might have been instances in which the physical and verbal texts were deliberately mismatched. Especially in the comedies, the effect of an intentionally repressed representation of a facial expression that could be conjured effortlessly but fails to show on the actor’s face – or, conversely, the effect of any additional expressions that lie ‘out of [his] text’ (*Twelfth Night*, 1.5.222) – would have not only triggered laughter, but also heightened the metatheatrical awareness of the audience, who, in all of Shakespeare’s plays, are constantly reminded that they are witnessing a performance.

Shakespeare’s Globe provided the perfect arena for actors to do things with faces: just as the audience could scrutinize actors’ features, actors could infer reactions to their performance from the faces of spectators. Hence Shakespeare’s theatre enabled immediate feedback through facial expressions while providing the breeding ground for what theatre critics attacked as emotional contagion and infection through the eyes. The latter is anticipated

by Bottom when he imagines his histrionic powers in the role of Pyramus: ‘That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I will move stones’ (*Dream*, 1.2.21–3).

As a playwright who was not only concerned with the art of character portrayal, but who was an actor himself, Shakespeare must have taken a natural interest in psychophysiological and physiognomic theories of the time. While none of his characters is explicitly linked to the pseudo-science as, for instance, the Cardinal in John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612–13) of whom Bosola wonders, ‘[d]oth he study physiognomy?’ (1.2.152), Shakespeare obliquely acknowledges physiognomic theories in *The Rape of Lucrece* when Lucrece admires the portraits of Ajax and Ulysses: ‘O what art / Of physiognomy might one behold! / The face of either ciphered either’s heart’ (1394–6). In portraiture, poetry and prose, and especially in the theatre, physiognomy is an indispensable tool for character construction. But theatre uniquely combines distinct modes of communication (verbal, visual and acoustic) and provides an arena in which playwrights and actors can experiment with the promise and the limits of facial rhetoric.

As I have argued elsewhere,⁹ Shakespeare’s drama is suffused with physiognomic knowledge. Fleeting emotions, such as blushing, trembling, smiling or blanching are frequently described together with the processes of transformation from the inside to the outside, and the challenges of rendering them. Shakespeare’s descriptions of facial expressions reached such a level of perfection that

⁸ For face-painting, see Annette Drew-Bear, *Painted Faces on the Renaissance Stage: The Moral Significance of Face-Painting Conventions* (Lewisburg, 1994); for the face of Elizabeth I see Anna Riehl, *The Face of Power: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I* (Chicago, 2007).

⁹ Sibylle Baumbach, *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy* (Tirril and Leicester, 2008) and ‘Let me behold thy face’: *Physiognomik und Gesichtslektüren in Shakespeares Tragödien* (Heidelberg, 2007). For a discussion of facial evidence in *Othello*, see also Michael Neill, ‘The Look of Othello’, *Shakespeare Survey* 62 (Cambridge, 2009), 104–22.

Charles Darwin quoted from his plays to support his own discoveries. Thus in his ground-breaking study *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), he praised the dramatist as ‘an excellent judge’ with ‘wonderful knowledge of the human mind’.¹⁰ While references to facial expressions in Shakespeare primarily served as implied stage directions (thus faces could indeed be ‘heard’), they also contributed to the physiognomic discourse of the time. They reflected the accepted physiognomic knowledge in early modern culture while serving to support, challenge or subvert popular physiognomic beliefs.

Physiognomic inference rests on the assumption that the exterior of the human body signifies specific traits, which by nature or habit leave their traces on the corporeal surface. While the face was the key object of physiognomic scrutiny, due to the complexity and versatility of its expressions, physiognomists examined the whole body, including static and dynamic (or, as they were referred to in the late eighteenth century, ‘pathognomic’) features. As defined in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica* (fourth century BC), the first physiognomic treatise, physiognomy explores ‘movements, gestures of the body, colour, characteristic facial expression, the growth of the hair, the smoothness of skin, the voice, conditions of the flesh, the parts of the body, and the build of the body as a whole’.¹¹

The sixteenth century experienced a renaissance of physiognomic thought and theory, stimulated by the increased interest in portraiture and strategies of self-fashioning, as encouraged in conduct books and manuals of rhetoric.¹² Numerous treatises were published that provided practical tools for the deciphering of man, including Thomas Hill’s *The Contemplation of Mankind* (1571) and Giambattista della Porta’s *De humana physiognomonica* (1586). However, possession of ‘expert’ knowledge about the signification of facial and bodily expression was a double-edged sword, as physiognomy aided not only the decoding of the face and body, but also their encoding. Thomas Wright, for instance, draws attention to the great potential of facial rhetoric, which, as he laments, has not yet been adequately recognized by

his countrymen, who show a ‘naturall inclination to Vertue and honestie’. In his *The Passions of the Minde* (1603), therefore, he aims at teaching them ‘a certaine politique craftinesse’, which allows them to control and alter their countenances ‘by wit and will’.¹³

This is also the craft for facial composition in Shakespeare’s plays. His most astute characters show a firm command of the ‘art / Of physiognomy’ (*Lucrece*, 1394–5), exploiting it to manipulate, as Richard Gloucester does, when he prides himself on his talent to ‘smile, and murder whiles I smile’ (3 *Henry VI*, 3.2.182).¹⁴ Even if the art of physiognomy is initially dismissed as unreliable and deceptive, it emerges as a highly valuable tool for deciphering characters. Contrary to Duncan’s claim – ‘There’s no art / To find the mind’s construction in the face’ (*Macbeth*, 1.4.11–12) – which is almost immediately countered by the cunning facial rhetoric of the Macbeths, there is an ‘art / Of physiognomy’. The stress, however, is on the word ‘art’, the ‘artifice’ or ‘artistry’, which is indispensable for successful face-reading. As Levinus Lemnius confirms, ‘in such as are marked with some visible note, Art finds out the truth’.¹⁵

In Shakespeare’s plays, it is not the mere description of physiognomic features that is significant, but the manner in which these features are delivered,

¹⁰ See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. Francis Darwin (London, 1989), p. 285.

¹¹ Ps.-Aristotle, *Physiognomonica*, 806a25 (Aristotle, *Minor Works*, trans. W. S. Hett (London and Cambridge, MA, 1936)).

¹² For a survey of the physiognomic discourse towards the end of the sixteenth century see Sibylle Baumbach, ‘Physiognomy’, in *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2010), 582–97.

¹³ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London, 1620), p. 149.

¹⁴ Cf. Michael Torrey, ‘“The plain devil and dissembling looks”: Ambivalent Physiognomy and Shakespeare’s *Richard III*’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 30 (2000), 123–53. For further examples, see Baumbach, *Art of Physiognomy*, esp. pp. 125–78.

¹⁵ Levinus Lemnius, *The secret miracles of nature in four books* (London, 1658), p. 130.

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disclosed, and discussed on-stage. Face-readings are enacted in and as performance. Their validity ultimately depends on the physiognomic competence of the reader as well as on the legibility of the face that is being read. Consequently, relational contexts – who reads whom, who translates faces into words, and whose face is subjected to physiognomic scrutiny – shed new light on characterization strategies, power relations, and the (de)construction of gender in the plays. They illuminate concepts of performance, self-fashioning and the conditions of the theatre, which are reflected in Shakespeare's meta-discourse on physiognomy.

2. WHAT'S IN A FACE?

In a play where visions are blurred, giving way to imaginary forces – 'How easy is a bush supposed a bear!' (5.1.22) – and fairies dominate the stage, there seems little room for any facial or bodily descriptions. As Henry Morley argued, '[e]very reader of Shakespeare is disposed to regard the *Midsummer Night's Dream* as the most essentially unactable of all his plays . . . its characters are creatures of the poet's fancy that no flesh and blood can properly present'.¹⁶ This notion of unrepresentability accords with William Hazlitt's severe criticism of the nineteenth-century illusionist stage and his indignation over the 'full-grown, well-fed, substantial, real fairies'¹⁷ he encountered at the Theatre Royal, in a production by Frederic Reynolds in 1816. They are, after all, meant to be nothing but 'shadows' (Epilogue 1) that evaporate as soon as the final words of Robin's epilogue have faded. It is due to their gossamer, 'invisible' (2.1.186) being that we receive little information on their outer appearance, but have to content ourselves with their names – Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, Mustardseed, which suggest non-human, abstract forms – and their voices, which we 'see' and follow (*Robin*, 'Follow my voice' (3.2.413)). Instead, we become more finely attuned to the properties of other characters, such as the artisans and the lovers, who exhibit corporeal presence on-stage. The lovers seem especially palpable:

they chase and embrace each other, and they fight, 'facing' each other.

When Hermia and Helena meet in the woods, they engage in a physiognomic combat. In a play where almost everyone addresses everyone else as 'fair',¹⁸ fairness seems to have come to an end. Hermia attacks Helena's weak spot:

Hermia. Fie, fie, you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

Helena. Puppet? Why, so! Ay, that way goes the game . . .

And are you grown so high in his esteem

Because I am so dwarfish and so low?

How low am I, thou painted maypole? (3.2.289–97)

The two women are rivals in love as well as in physiognomy. Difference in size is a feature that we find repeatedly in Shakespeare's female characters: in Rosalind and Celia, one being 'more than common tall' (*As You Like It*, 1.3.114), the other rather 'low' (4.3.88); in Hero, whom Benedick describes as 'too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise' (*Much Ado*, 1.1.163–5), and in Beatrice, a role which, like Helena's, calls for an actor who is fair and tall.¹⁹ Rather than type-casting, Shakespeare tailored these roles to two boys of his company, who embodied these opposites perfectly. One is said to have been tall and cheeky, and the other rather diminutive and reserved.²⁰

While Shakespeare's plays are mainly concerned with the discursivation (in the Foucauldian sense of the term) of physiognomy, which involves engaging the audience in physiognomic (counter-) readings, we find some instances of physiognomic

¹⁶ Henry Morley, *The Journal of a London Playgoer from 1851 to 1866* (London, 1866), p. 66.

¹⁷ William Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage* (London, 1818), p. 81.

¹⁸ Thus 'fair Hippolyta' (1.1.1), 'fair Hermia' (1.1.117), 'fair Helena' (3.2.247), '[f]air lovers' (4.1.176), 'fair ladies' (3.1.36), 'fair Pyramus' (5.1.188).

¹⁹ See John C. Meagher, *Pursuing Shakespeare's Dramaturgy: Some Contexts, Resources, and Strategies in His Playmaking* (London, 2003), p. 183.

²⁰ See Helmut Castrop, 'Das elisabethanische Theater', in *Shakespeare Handbuch: Die Zeit – Der Mensch – Das Werk – Die Nachwelt*, ed. Ina Schabert (Stuttgart, 2000), p. 111.

stereotyping, as, for instance, in Rosalind's portrayal of a man in love (*As You Like It*, 3.2.361–4). Distinct, static physiognomic features, are referred to for three main purposes: (1) to create antagonisms, such as between Helena and Hermia; (2) to prepare an anagnorisis, which is often accompanied by a face-reading²¹ or its comic inversion, as in *Twelfth Night* where brother and sister identify each other by their shared knowledge of their father's mole (5.1.240–1); and (3) to establish genealogical relations that are revealed by the father's signature or 'imprint' on a face. Thus, in *All's Well That Ends Well*, the King links Bertram to his father, by both face and character: 'thou bear'st thy father's face . . . / Thy father's moral parts / Mayst thou inherit, too' (1.2.19–22).

Most *personae*, however, seem to play against the 'character' that has been designed for them. Within the dynamics of code-making and code-breaking, which is fuelled by cross-dressing, masking and self-fashioning, physiognomic clues emerge as a valuable tool for tracing processes of (self-) authorization. While the power of inscription and thus of creating 'characters' (the 'imprinted') has been traditionally attributed to man, who leaves his imprint on the (female) body, whereas women serve as interfaces in the process of creation, as passive receptors that follow and reproduce male scripts, Shakespeare's women run against their 'texts', gaining authority over their own bodies and faces. This process of authorization is at the heart of the conflict that sets off the action in *Dream*. Theseus reminds Hermia that it is not within her power to refuse her father's will:

To you your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax,
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it. (1.1.47–51)

Hermia disobeys. Rebellious against paternal authority, she refuses to marry Demetrius and elopes with her beloved Lysander. After this upheaval against the determination of character, characters are set in motion: they are disguised, enacted, adopted and adapted, changed and

exchanged, and also, as we will see in the case of Bottom, eventually overcome.

The 'translation' of Bottom into an ass-headed man, which symbolizes the 'continuous flow of human-animal, animal-human "translations"'²² in Shakespeare's plays and marks a pivotal point in *Dream*, is the comic epitome of physiognomy. It stands in the tradition of the zoomorphic method of character-reading, which was first presented in detail in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica* and expanded by Hill, della Porta, and later also Charles Le Brun. Zoomorphism seeks to determine the human character by exploring analogies between the physical appearances of man and animal. The inference is straightforward: as the lion is associated with power, liberality and magnanimity, leonine features, such as a deep voice and full hair indicate a strong, just mind. The ass, on the other hand, was deemed idle, dull and arrogant. Consequently, a long face, extremely big ears, thick lips, protruding eyes and an unpleasant, deformed voice, point to a dull and languid mind,²³ as suggested in della Porta's woodcut that shows an ass's head and its human counterpart side by side (see Illustration 1).

In Shakespeare's *Dream*, we find these parallel physiognomies incorporated in Bottom, who seems smooth-faced – in contrast to Flute who claims to have 'a beard coming' (1.2.43–4) and has to play in a mask, Bottom has to beard himself for his role²⁴ – but finds himself to be 'marvellous hairy about the face' (4.1.24–5) after his translation. Moreover, Bottom claims that he can aggravate his 'monstrous' (1.2.48) voice into a frightening roar, and a great voice was seen 'as a sign of stupidity . . . irascibility, [and] often equated with an ass'.²⁵ Finally, Bottom's tendency to overestimate his acting capabilities combined with his

²¹ See *Measure*, 5.1.201.

²² Andreas Höfele, *Stage, Stake & Scaffold: Humans & Animals in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Oxford, 2011), p. 35.

²³ See *Scriptores Physiognomici Graeci et Latini*, ed. Richard Foerster (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1994), pp. 137–8.

²⁴ Will Fisher, 'The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 183–4.

²⁵ Porter, *Windows*, p. 178.

1. Giambattista della Porta, *De humana physiognomonia libri IIII* (1586).

ill-command of language, which is suggested by the numerous malapropisms, carefully prepare his transmutation into an emblem of folly, which in early modern iconology featured an ass.²⁶

Regarding Bottom's characterization in the play, his 'translation' is almost the logical consequence. In fact, considering Michael Porter's remarks about 'the innate, iconic nature of the language of physiognomy',²⁷ it is quite likely that the audience has not only heard but also, to a certain extent, seen Bottom's ass-face, even before the transformation takes place. In his example, Porter refers to the widespread physiognomic association of an aquiline nose with magnanimity: 'given the frequency with which the aquiline nose was described as a sign of magnanimity in the early modern period', he writes, 'magnanimity itself would often have been automatically visually represented before the early modern mind's eye in the form of an image of an aquiline nose'.²⁸ The same might be claimed for the association of folly and stupidity with features of an ass – an image as latently present in early modern culture as the connection between magnanimity and the aquiline nose.

Having heard and seen his ass's face, the audience is urged by Bottom – awakening from his 'dream' – to qualify their perception: 'The eye of man hath

not heard, the ear of man hath not seen . . . what my dream was . . . It shall be called "Bottom's Dream", because it hath no bottom' (4.1.208–13). We are reminded of another lover here, of Romeo who, when Juliet disappears from the balcony, ponders the nature of his vision: 'I am afeard, / Being in night, all this is but a dream, / Too flattering-sweet to be substantial' (*Romeo*, 2.1.181–3). Romeo's dream comes true. And Bottom's? Does it have no bottom because it was too 'flattering-sweet'? The (prognostic?) meaning of the dream cannot be determined: 'Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream' (4.1.204). Nonetheless, Bottom determines to have it captured in writing. The realization and re-mediatization of his dream, however, does not end here: 'I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream' (4.1.211–12) – a ballad that Bottom intends to give a voice to immediately after its composition: 'I will sing it in the latter end

²⁶ See Joseph Rosenblum, 'Why an Ass? Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* as a Source for Bottom's Translation', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 32 (1981), 357–9. Deborah Baker Wyrick, 'The Ass Motif in *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33 (1982), 432–48.

²⁷ Porter, *Windows*, p. 228.

²⁸ Porter, *Windows*, pp. 228–9.

of a play' (4.1.213–14). Hence, while the weaver refuses to tell his friends about his experience ('Not a word of me' (4.2.30)), 'Bottom's Dream' has a 'Bottom', a voice that can be seen on-stage.

While it is suggested that Bottom's character remains unvarying throughout his (re-)translation – 'when thou wak'st with thine own fool's eyes peep' (4.1.83) – the asinity of this 'fooleosopher'²⁹ needs to be qualified. As Peter Holland remarks, Bottom cannot be reduced to a 'foolish, vain, and arrogant' character: 'he is also gentle, lovable, and admirable. The comedy lies in the disjunction between himself and the circumstances in which he finds himself, his existence beyond the bounds of his own competence.'³⁰ As ambitious actor, Bottom, the weaver, is out of his text: he fools about in a métier that is not his – just like the audience who have put down their tools and suspended their work to participate in the theatrical event.

The danger of reducing a character to a set of features which seem dominant in a particular situation is a problem inherent in the art of physiognomy. Physiognomic treatises, therefore, stress the necessity to consider not only individual features, but also the way which they interact with each other. Even then, the possibility of misreading persists, as indicated by Socrates, a prominent example of physiognomic misreading. As the story goes, the Syrian physiognomist Zopyrus, unaware of Socrates's identity, diagnosed him as dull and imbecile from his bulbous nose, protuberant eyes, bulky lips and overall Silenic appearance. Socrates defended this reading, but claimed to have overcome his natural disposition by reason.³¹ Henceforth he was deemed an exception to the rule or, as Michel de Montaigne writes in his essay 'On Physiognomy': 'nature did him wrong'.³² Bottom is not a second Socrates but the idea behind his transformation is the same: physiognomy is a tool that needs to be cautiously applied and scrutinized. It is an art of translation, in the process of which one or two misprints might creep in.

As David Marshall argued, the entire play is devoted to the question of representation: 'The question of the play is whether presenting and representing must mean misrepresenting; whether

figure must be synonymous with *disfigure*.'³³ The linchpin here is, of course, Bottom. Referred to as 'paramour' and 'paragon' 'for a sweet voice' (4.2.12–13), which amounts to 'a neat conflation of sexiness and exemplariness';³⁴ self-fashioned as multi-faced and -voiced actor; cast as 'sweet-faced' Pyramus, 'a most lovely, gentlemanlike man' (1.2.80–1) (information that causes Bottom to contemplate his choice of beard, as the beard had an important semiotic function, both as 'natural Ensigne of Manhood'³⁵ and 'ensigne of majesty'³⁶); used as a medium for Oberon's playful revenge on Titania, and translated into the ass-headed lover of the fairy queen, Bottom emerges as both the agent and the subject of figuration and disfiguration. His physiognomic disfigurement does not end with the release from the ass's head. It continues in the play-within-the-play, which is deeply engaged in the process of figuration and disfiguration. The tragic story of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', which is dramatized in *Romeo and Juliet* (a play which in turn anticipates the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Mercutio's image of Queen Mab) and translated into the genre of comedy in *Dream*, awaits further transformation in the amateur performance: it stages the translation of Bottom into the role of Pyramus, and also includes another disfiguration of the 'sweet-faced' lover, sparked by a

²⁹ See Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Sir Thomas Chaloner (London, 1965), p. 10.

³⁰ Peter Holland, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Oxford, 2008), p. 81.

³¹ Cf. Cicero, *De Fato* 10; Plato, *Symposium* 215b and *Apology* 21a.

³² *Montaigne's Essays*, trans. John Florio, vol. 3 (London and New York, 1910), p. 314. See also Thomas Hill, *The Contemplation of Mankind* (London, 1571), fo. x–xi; Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metoposcopia* (London, 1653), p. 144.

³³ David Marshall, 'Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *ELH*, 49 (1982), 546.

³⁴ Ronda Arab, *Manly Mechanicals on Shakespeare's Stage* (Selinsgrove, 2011), p. 112.

³⁵ John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis* (London, 1654), p. 193.

³⁶ Helkiah Crooke, *A Description of the Body of Man: The second Edition Corrected and Enlarged* (London, 1631), p. 70. See also Fisher, 'Renaissance Beard', p. 172.

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face-reading: 'Asleep, my love? / What, dead, my dove? / ... These lily lips, / This cherry nose, / These yellow cowslip cheeks / Are gone, are gone' (5.1.319–28). This comic inversion of the lethal misreading that leads to the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*, when Romeo fatally misinterprets signs of life on Juliet's face (5.3.94–102), offers a description that fits a heroine, not a hero. Flute-as-Thisbe picks the wrong colours only to misapply them to the wrong features: 'Lily', often as 'lily-pale', is usually connected to skin colour, 'cherry' to lips, 'yellow' to hair, and the cowslip is completely out of place. Figuring or, rather, disfiguring the hero of the play in this *contre-blason*, tragedy transforms into comedy and the desire for physiognomic *evidentia* is again parodied. Considering the broader picture in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, physiognomy is not lost in translation. Rather the opposite is the case as both the meta-theatrical dimension and Bottom's metamorphosis direct our attention to faces which we might have missed.

It is especially the notion of in-betweenness, created by an action which moves between different levels of stage reality and illusion, between Athens, governed by the tight reign of rational Theseus, the theatrical world of amateur performance and the 'green world' where imagination rules, that provides the perfect setting for comparing and contrasting opposing perspectives on this pseudo-science. Bottom's translatability carries to extremes what is a governing principle of nature. In this play particularly, physiognomy is intertwined with the notion of *magia naturalis*, which is conveyed through images of an anthropomorphic nature, whose character is rendered in physiognomic terms ('O grim-looking night' (5.1.168)). Titania's portrayal of nature is a case in point:

the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard . . .
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger washes all the air . . .
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: 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 mock'ry, set. (2.1.94–111)

Titania's quarrel with Oberon over the 'little changeling boy' (2.1.120) has left visible marks: 'These are the forgeries of jealousy' (2.1.81). Nature is about to lose its countenance as well as its temper. The corn has withered before maturity, the scattered frosty hairs of old Winter are mocked by the harbingers of spring, and the moon is outraged by what she sees on earth.

Advocates of physiognomic inference frequently stressed its connection to natural magic. Beyond Aristotle, one of the most influential proponents of this association was Giambattista della Porta. Following his *Magia naturalis sive de miraculis rerum naturalium* (1558), he wrote the highly successful *De humana physiognomonica* (1586), before turning to the physiognomy of plants in *Phytognomonica* (1588). Della Porta's observations are based on the doctrine of signatures and thus on the assumption that all elements of nature offer external signs that hold clues about their properties. Presenting physiognomy as the art to disclose these natural signatures and unlock the secret of Nature, he aims at distinguishing this art from any kind of charlatanism. Following Ps.-Aristotle, he embeds it within a scientific context to rehabilitate the pseudo-science, defy its bad press and pre-empt censorship.³⁷

Moving between the rational world of Athens, the world of the theatre and the magical world of the fairies, physiognomy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be seen as reflecting opposing views of this practice, which was degraded as mantic, divinatory art by some, and even prohibited at times,³⁸ while praised as 'lawdable science' by others.³⁹

³⁷ See William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 210–14.

³⁸ James I and IV, *The first Daemonologie*, ed. George B. Harrison (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 21–2. In 1597, Elizabeth I decreed that whoever claimed 'to have knowledge in Physiognomye Palmestry or other like crafty Scyence' shall be punished in public (39 Eliz. I c. 3 [1597]).

³⁹ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 2.

Thus is born the notion of *magia naturalis*, which suffuses the play and serves to bridge and reconcile these divergent perspectives.

In particular the moon, ‘th’inconstant moon’ (*Romeo*, 2.1.151), remains a prominent image throughout the play, which takes on many names and many forms: it is not only embodied in the performance of the mechanicals (and thus cannot only be seen but also heard) but emerges as an instrumental player. It decelerates the ‘nuptial hour’ (*Dream*, 1.1.1) of Theseus and Hippolyta by allowing sufficient time for the four young lovers’ journey into the green world (‘Four happy days bring in / Another moon – but O, methinks, how slow / This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires’ (1.1.2–4)); serves as guide to Hermia and Lysander who plan to elope ‘when Phoebe doth behold / Her silver visage in the wat’ry glass’ (1.1.209–10); and comments on the strange doings on earth: ‘The moon, methinks, looks with a wat’ry eye, / And when she weeps, weeps every little flower, / Lamenting some enforcèd chastity’ (3.1.190–2). It is debatable whether the moon’s tears, which Titania refers to in this scene, mourn chastity violated by force, as a lunar Diana should, or whether the moon is lamenting a compelled preservation of chastity, as would become a ‘more amorous Luna or Selene’,⁴⁰ or Phoebe, as she is referred to in the play. While in either case, tears clearly signify distress, the uncertainty as to whether they imply a chaste or amorous moon complements the ambivalence inherent in many physiognomic features, including tears, which – depending on their context – can convey quite different meanings. In performance, these gaps in the visual or verbal text are filled by non-verbal actions on-stage, which make one reading more plausible than another. Titania’s instruction to her fairies certainly allows for a reading of this scene in ‘the most erotic of Shakespeare’s plays’,⁴¹ as preparing the overcoming of ‘enforcèd chastity’: ‘Tie up my love’s tongue; bring him silently’ (3.1.193).

Even if tongue-tied, the ass-headed Bottom will continue to ‘speak’. Having heard, or rather read, a lot about faces, let us now revisit Bottom’s remark,

which was quoted at the beginning, and start ‘seeing’ voices.

3. WHAT’S IN A VOICE?

In physiognomic manuals, voice is ranked among the key components of analysis.⁴² It not only delivers the body of language but is deemed as the most perceptible and most obvious trace of the body in language. Its particular texture, rhythms, tone, volume, tunes and dynamics carry information about the gender, age and character of its bearer. Hence, a shrill, high-pitched voice indicates an ‘yreful’⁴³ person who is ‘unstable, and vaine’.⁴⁴ A voice ‘small and lowe’, on the other hand, marks ‘a creature to be fearefull and envious’.⁴⁵ A hasty one indicates wickedness; loud voices reveal ‘talkative, bolde, and contentious’⁴⁶ characters; ‘[t]he creature with a verie bigge voice, is noted to be a servant, unto his owne belly’;⁴⁷ and those blessed with a ‘slowe, and bigge sounde of the voyce’, are considered ‘to be quiet, tractable, gentle, merie [and] verie iust’.⁴⁸

Shakespeare was aware of this signifying quality, as suggested in Jacques’s portrayal of the seven ages of man, in which the voice plays a prominent part: from the infant’s ‘[m]ewling’, the ‘whining school-boy’, ‘the lover, [s]ighing like furnace’ to the soldier that is ‘[f]ull of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard’, ‘justice, / In fair round belly... / With eyes severe and beard of formal cut’, and the ‘big, manly voice, / Turning again toward childish treble, pipes / And whistles in his sound’. Both the body of

⁴⁰ James L. Calderwood, ‘A *Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Anamorphism and Theseus’ Dream’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 421.

⁴¹ Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (Garden City, 1964), p. 212.

⁴² Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 131–7.

⁴³ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 135.

⁴⁴ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 135.

⁴⁵ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 134.

⁴⁶ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 135.

⁴⁷ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 136.

⁴⁸ Hill, *Contemplation*, fo. 134.

the voice and the voice's body change substantially until the wheel comes full circle in 'second childishness and mere oblivion, / [s]ans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything' (*As You Like It*, 2.7.144–66).

On the theatrical stage as in the *theatrum mundi*, one of the most immediate functions of the voice is identification. 'Who's there?' (*Hamlet* 1.1.1): the opening question of *Hamlet* requires no name, only a voice. 'Long live the King!' – 'Barnado?' (1.1.3). It is especially in scenes set at night that Shakespeare relies on the voice's kinetic qualities, which explains the prominence of the voice in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where '[d]ark night, that from the eye his function takes, / The ear more quick of apprehension makes' (3.2.178–9). The setting of many scenes at night and the magical events in the Athenian woods are impediments to vision, and the counter-illusionistic play within the play sets the stage for a voice to be 'seen'.

Bottom-cum-Pyramus is separated from his beloved by a wall when he purports to 'see a voice' (5.1.191). Indeed, he must have heard Flute-as-Thisbe lamenting her separation from her lover to the same wall, 'My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones, / Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee' (5.1.189–90). The references to facial features not only prepare for Pyramus's impression of 'seeing' a face, but also point to the visual paratext which accompanies these words. With Snout representing the Wall, not only the audience but also Pyramus must have had a good view of Thisbe. Imagine the scene in performance: it would have had a comic effect if Bottom-as-Pyramus asserted to have 'heard' instead of 'seen' Thisbe's voice, as he is almost facing Flute-as-Thisbe, because the imperfectly disguised Snout, who embodies the Wall, could hardly screen him from view. The fact that he goes on claiming to 'hear a face' can also be easily explained. During the casting, Flute complained about being assigned the role of Thisbe because he lacks the smooth skin required to play a female role: 'Nay, faith, let not me play a woman. I have a beard coming' (1.2.43–4). Quince promptly offers a solution: 'You shall play it in a mask, and

you may speak as small as you will' (1.2.45–6). These visors, however, are farcical as their potential for concealment is eroded by the players who are anxious to spotlight the fictitiousness of their masks. For their subversion, Bottom provides the text:

Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck, and he himself must speak through, saying thus or to the same defect: 'ladies', or 'fair ladies . . . If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing. I am a man, as other men are.' (3.1.33–40)

We do not know what Flute's mask looked like; it might only have been a half-mask. In this case, it would not solve the problem. If it was a full mask, however, Thisbe's 'face' would have lacked mobility and therefore required verbal communication. Simultaneously, the repeated confusion of hearing and seeing underscores the counter-illusionistic mode of the artisans' performance while serving as an instruction to the audience to sharpen their eyes and attune their ears not only to what can be 'heard' or 'seen' on Shakespeare's stage, but also to what happens in translation from one to the other.

On an (almost) empty theatrical stage, the actor's voice together with his body is the key medium of communication. It translates the script penned by the playwright and sets its 'characters', in the literal sense of the word, in motion, by materializing or dematerializing them through performance. Flute's 'small' (1.2.46), probably high-pitched voice seems perfect for his role. What Shakespeare's Cleopatra is dreading – to be impersonated by '[s]ome squeaking Cleopatra' (*Antony*, 5.2.216) – Thisbe's character has to endure. Again, the question of whether Flute does a good job in presenting his lines in an adequately small voice or, as in Michael Hoffman's movie production of 1999, fails and becomes a laughing-stock, is another issue and depends on directors' choices. Even though Flute's aptness for a female role suggests a treble voice, his name implies a variety of tones and tunes, provided that its bearer knows the technique and is

able to play.⁴⁹ Quite unlike Bottom's. And yet, Bottom's enthusiasm about acting is bottomless. Lover or tyrant, human or animal, man or woman – he wants to play them all and justifies the broad spectrum of adequate roles by referring to the great variability of his voice: 'let me play Thisbe too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: "Thisne, Thisne!"' (1.2.47–8); 'Let me play the lion too. I will roar that I will do any man's heart good to hear me' (1.2.66–7). On Quince's objection that his roar might frighten the ladies in the audience, Bottom immediately tries to qualify his 'monstrous' voice, but achieves the opposite when he promises, 'I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove. I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale' (1.2.76–8).

Bottom's frequent malapropisms subvert his proclaimed ability to manipulate his voice according to his role. Even though the boastful weaver attests himself 'a reasonable good ear in music' (4.1.28), the image of the roaring nightingale parodies rather than supports the actor's talent to do things with voices. Hence, when Quince describes Bottom as 'a very paramour for a sweet voice' (4.2.11–12), Flute seems wrong in correcting him, '[y]ou must say "paragon"'. A paramour is, God bless us, a thing of naught' (4.2.13–14). Bottom is neither and both – he is the 'paragon' of the amateur actors and a paramour, i.e. 'a lover, . . . esp. in an affair or romance' (*OED*, 2a) of a sweet voice, of Titania the 'sweet queen' (4.1.74). The brief conversation between Quince and Flute therefore marks the transition of Bottom from Titania's paramour to the actor's paragon. Hence, Flute's demurring cannot be dismissed outright. After all, it is remarkable that Titania falls in love with Bottom's voice, not his face: 'What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed? / . . . I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again. / Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note; / So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape' (3.1.122–32). Titania sees a face through a voice; what is more, she demonstrates the concept of man as being situated somewhere between angel and animal, closer to the one or the other according to his conduct, as it was famously expressed in Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.⁵⁰ Enthralled by

Bottom's 'sweet' song, the eye follows the ear in its attraction to the ass-headed weaver: 'On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee' (3.1.134) – the ear informs the eye, the eye the voice, and reason is abandoned.

With their 'sound combat' in the casting scene, Bottom and Flute open a discourse on the quality of voices, which urges the audience to look behind the action on-stage, unveil the physiognomy of the theatre, and 'see' the mechanisms not only behind practices of cross-dressing but also of cross-voicing.

Flute-as-Thisbe's 'small' voice draws attention to the different physiological properties of the male and female vocal organs and 'the impact of sound on the performance of gender'⁵¹ while alluding to the social (in)significance of the female voice, as it is unfolded in the opening scene. According to humoral theory, women's voices are inferior to men's because their bodies lack sufficient heat to produce full and variable voices. As Lemnius writes in *The Touchstone of Complexions*,

They . . . that have hoate bodyes are of nature variable, and chau[n]geable, ready, pro[m]pt, lively, lusty, and aplyable: of tongue, trowlyng, perfect, and perswasive, delivering theyr words distinctly, plainly, and pleasauntly, with a voice therto not squeaking and slender, but streinable, comly and audible.⁵²

Audible and powerful – such is the voice of authority in Athens, which opens the play: eager to marry the defeated Amazon queen Hippolyta, Theseus sets the date and makes arrangements for their wedding, before passing judgement on Hermia's

⁴⁹ Francis Bacon already describes the flute as a musical instrument with a broad soundscape: 'In flutes, the air, issuing by a hole nearer the breath, yields a more treble sound; by one more distant, a baser' (*The Works of Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England*, ed. Basil Montagu, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1841), vol. 3, p. 540).

⁵⁰ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis et al. (Indianapolis, 1965), p. 5.

⁵¹ Gina Bloom, "'Thy Voice Squeaks': Listening for Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage", *Renaissance Drama*, 29 (1998), 39.

⁵² Levinus Lemnius, *The Touchstone of Complexions*, trans. Thomas Newton (London, 1581), fo. 46.

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refusal to accept her father's arrangements for her marriage, while his future wife – except for a short interlude – remains silent: 'Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love?' (1.1.122). The Duke of Athens has subdued the Amazon queen to his power, his will and also his voice. As Marshall has pointed out, 'her silence is an important key to the conflicts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* . . . As readers who must imagine Hippolyta represented on a stage, we must first hear her silence; we must recognise that she does not speak.'⁵³

It is in these moments of silence when the rhetoric of face and body steps in, providing a 'voice' when none can be heard. To see Hippolyta's voice is to acknowledge her presence on-stage, a silent presence that can be far more powerful than one enforced by an audible voice. In the opening scene, Hippolyta and Hermia share the same fate: they both lack voices – one is meek, the other mute. While Hippolyta does not speak, Hermia should not speak. '[W]anting [her] father's voice' (1.1.54), she is not authorized to plead for the right to marry Lysander, as her voice lacks both male value and her father's consent. It is only after both Theseus and Egeus have left that Hermia regains her voice – a voice which Helena desires to imitate.

4. THE ART OF FASCINATION

Your eyes are lodestars, and your tongue's sweet air
More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear . . .
Sickness is catching. O, were favour so! . . .
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.
Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.

(1.1.183–91)

Full of envy for Hermia's effect on both Demetrius and Lysander, Helena wants to exchange both her voice and eyes for Hermia's in order to charm Demetrius. She can 'see' the captivating quality of Hermia's voice that Egeus overlooks, because he silences his daughter. Instead, Egeus accused Lysander of having 'bewitched' her: 'Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung / With feigning voice verses of feigning love, . . . With cunning

hast thou filched my daughter's heart' (1.1.30–6). Like Othello, whom Brabantio attacks similarly, Lysander is suspected to have seduced Hermia by the power of words, more precisely by his 'feigning voice'. As it turns out, however, it is Hermia who is responsible for this infatuation,⁵⁴ which is caused both by her voice and her visage. Even before the herb juice enters the play as a device for enchantment, there seems to be something magical in the air:

For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine,
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.

(1.1.242–5)

What Helena accuses Hermia of is the art of fascination, of exerting an 'irresistibly attractive influence'⁵⁵ that has charmed Demetrius. According to early modern psychophysiology, 'heat' in the naturally cold body of women indicates 'an inclination to love others'⁵⁶ and thus supports the emanation of spirits and passions onto other bodies.⁵⁷ As suggested by Francis Bacon, fascination is caused by two powerful affections, 'which draw the spirits into the eyes . . . love, and envy'.⁵⁸ Whereas in love the eye sends out beams that enter the body of the beloved through the eyes, kindling in his heart the desire to return this affection to the body which emitted the glance, in envy the fire thus kindled is baneful, caused by the emanation of 'some malign or poisonous spirit'.⁵⁹ The power of fascination (from *fascinare* – to bewitch), therefore, was often intertwined with the notion of the

⁵³ Marshall, 'Visions', pp. 549–50.

⁵⁴ See Jay L. Halio, "'Nightingales That Roar': The Language of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", in *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 2010), p. 45.

⁵⁵ OED, 'fascination', 3.

⁵⁶ Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago, 2004), p. 161, also pp. 77–134.

⁵⁷ See Paster, *Humoring the Body*, pp. 89–90.

⁵⁸ *Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 2, p. 129.

⁵⁹ *Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 2, p. 129.

evil eye and ranked among ‘unlawfull Magicke’.⁶⁰ This magic, however, becomes natural when love is involved. As Robert Burton writes ‘love is a fascination’,⁶¹ and as love is kindled by beauty and ‘the face is beauty’s tower’, it is ‘of itself able to captivate’.⁶² Explaining ‘the manner of fascination’, Burton quotes Ficino, ‘Mortall men are then especially bewitched, when as by often gazing one on the other, they direct sight to sight, and ioyne eye to eye, and so drinke and sucke in loue betweene them, for the beginning of this disease is the Eye.’⁶³

Both love and envy abound in *Dream* and so does ocular contagion, which paves the way for a rich discourse of fascination that can be traced at verbal, visual and acoustic levels. While the voice has a certain captivating quality, ‘fascination’, as Bacon contends, ‘is ever by the eye. But yet if there be any such infection from spirit to spirit, there is no doubt but that it worketh by presence, not by the eye alone: yet most forcibly by the eye.’⁶⁴

While Helena insists that ‘[l]ove looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, / And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind’ (1.1.234–5), there is not more to love than meets the eye, especially in Shakespeare. Phoebe’s question, ‘[w]ho ever loved that loved not at first sight?’ (*As You Like It*, 3.5.83) gets to the heart of ‘[y]oung men’s love’, which, as Friar Laurence laments, ‘lies / Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes’ (*Romeo*, 2.2.67–8). The eyes serve as windows through which love and fascination enter the mind. Hence, Lysander purports to see in Helena’s eyes ‘[l]ove’s stories written in love’s richest book’ (*Dream*, 2.2.128) and Prospero observes with content that Miranda and Ferdinand ‘have changed eyes’ (*Tempest*, 1.2.445) at first sight.

In fact, in the classical tradition, Cupid was never painted blind.⁶⁵ Further, Helena herself, whose name brings to mind one of the most beautiful and fatally seductive women in cultural history, ‘the face that launched a thousand ships’,⁶⁶ does not believe in what she says. Instead she turns to Hermia, urging her to teach her this ‘art’: ‘O, teach me how you look, and with what art / You sway the motion of Demetrius’ heart’ (1.1.192–3). Helena’s demand will eventually be met, but not by

Hermia’s instructions, nor by means of a bodily transformation, but by a change in Demetrius’s eye. For this change to come to pass, the spell must be broken by removing the source of his infatuation (as Hermia promises, ‘[h]e no more shall see my face’, 1.1.202) and fascinating Demetrius anew by ‘love-in-idleness’ (2.1.168).

As Oberon tells Robin, the juice of this flower ‘on sleeping eyelids laid / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees’ (2.1.170–2). Once Robin circulates with the magic potion, Hermia’s enchanting power has vanished. What is more, those formerly infatuated by her ‘sphery’ (2.2.105), ‘bright’ (98), ‘blessèd and attractive eyes’ (97) finally see her ‘true’ face: ‘Away, you Ethiopie’ (3.2.258); ‘Out, tawny Tartar, out; / Out, loathèd med’cine; O hated potion, hence’ (3.2.264–5). Seen through eyes washed by the magic potion, Hermia’s exotic fascination fades behind her dark complexion, which was thought to indicate a corrupted mind and to be entirely unalluring. Whereas Helena’s ‘tawny’ skin seems to bar love from entering her heart, Lysander, whose true ‘marshal to [his] will’ (2.2.126) is now love-in-idleness, claims to look straight into Helena: ‘Transparent Helena, nature shows art / That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart’ (2.2.110–11). Against the sinister background provided by her former friend, Helena’s beauty shines even more brightly, which explains Lysander’s change of affection: ‘Who will not change a raven for a dove?’ (2.2.120).

It seems as if ‘the pretty flow’rets’ eyes’ (4.1.54) have absorbed Hermia’s power of fascination. This assumption is supported by the association of Hermia with Tartar and Tartar with Cupid. The

⁶⁰ Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London, 1614), p. 209.

⁶¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Democritus Junior (Philadelphia, 1857), p. 465.

⁶² Burton, *Anatomy*, p. 465.

⁶³ Burton, *Anatomy*, p. 468.

⁶⁴ *Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 2, p. 129.

⁶⁵ See Holland, ed., *Dream*, p. 14 n. 235.

⁶⁶ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.1.90 (ed. David Scott Kastan (New York and London, 2005), A-Text).

latter is exhibited in Oberon's reference to 'Cupid's archery' (3.2.103), which comes on the heels of Robin's '[s]wifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow' (3.2.101). Encapsulated between these two images stands the '[f]lower of this purple dye' (3.2.102). Once its juice, which gained its magic power from Cupid's misguided arrow, has entered Lysander's eye, there is no room for Hermia: 'Out, tawny Tartar, out.' These changes in agents and subjects of fascination are mediated by periods of sleep and dream, in which the mind can process impressions gathered during waking hours. In this time of transition, Hermia suffers from a nightmare that translates her loss into the image of a snake: 'Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best / To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast! / . . . Methought a serpent ate my heart away' (2.2.151–5). Serpents were associated with both apotropaic and lethal powers; they were attributed the greatest power of fascination, as epitomized by the basilisk that kills by a glance. Serpents were believed to petrify their prey, paralyzing it by their lethal gaze, holding it mute and unmoving before its death.⁶⁷ Hermia's association with a serpentine character is further supported by Lysander, who, 'freed' from her spell, threatens her, 'let loose, / Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent' (3.2.261–2). Despite forfeiting her fascination, which seems to have been sucked out by a new 'serpent', love-in-idleness, Hermia retains some serpentine qualities, which the audience are reminded of shortly before Robin reapplies the magic potion to set things and eyes right: she is reduced to 'crawling': 'I can no further crawl' (3.3.32). Weary from rejection and exhausted by the long wanderings through the woods, she finally falls asleep – only to awake with her charming powers over Lysander regained.

Apart from its 'force and blessed power' (4.1.73), we know hardly anything about the physiognomy of the 'little western flower' (2.1.166), which holds the enchanting juice and 'changes' the eyes of Titania, Lysander and Demetrius. Love-in-idleness is a fancy name for a pansy. Etymologically, the name

is derived from the French *pensée*: As speculations go, 'some unknown poet in ancient times believed that the flower had a thoughtful, pensive face'.⁶⁸ Hence, in addition to providing an image of metamorphosis, more precisely of Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe, and serving as agent initiating the process of fascination, love-in-idleness emerges as an image of the fascination of and with faces in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the end, therefore, we shall heed Bottom's note of caution, which resonates throughout the play: 'let the audience look to their eyes' (1.2.22). To look to your eyes means to guard them against the perils of fascination, against being fixated on an eye, a face or a dream, because fascination is not only caused by sight but is also 'the power and act of imagination'.⁶⁹ It also means to look at yourself and 'see' yourself in the sense of *nosce te ipsum*. For the guarding of the eyes, Robin provides remedy when he releases the audience into the world (perhaps another dream?), before it is too late: 'Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue, / We will make amends ere long' (Epilogue 11–12). For the knowledge of the self and others, physiognomy provides the key. It offers a tool for translation and (re-)mediation and supports us in seeing and understanding interfaces between human and animal, body and mind, but also between dream and reality, comedy and tragedy: the theatre and *theatrum mundi*. The complexity, challenge and, not least the criticism of physiognomy contributed to its fascinating power, because what fascinates us most is the forbidden, the mysterious, the lure of the unknown and unattainable, which we find translated in Shakespeare's experimental physiognomic theatre in a playful nonchalance – like a dance for which all we need is a bass or 'bottom' and a flute.

⁶⁷ See Thomas B. Johnson, *Physiological Observations on Mental Susceptibility* (London, 1837), pp. 200–1.

⁶⁸ Robert Hendrickson, *QPB Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins* (New York, 1998), p. 508.

⁶⁹ *Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 1, p. 129.