Shakespeare at Palazzo Te

by Sky Gilbert

Shakespeare mentions a contemporary Italian artist by name in only one play. Near the end of *The Winter's Tale*, four courtiers are discussing the fate of the leading characters:

> The Princess, hearing of her mother's statue, which is in the keeping of Paulina—a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape: he so near to Hermoine hath done Hermoine that they say one could speak to her and stand hope of an answer." (5.2.101–109)

My Folger edition finds this reference perplexing: "There is no agreement among scholars about why Shakespeare included Romano's name in a play set in an age when kings turned to the Delphic oracle for answers" (248). Why does Shakespeare—who never mentions another contemporary visual artist by name, do so here? In addition, Romano was known in England at the time only as a painter and architect. So how would Shakespeare have known he was a sculptor? The Folger note neatly explains this away by suggesting Shakespeare must have read Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, in Italian: "Jupiter saw sculpted and painted bodies breathe…by the skill of Giulio Romano."

The inadequacy of this explanation exemplifies the sad excuse for scholarship that so often masquerades as academic rigor, and routinely obscures

Shakespeare's work. The Folger explanation for Shakespeare's mention of Giulio Romano (or lack of one) paralyzes our understanding of *The Winter's Tale*, simply by managing not to think very deeply about it. Not surprisingly, an internet search of "Shakespeare and Giulio Romano" yields almost nothing. There is an article in *The Guardian* ("Are These Shakespeare's Dirty Pictures?" 2010) which suggests that *I Modi* (a series of Romano's engravings of sexual positions published in Italy in the 1520s) was, perhaps, "Shakespeare's erotica." There is also an article by Oxfordian scholar Michael Delahoyde ("Shakespeare's Lucrece and Romano's Sala de Troia," 2010) arguing that the description of the Trojan painting in Shakespeare's *Lucrece* may have been a description of the painting in Romano's Sala de Troia. The Sala de Troia is just one of many rooms in a magnificent castle designed and decorated by Romano called Palazzo Te, located in Mantua.

There is additional Oxfordian research on Mantua. John Hamill offers ample evidence that Shakespeare likely visited there, citing Shakespeare's obvious familiarity with authors Aretino and Castiglione, both Mantuans, as well as the fact that characters in *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* were likely inspired by Mantuan public figures. Hamill says, "Mantua and the Forest of Mantua are specified settings in two Shakespeare plays: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Act IV, scene 1 and Act V, scene 3), and *Romeo and Juliet* (Act V, scene1)" (12). Also, both plays are set in Verona, only 29 miles away from Mantua. Hamill, like Delahoyde, also mentions the painting in Sala de Troia of Palazzo Te as the likely subject of the description in *Lucrece*.

While Delahoyde and Hamill are certainly onto something, no scholar has pursued their research. This is because the academic establishment knows that to connect Shakespeare with a highly respected but, even by today's standards, somewhat scandalous, Italian artist, might threaten the very foundation of Shakespeare studies. As Hamill notes: "More than any other artist, Giulio helped propagate the erotic style of art so fashionable during the seventeenth century, and it is mainly through his influence that religious painting in Europe declined after 1600" (13). If scholars were to recognize the implications of Shakespeare's connection with Giulio Romano, it would initiate discussions that, though academically rewarding, could fundamentally alter

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our thoughts and feelings about Shakespeare. The present essay will go one step beyond Hamill and Delahoyde's musings on Palazzo Te, proposing that an exploration of this extraordinary castle in Mantua is absolutely necessary, as it will inevitably facilitate a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's entire sensibility.

There is a second—more glancing, yet transparent—reference, to Palazzo Te, in *The Winter's Tale*. As Paulina leads Leontes through her home, she calls it "my poor house" (5.3.7). Leontes contradicts this: "Your gallery / have we pass'd through, not without much content / in many singularities" (5.3.12–14). Now, most "poor houses" don't have galleries, and "singularities" are sublime and unique works of art. Paulina is undoubtedly leading Leontes through Palazzo Te. The "Man from Stratford" (William Shakspere) would have had no opportunity to visit the Gonzago palace in Mantua because the English Passport Office does not record granting him a passport for foreign travel. However, Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, visited Europe for 16 months at the age of 25 and spent a significant amount of that time in Italy. As a representative of one of the oldest and most noble families in England, he would likely have been cordially welcomed at Palazzo Te. Is it not possible that Shakespeare makes *an unprecedented mention* of Giulio Romano because Shakespeare's work was akin to Romano's in both style and purpose, in other words, because he was an ardent admirer?

Palazzo Te is Romano's masterpiece. A close examination must include the structure itself, the paintings and sculptures, and the pervading atmosphere—with special attention to *the obviously intended effects on the viewer*. Such an examination suggests that Romano and Shakespeare held the same aesthetic, philosophical, and metaphysical views. Shakespeare was enchanted with Romano's work because Romano's sensibility precisely mirrored his own.

The construction of Palazzo Te took 10 years, from 1525 to 1534. It is described tactfully on Wikipedia as a "palace of leisure." But it could perhaps more accurately be described as a sex palace. It was created for and enjoyed by Frederico de Gonzago, Marquess of Mantua, to enjoy with his mistress, Isabella Boschetti, along with other likeminded royal guests. The walls of Palazzo Te are adorned with explicit—some might even call them pornographic—paintings. Noemi Magri says that Romano was hired "to portray the handsome ruler's voluptuous joy in life" (36), whose "wish to be surrounded with pagan beauties was satisfied by Giulio's art, which is the expression of pagan eroticism, sensuousness and voluptuousness. With Giulio Romano, the erotic became the beautiful" (52).

Magri also mentions the description of Romano by the celebrated art historian Ernst Gombrich, who went so far as to call him a "'licentious genius… [whose] art celebrates the beauty of the human body in the erotic and heroic nude" (52). Casino della Grotto in Palazzo Te offers a series of adjoining

rooms where guests could bathe amid sensuous waterfalls. The description of these rooms calls to mind the Toronto gay bathhouse The Roman Sauna Baths, as well as another gay bathhouse, Vienna's Kaiserbründl Men's Sauna. Both were decorated with erotic paintings and/or sculptures, to encourage "sensuous bathing."

Palazzo Te is truly singular. Four vast interconnected buildings enclose a courtyard. The walls of these buildings are unlike most Renaissance walls because most of the windows are false (they do not open to the outside) and the space between the pillars is not uniform. There are other irregularities. Some of the pillars and the walls are decorated with plaster, "rusticated" in such a way as to make them appear damaged, and perhaps unstable. The arched brickwork that supports the palace rests in the lake surrounding it in such a way that the water level seems a bit too high. This offers the impression that the palace is in danger of flooding. Some of the pediments were designed to appear as if they are falling apart, as are some of the walls. Romano wishes to inspire a feeling that is the very opposite of what is desired by High Renaissance architects: that is, he does not wish to make the visitors feel comforted but to make them insecure. Why would Romano wish to make visitors to his "palace of leisure" feel insecure? The answer lies in his aesthetic, and his philosophy as a mannerist.

The Mannerist Ethos

Mannerism is the subject of controversy, partially because a plethora of techniques fall under the rubric, making the categorization seem inexact, and because there is some argument over whether the movement itself produced work that was profound or "special effects" that are merely quirky. This is perhaps another reason critics have been reluctant to explore Shakespeare's fondness for Romano. But exploring Shakespeare's plays in the context of the visual art style called mannerism will lead us to the conclusion that Shakespeare not only appreciated mannerist art but was a mannerist writer himself.

The mannerist movement involved painters, sculptors and architects associated with the late Renaissance. Less well-known artists like Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) are often cited as exemplary mannerists, but other more famous (and more respected) artists are often called mannerists: Michaelangelo and Raphael, for instance. The definition of mannerism is necessarily expansive, as it refers to all artists who—although fully aware of the classical rules and adept at working within those parameters—wished to challenge them.

Some of the mannerist challenges to the Renaissance orthodoxy revealed themselves in subtle ways; others are more obvious. For example, one can't miss the mannerism of Parmigianino's *Madonna with the Long Neck*. The neck of the title appears elongated in an unnatural—even anatomically incorrect—manner. A more subtle technique employed by the painter Caravaggio

is *tenebroso*: foregrounding dramatic contrasts between light and dark. Mannerism often also includes an image that is easily recognizable but less obvious to us as characteristic of Renaissance painting: the twisted, contorted bodies of its painted subjects.

These techniques have much more in common than merely a challenge to classical painting orthodoxy. They offer a philosophical challenge to the aesthetic objectivity assumed by Greek and Roman art. Classicism takes it for granted that we all understand reality in the same way, whereas mannerism reminds us repeatedly that everyone's viewpoint is different. Richard Arthur Holmes quotes Friedlander:

> The whole bent of anti-classical art is basically subjective, since it would construct and individually reconstruct from the inside out, from the subjective outward, freely, according to the rhythmic feeling present in the artist, while classic art, socially oriented, seeks to crystallize the object for eternity by working out from the regular, from what is valid for everyone. (60)

The Renaissance quest for universal visual objectivity reached its zenith with the discovery of the vanishing point. Until then, paintings displayed reality as flat. But as we all live in a three-dimensional world, the vanishing point was an aesthetic seismic shift; painters celebrated seeing the world *for real*, the way the world *actually is*. But the reign of the vanishing point was almost immediately and amazingly challenged by mannerists, sometimes returning to "flat" representations of reality, and in doing so anticipating modern artists, including Picasso.

Renaissance mannerists understood that although the vanishing point was deemed the very height of objectivity by High Renaissance painters, it nevertheless, from its very inception, contained an element of subjectivity, because the contraption Brunelleschi used to demonstrate the technique involved the spectator looking through a tiny hole in a painting, and significantly, the spectator could see their *own eye* reflected back to them in the mirror at the very center of the image. In this manner Brunelleschi's experiment accented the subjectivity of the viewer.

We usually associate perspective with a conical shape, in which the wider end is near the viewer's eye—and as the sightlines in the painting move towards the vanishing point, the cone narrows. Yet, as Martin Jay points out, Alberti confirmed that though the sightlines form a cone that goes from wide to narrow, this cone necessarily assumes its own reversal, in which the wider part of the cone (which is the image) comes back to a narrow point (which is in the eye):

> For perspective meant not only an imagined visual cone (Euclid's word) or pyramid (Alberti's) with its apex the receding, centric (or as it was

> later called, vanishing) point in the scene on the canvas. It was also the reverse pyramid or cone whose apex was the beholder's eye (or the infinitesimal point that came to replace it in theoretical terms). (54)

As Carabell says: "Just as occurs in Brunelleschi's specular model, Alberti's lines of sight are reflected back to their sender, their conical structure reversed and returned, until the observer himself becomes the object perceived" (95).

This may seem like an abstruse deconstruction of a painterly technique that is, after all, universally accepted today as *the* authoritative invention for imitating reality. So what's the point? This essay intends to prove that, as a mannerist, Romano was aware of the vanishing point's implications for subjectivity, and what he considered to be its false claim of offering a supremely objective representation of reality. This is because Romano's primary concern as an artist, was—like Shakespeare—with unsettling the viewer's confidence in his or her point of view.

One cannot underestimate the importance that mannerism placed on overturning classical notions of objectivity. As Hauser says, "The fundamental mannerist feeling is that there is no firm ground anywhere under one's feet" (30). This attitude is accentuated from the moment one sets foot on the grounds of Palazzo Te. Though some have suggested that Romano's crumbling columns imitate trees (setting up an opposition between art and nature), Romano's odd architectural style is a kind of satire of High Renaissance models. Romano was not alone in utilizing this technique. As Holmes notes, Michelangelo's design for the Laurentian Library in Florence aims for the same effect: "the pillars visually (and physically?) underplay their supporting role by tapering towards the base leading to slender moldings which almost parody the architecturally sound pedestals and capitals of the Renaissance" (16). One can easily imagine a young Shakespeare arriving in front of the castle. He—as a highly educated, young, intellectual poet—with thorough knowledge of classical notions of aesthetic objectivity—would have found it a deep, and perhaps fascinatingly unsettling, experience.

One distinctly mannerist aspect of Shakespeare's work has been duly noted by critics: his fondness for flouting the strict rules of classical playwriting. Aristotle, the supreme arbiter of Greek poetics, divided plays into two discrete categories called tragedy and comedy. Shakespeare, on the other hand, routinely and somewhat randomly mixes genres. and creates new genres of his own—i.e., romances and "problem plays." Similarly. Cicero, the primary Roman source for early modern rhetorical learning, strictly prescribed two distinctly different rhetorical styles for each of the discrete Greek theatrical genres. But Shakespeare, in his tragicomedies, comi-tragedies and romances shifts quickly and unpredictably from elaborate metaphor to colloquial utterance. Finally, Shakespeare invented so many new words that he significantly expanded, some say created, a new English language.

This is not the first essay to suggest Shakespeare was a mannerist. In his book *Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition*, Maquerlot proclaims *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Measure for Measure* mannerist plays. In *Julius Caesar* it is difficult to discriminate the good characters from bad, as "a succession of images, in turn positive and negative, disconcerts the spectator to the extent that he or she can no longer situate the characters on a scale of moral values" (76). And, "like mannerist painters or sculptors he [Shakespeare] repudiates all sense of hierarchy in viewpoints, thus holding up disparity and off-centeredness as the studied principles underlying his treatment of characters" (81).

Maquerlot views Hamlet's thought process as a kind of anamorphosis. Anamorphosis was a painterly trick utilized by Leonard da Vinci, which informs the mannerist technique *trompe l'oeil*, which was so expertly utilized by Romano in the Sala dei Cavalli, at Palazzo Te. Collins Dictionary defines anamorphosis as "an image or drawing distorted in such a way that it becomes recognizable only when viewed in a specified manner." Hamlet's brain seems to operate as a kind of *trompe l'oeil*, because he is constantly changing his mind and—"it is the irresistible emergence of different viewpoints in Hamlet's consciousness which accounts for his bifurcations of thought and behavior…[which] proceeds from a mode of thought attentive to and critical of its own functioning" (99).

In his analysis of *Measure for Measure*, Maquerlot suggests that the Duke disguised as a friar is a reference to Shakespeare himself. The Duke manipulates the other characters and contrives plots for their lives, as any writer might do when writing a play. Maquerlot says "*All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* go to unprecedented lengths in unveiling the artificiality of the dramatic machinery" (147). He notes that some find it discombobulating that the characters in Shakespeare's comedies end up marrying people that they have only just met, and/or who they don't even seem to know—or perhaps even *like*. Maquerlot believes this is perfectly intentional on the writer's part: "what I find intriguing and attractive in these half-tone denouements is not so much the image of blissful harmony thus outlined before us, as the lucid, amused look which the playwright casts upon his work" (146–47). This technique is related to mannerism because it points to the artificiality of art:

> When mannerist painters elongate their figures regardless of verisimilitude and the Vitruvian canons, when they ride roughshod over Alberti's perspective, employ rare or consciously unrealistic colors, excessively reduce or enlarge the encompassing space, what are they doing if not calling attention to the contrived nature of the work? (147)

This is the essential contradiction that rests at the heart of mannerism. Some mannerist painters are fond of teasing us with images that are *evidently* unreal. Holmes quotes Hauser: "Mannerism permits—and often actually calls for—occasional interruptions of the illusion of art, and return to it at pleasure" (28). These artists would have us believe and disbelieve at the same time.

The classicist wishes us to immerse ourselves in the fantasy that the illusion is real. It is only after we have stopped viewing the classical painting that we return to reality. But by openly acknowledging the painter's skill and contrivances, the mannerist artist would have us interrupt this immersion. Paradoxically, the mannerist artist wishes to make our experience more profound and involving, not less so; the idea is that we come to believe even more fervently in the reality of what is being presented when we consciously consent to fully deceive ourselves. Thus Maquerlot says: "It seems that Shakespeare…has determined to push realism and artifice to the extreme" (158)

Holmes quotes Shearman: "Mannerist works of art are conceived in the spirit of virtuoso performances" (17). And this display of virtuosity accentuates the all-consuming, godlike power mannerism has given to the artist. The artist does not just imitate reality, or record it, he creates it; and the creation does not just match reality, it surpasses it. As Holmes says "The artist's will is the ultimate force in the creative process, and his idea is 'truer' than what he sees" (8).

The Role of The Courtier

The idea of an artist who creates something more real than reality itself is one that can be found in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, which scholars have long considered to be Shakespeare's textbook of deportment and art (many think it had a significant influence on *Hamlet)*. Both Romano and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, are linked with Castiglione: it was Castiglione who introduced Gonzago to Giulio Romano (one of Raphael's prized pupils), and at the age of 20, Edward de Vere wrote an introduction to the then most recent Latin translation of Castiglione's book.

Castiglione wrote that the courtier should "practice in all things a certain nonchalance (sprezzatura) which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless" (66). He goes on to say:

> I am sure that grace springs especially from this, since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly, and so facility in such things excites the greatest wonder; whereas, in contrast, to labor at what one is doing and, as we say, to make bones over it, shows an extreme lack of grace and causes everything, whatever its worth, to be discounted. So we can truthfully say that true art is what does not seem to be art; and the most important thing is to conceal it, because if it is revealed this discredits a man completely and ruins his reputation. (67)

Castiglione may seem to be saying that the artist (in this case the courtier) should do the very opposite of what mannerists do, that is *hide his contrivance*. But the mannerist artist, in celebrating his own virtuosity, is not "making bones over it," because he would never admit that it was tough work, but only that he is a genius who creates a better reality. This is what Shakespeare

does when, in the mannerist fashion of self-conscious contrivance, he creates artificial comedies with unlikely plots and surprisingly happy endings. As de Vere himself suggests in his Latin introduction to Castiglione's book, the artist/courtier improves on nature: "And so, although nature herself has made nothing perfect in every detail, yet the manners of men exceed in dignity that with which nature has endowed them; and he who surpasses others has here surpassed himself, and has even outdone nature which by no one has ever been surpassed."

Thus, the artist may create something that is not simply real, but "truer than truth." Shakespeare returns to this mannerist idea again and again in his work. This is Shakespeare's intention when he points the audience to the statue that breathes in *The Winter's Tale*, which in turn points to Palazzo Te. Not coincidentally, in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare describes a real horse, one which seems so real that he can only assume that it is a fake, i.e., that it was the painting of a horse:

> Look, when a painter would surpass the life,
> In limning out a well-proportion'd steed,
> His art with nature's workmanship at strife,
> As if the dead the living should exceed;
> So did this horse excel a common one,
> In shape, in courage, colour, pace and bone

It is likely that when Shakespeare wrote this passage he was speaking of what he experienced when—after viewing the unconventional architecture of the building—he first entered Palazzo Te. The Hall of the Horses (Sala dei Cavalli), is the first room that visitors to the palace encounter after viewing

the building from the outside (it is the only room that is called a "hall"). Several paintings of horses adorn the walls of the Hall of the Horses. Here Romano manages to create, through the technique of *trompe l'oeil*, the pure distillation of his art—with the skill that is so accurately described in *The Winter's Tale*. Like the structure of the castle itself, the paintings are beautiful but unsettling. Romano places his paintings of horses high on the walls (the land on which Palazzo Te rests was originally the home of Gonzago's stables). What's shocking about these horses is that, looked at from a certain angle, they appear to be alive. The fact that these magnificent, seemingly very alive creatures, are so high up, calls direct and immediate attention to the artist's *sprezzatura*—his ability to create something absolutely real which is at the same time undeniably false.

While the Sala dei Cavalli of the Palazzo Te speaks to the philosophical implications of Shakespeare's mannerist aesthetic, the Sala di Amore e Psiche (the Chamber of Cupid and Psyche) speaks to this aesthetic, as well as his, and Romano's, radical views on sex and sexuality. Several of the rooms at Palazzo Te are inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the Sala di Amore e Psiche, the Chamber of Ovid, and the Sala dei Giganti, for instance. It goes without saying that Ovid's poetry brims with eroticism, and most scholars agree that Ovid was Shakespeare's favorite poet. Jonathan Bate calls Book Ten of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* "a series of narratives concerning destructive passion and female desire … [it] teems with aggressive female wooers, and homoerotic charm" (83). Ovid's gods, goddesses and mortals are often deceived by passion, and come to tragic or horrific—but often quite magical—ends, ultimately transformed into animals, trees, or flowers—all the while and experimenting with gender.

Shakespeare's Erotic Philosophy

What was Shakespeare's attitude toward sex and sexuality? Scholars often note with some embarrassment the endless array of often seemingly irrelevant "dirty jokes" and double entendres in his plays. In *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare gives voice (and pride of place) to prostitutes and pimps, and frankly acknowledges venereal disease. But these plays are neither more nor less "filthy" than the plays, poems and prose of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Shakespeare's own personal attitudes to issues of sex and sexuality are as difficult to decipher as his attitudes to anything else. Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* is ridiculed by Maria as a "some kind of puritan" (2.3.139), yet Shakespeare lets Thersites (in *Troilus and Cressida*) give eloquent voice to the puritan view: "Lechery, lechery; still, wars and lechery; nothing else holds fashion: a burning devil take them!" (5.2. 297–199)

The clue to Shakespeare's attitude toward sex can be found in the structure of Shakespeare's comedies—especially *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like it* and *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream. All Shakespeare's comedies share a carefully modulated array of loving pairs. Each couple represents a different kind of love, leading the audience on a spiritual journey from physical love to "true" love, one step at a time.

In *As You Like It*, Touchstone openly lusts after Audrey. He quips: "Well, praised be the gods for thy foulness! sluttishness may come hereafter" (3.3. 39–40). Silvius, on the other hand, is tortured by a love for Phebe that he *claims* is profound, but that appears to be a parody of Petrarchan cliches: "So holy and so perfect is my love, / And I in such a poverty of grace, /That I shall think it a most plenteous crop / To glean the broken ears after the man / That the main harvest reaps; loose now and then / A scatt'red smile, and that I'll live upon" (3.5. 106–111). In his own perhaps overly-poetic manner, Silvius takes a small step on the road to true love. But when Rosalind teaches Orlando to woo her, this is the highest rung on the amorous spiritual ladder, for there is no doubt that Rosalind is connected to a higher power: "Believe then, if you please, that I can do strange things. I have, since I was three years old, conversed with a magician, most profound in his art and yet not damnable" (5.3 62–65).

Shakespeare distinguishes his lovers in this way to illustrate the classic neoplatonic journey that leads to the true spiritual love of profound beauty. Neoplatonism, which found its origins in Italy, was an early Renaissance attempt to reconcile Christianity with paganism. The neoplatonic attitude to sex and sexuality is less sex-negative than the one we usually associate with Christianity; the primary difference is that for neoplatonists, physical beauty can sometimes be an expression of the inner beauty that leads us to true love. (But then again, sometimes not!)

In *Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty* John Vyvyan defines the neoplatonic principle of the recognition of immortal companions: "people are in perfect love in heaven first, but when they get to earth they sometimes don't recognize each other" (12). This explains the characters' perplexing confusion in so many of Shakespeare's comedies, and why "the course of true love never did run smooth" as Lysander observes in *A Midsummer Nights Dream* (1.1.136). Vyvyan says: "individual souls, when immersed in matter, are liable to forget their true nature" (27), and "when the beauty of the body is judged superior to the soul, then the true dignity of love is abused" (48). It is up to the discerning lover to discriminate between mere physical love and the combined spiritual and material beauty of the "immortal companion." This process, it must be noted, is explained explicitly in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtie*r. As Vyvyan notes, this dilemma is central to many of Shakespeare's comedies. When Sebastian, Viola's twin, first appears, all are confused because he looks exactly like his sister. But he explains: "A spirit I am indeed; / But am in that dimension frossly clad / Which from the womb I did participate" (5.1.248–250).

In the Sala di Amore e Psiche Romano takes us on the neoplatonic journey from material beauty to the beauty of the soul, telling Ovid's story of Cupid and Psyche. It is significant that the many ceiling panels (i.e., paintings) not only require the viewer to look up, but are *not* arranged in the order that follows Ovid's story. Instead, viewers must work to find their own way through the labyrinth, much the same way as ordinary mortals must thread their way through many perilous curves on the path to true spiritual love. As Michailidis says:

> This philosophy is mainly captured through the narration, with the path of the labyrinth followed by Psyche, which represents the human soul. While she is in an intermediate state in the world of ideas—represented by the octagons—she falls with Eros and the material body. Only through much effort does she manage to reach the top, in the centre of the ceiling, achieving eternal immortality.

This perplexing arrangement of images that ultimately tells a neoplatonic story is one Shakespearean aspect of the Sala di Amore e Psiche. But the content of the paintings is also distinctly Shakespearean. Romano's *Jupiter Seducing Olympias* is explained in his subtitle: "Olympias is seduced by Jupiter, whose thunderbolt is seized by an eagle who drills the eye of the jealous king of Macedonia." In this painting a virile, fully naked Jupiter (Zeus) looms over Olympia, who is also naked. Jupiter has one hand on her chin, and his penis rests on her thigh. The subtitle refers to the bearded face in the upper right-hand corner of the painting. An arrow, guided by an eagle, pierces the eye of the King of Macedonia—Olympias' husband—who is spying on the couple. Partway down the shaft of the arrow a strange jagged conical shape

Giulio Romano: Jupiter Seducing Olympias.

is attached. That cone opens up onto the eye, whereas its point is closer to the eagle who is holding it.

What is the meaning of this arrow? Most assume that it represents Philip's pain since he is witnessing his wife's infidelity. But Paula Carabell postulates that this arrow in the eye of the voyeur is a critique of the male gaze. This painting was meant for Frederigo Gonzala of Mantua to view for his sexual pleasure. However, Romano's painting is not merely meant as erotic titillation; it clearly implicates the viewer. By placing an erotic spy in the painting Romano has commented on the act of voyeurism himself. As Carabell says:

> By making clear the presence of a second male figure, Giulio created a dual target for the Duke's projective drive. In so doing he ruptured a bond that had promised compensatory pleasure and made this an image of insatiable desire. Federigo's inevitable exclusion from the activities of the amorous duo is, of course, a function of Giulio's compositional strategy. Cast in profile, Philip serves as a surrogate for the covetous spectator. (93)

Carabell goes on to say she sees the cone in the painting as a reference to perspective. If it is, this offers an additional reminder of the viewer; as it not only reminds us, in a mannerist way, that the image is not simply real, but also extremely subjective. Not only is beauty in the eye of the beholder, but there are many different ways of viewing the same eroticized object, and there are consequences for doing so.

It's important to note that in Shakespeare's work, as in Romano's painting, the viewer of beauty—particularly the male viewer of female beauty—does not go unimplicated. There are consequences to eroticization of another human being (and not just intercourse, or consequently pregnancy and birth, or venereal disease). Philip's eye in Romano's painting is Shakespeare's eye, and it is true that for Shakespeare the eye is the ultimate symbol of love's inception. As Fineman says of the sonnets: "Cupid shoots his arrows through the lover's eye into the lover's heart. This is a specifically visual desire…it is as something of the eye that the young man's 'fair appearance lies' within the poet's heart…'thy picture in my sight' indifferently 'Awakes my heart to heart's and eye's delight'" (60).

But in his analysis of the sonnets, Fineman calls this lover's gaze in Shakespeare's poetry "Shakespeare's perjur'd eye" because Shakespeare's attitude to love and sex is both complex and paradoxical. On the one hand we have Venus' ardor in *Venus and Adonis*, unabashed, poetic, affecting, and yet for all its mellifluous religiosity, frankly filthy: "Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry, / Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie" (233–34). Here, Venus seems to be making love to herself—in order to lure a young, gorgeous and innocent Adonis, who is merely perplexed and repelled. Yet the narrator of the poem does not judge her. In fact, he allows her to romanticize what Adonis interprets as naked lust. Then there is Shakespeare's description of sex in Sonnet 129 as "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame". We must allow Shakespeare—as is his wont—to hold opposing views about sex, for both our delectation and our somewhat perplexed consideration.

It may very well be that Shakespeare's "affectionate bitterness" about sex anticipates the Rolling Stones' sentiment that "you can't always get what you want." Shakespeare's ambivalent feelings about love and sex are succinctly expressed in an early poem by Edward de Vere titled "The Lively Lark Stretched Forth Her Wing." Here a young man meets desire attired as a beautiful young knight, who informs him that desire loves nothing better than to see a man who is sexually frustrated: "Then of desire I asked again / What thing did please and what did pain? / He smiled, and thus he answered then, / 'Desire can have no greater pain / Than for to see another man / That he desireth to obtain; / Nor greater joy can be than this, / Than to enjoy that others miss.'"

There is no more eloquent symbol of Shakespeare's conflicted attitude to sex and the male gaze than his obsession with the legend of Actaeon. In Ovid's tale, a young hunter is tempted when he accidentally catches sight of the goddess Artemis (the Roman goddess Diana) bathing naked. To punish him, Artemis turns Actaeon into a stag. She also sets his own hounds on him. He is ripped apart by his own dogs. Many, many characters in Shakespeare's work are "hunted by the dogs of their desire."

There are at least five direct references to Actaeon in Shakespeare's work, including *As You Like It*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Twelfth Night*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* wishes she was Diana, so Bassanius' temples "should be planted presently / With horns, as was Actaeon's…" (2.3.62–63). When Orsino speaks of love in *Twelfth Night*, he says, "That instant was I turned into a hart, / And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, / E'er since pursue me" (1.1.22–24). In *Cymbeline*, Iachimo sneaks into Imogen's bedroom and, like the voyeur Actaeon, observes her naked breasts. Shakespeare, like Philip of Macedonia in Romano's painting, is clearly aware that Cupid's arrow means more than simply true love; it can be implicated by pure evil, or bring disillusionment, or even impossible anguish.

The Genius of Palazzo Te

If we continue along with Shakespeare on his journey through the Palazzo Te, we will come to Romano's climactic work, undoubtedly meant to be the penultimate aesthetic experience for the viewer. This is the Sala dei Giganti, the chamber of the giants. Standing in that room, Shakespeare would no longer merely a spectator, but experiences the wonder of being in the presence of god (or perhaps more accurately, the gods)—and would quite literally sense the ground shifting under his feet. We can be sure that the Sala dei Giganti was on Shakespeare's mind, because, as John Hamill notes, he mentions it in *Loves Labour's Lost*. In one early quarto, Berowne describes: "This Signior Julio's giant dwarf, Don Cupid" (25).

The Sala dei Giganti illustrates a chapter from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which the giants attempt an attack on Jupiter, erecting a structure made of mountains. Predictably they are destroyed when Jupiter returns the favor by

destroying them with thunderbolts. Romano's room does not merely feature painted walls, the room itself *is* a painting, one that covers the entire space from floor to the ceiling. When the viewer enters the room, he or she enters a painting.

The floor was originally constructed of pebbles, and an actual fire roared in a fireplace under the flames in the painting. (Neither of these aspects of Romano's realism have stood the test of time.) At the base of the painting the giants are being crushed by falling arches and columns, fire and floods. Far up—above the clouds—the gods are in frenzied disarray as Jupiter hurls down his revenge. This image of heaven on the ceiling seems to go on forever until it reaches a giant dome of gold and glass at its peak. The perspective is dizzying. In fact, the experience of the room is dizzying. It is a kind of trick, a masterful slice of *sprezzatura* for, although the chamber itself is not that large, the feeling is that a vast universe is crashing down upon the viewer.

Though it is a virtuoso technical feat of perspective, and a flamboyant display of wild color and frantic movement—and though it is incredibly, performatively ambitious—the effect on the viewer is what creates a singular mannerist experience. As Carabell says:

> Of particular interest, however, is not his rendition of battling forces, but rather, his [Romano's] treatment of the beholder's share in the drama. In question is the disparity in scale between the protagonists and those who observe them along with the placement and attitude of these tiny figures. Dwarfed by the image that surrounds them, the viewers are incorporated into representational space, entering into a state of non-differentiation that reflects the chamber's unique pictorial structure. It is this sense of merger that gives rise to feelings of fear; it produces a sensation of discomfort that finds its closest parallel in Freud's notion of the uncanny. (95)

Carabell goes on to suggest that the philosophical effect of this aesthetic is to decentralize the viewer—ultimately challenging their objectivity—as he or she is no longer placidly observing a painting, but utterly and completely involved in it:

> As Vasari and his successors implicitly realized, the chamber's cyclorama structure was a decentering feature, one that destroyed the preeminence of the viewing subject. By reversing the relationship between seer and seen, the Sala dei Giganti let it be known that identity exists as a relative construct. Even in a pleasure palace like the Palazzo del Te, the integrity of the individual remained always far from secure. (97)

The experience of the Sala dei Giganti at Palazzo Te is the ultimate expression of mannerist *sprezzatura*. One is so seized with real terror that one

cannot help but admire the virtuosity of the artist. Thus, one vacillates between the experience of a truth that is truer than true and the comforting notion that the situation is completely artificial.

Segue to *The Tempest*

Does all this remind you of anything? What happens to the viewers of the Sala dei Giganti at Palazzo Te is exactly what happens to audiences as they watch *The Tempest*, because Shakespeare has done everything in his power as an artist to induce them to feel the terror of imminent death by drowning. He stipulates that cries and sounds come from backstage, to make the passengers' desperation more realistic: "A confused noise within: 'Mercy on us!'—'We split, we split!'—'Farewell, my wife and children!'—'Farewell, brother!—'We split, we split, we split!'" (1.1.62–65). The cheerful Boatswain announces their upcoming demise in a uniquely but realistically terrifying way; he displays the good cheer of an experienced mariner who has led a good life but must now say goodbye to this one: "Use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap—Cheerly, good hearts!—Out of our way, I say!" (1.1.24–28).

One need only think of what it might be like to have a similar announcement made by the pilot of an airplane just before a crash. When Miranda accuses Prospero of murdering innocent people with his art he assures her that no one was killed—"there is no soul—/ No not so much perdition as an hair / Betid to any creature on the vessel" (1.2 36–38). But Miranda knows that the shipwreck, has, at the very least, scared many innocent people nearly to death. We know this because we have just been terrified ourselves. Prospero continues in this manner throughout the play, alternately torturing and terrifying his enemies out of what seems partially a personal grudge and partially an earnest attempt to redeem the villains who robbed him of his crown so long ago. Whether he succeeds with their redemption is a moot point, but he *is* successful in teaching the future King of Milan to fall deeply and profoundly in love with his daughter's soul. But is this enough to redeem him?

Our mixed feelings about Prospero are the same as our feelings about Giulio Romano when we enter the Sala dei Giganti. It is the same feeling we have about so many of Shakespeare's characters, but the difference here is that Prospero is not *just* controlling the other characters in the play (as Iago or Richard III does) but manipulating *us*, *the audience*—with his charm, his plot devices, and his heartbreaking rhetoric. Thus we are deeply conflicted and "decentred" (to use Carabell's word) when Prospero threatens to abjure "this rough magic" (5.1.59) and put an end to this particular play, and perhaps all of Shakespeare's plays, forever.

Some critics challenge Prospero's virtue. Lytton Strachey, for instance quipped: "if Prospero is wise, he is also self-opinionated and sour, that his gravity is often another name for pedantic severity, and that there is no character in the play to whom, during some part of it, he is not studiously disagreeable" (68). Indeed, Prospero himself identifies with the basest character in the play, Caliban, saying: "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (5.1.330–331). It matters what Shakespeare thinks of Prospero because Prospero is undoubtedly a mannerist artist, who, like Shakespeare, creates fictions so real that they paralyze us with fear, simultaneously dazzling us with his virtuosity.

In a desperate attempt to sort out his dual nature critics have lately branded Prospero a colonialist. Well, of course Prospero is a colonialist—as is Shakespeare—if one looks at him through a modern lens. But examined through an early modern lens, both men are remarkably sympathetic to the "indigenous" Caliban. When critics defend Prospero, they make it clear he was no Sigfried and Roy—that is, they cite Shakespeare's equation of artist and magician, and the various magicians whose magic was taken quite seriously in the early modern period. Bruno, Pico della Mirandola and John Dee (Elizabeth's personal magician) have all been suggested as possible models for Prospero. These magicians—like Raymond Lull and Cardano—were mystical neoplatonist philosophers, less mischievous troublemakers than earnest holy men, searching for spiritual perfection via the occult. But let's add another possible model for Prospero: Neapolitan magician Giambattista della Porta. He was not only a practical natural magician but a playwright.

Della Porta wrote 17 plays. They were available in England in Shakespeare's day (in Italian), and are often described today as mannerist, mainly because of the artificial quality of della Porta's dialogue and the contrived nature of his stories. Kodera compares Shakespeare's own dramaturgical devices to della Porta's dense plot constructions:

> The labyrinthine pattern should appear hopelessly frustrating, until suddenly resolved by a final peripety, a coup de théâtre with unexpected and satisfying dramatic impact, producing order out of chaos and a happy ending all around…. Many of these intricate ruses are echoed in Shakespeare's comedies, such as *Twelfth Night* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. (16)

Della Porta, at the very least, shared Shakespeare's pagan, slightly skeptical worldview, and was dedicated like Shakespeare to faithfully, if somewhat fantastically, recording the arbitrary twists and turns of fate. Like Shakespeare, he often looked on happy endings with irony. As a natural magician (not unlike Prospero, who calls out to nature in his renunciation speech), his revolutionary, real world experiments anticipated modern science. The

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy makes della Porta sound very much like Prospero:

> Porta's magus is a decidedly male figure who unites the physical dexterity of the trickster, the experience of the alchemist, the erudition of the humanist, the astrologer's command of mathematics, and the intuitive knowledge of the psychic medium…. The magus must be talented, rich, educated, and hard-working; magic is the most noble part of philosophy for Porta, instead of a priest or metaphysician in quest of the divine—as in Pico della Mirandola or John Dee, Porta's magus is thus depicted as an artifex (a craftsman or mastermind) who knows how to manipulate the natural and occult properties of certain bodies.

The fact that della Porta may have been one of the models for Prospero is important because it accentuates that Prospero, like any artist, was both a very godlike human and a very human god. When Prospero attempts to obstruct the courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda, he sounds as much like a villain contemplating evil manipulations as a playwright crafting a plot. But he could also be a gentle god, patiently guiding the lives of ordinary people: "They are both in each other's powers. But this / Swift business / I must make uneasy, lest too light winning / Make the prize light" (1.2.542–45). This kind of magic resembles one of della Porta's most famous tricks. As Kodera reminds us, in della Porta's lectures (which were very much performances) he often used magnets to manipulate metal figurines so that they appeared to be moving of their own will:

> when the lodestone was laid down, they laid down their spears, if they were ready to fight, and did threaten to kill and slay…and when the stones come near to one the other, they seemed to fight, and run one with the other…. In this natural theater, the magus is pulling the strings from behind the scenes, much to the amazement of the observers. (14–15)

Magnetism was, of course, an early modern neoplatonist metaphor for longing to unite with one's true love.

Perhaps the difficulty we have deciding whether or not Prospero is a good person is related to his godlike qualities. For if Prospero were a Christian god, he would necessarily be flawless, and ultimately have our best interests at heart, never, ever driven by petty emotion or shallow grudge. Pagan gods, on the other hand, were prone to human failings. But more importantly, neoplatonists *defined* gods as artists. For the neoplatonists, god is the ultimate creator of beauty, and it is by perceiving and understanding this beauty that we will reach spiritual awareness. As John Vyvyan tells us:

> The qualities they [the planets] bestow on the soul are, of course ultimately God given: In the beginning God contains the potency of these

> gifts himself. He then grants them to the seven gods who move the seven planets…[by] imparting to stubborn matter the physical beauties that correspond to their celestial gifts. They work as artists. (44)

Conclusions

In this way, the Sala dei Giganti at Palazzo Te reflects the metaphysical center of Shakespeare's world. For, without a doubt, Prospero in *The Tempest* is Romano the mannerist as much as he is Shakespeare himself. He is also a pagan god, acting sometimes without reason, and Shakespeare knows that it is necessary for us to come to terms with the kind of terror such a god creates. This is the purpose of Shakespeare's art: to induce us to confront the terrifying paradox that is life and death. Palazzo Te exemplifies Shakespeare's vision of the artist as a trauma-inducing hurtler of aesthetic thunderbolts. When Shakespeare first experienced the Sala dei Giganti, he understood that *his* job too—as an artist—was to involve the audience deeply, with the goal in mind of implicating and unsettling them with this vision.

Shakespeare mentions Giulio Romano in *The Winter's Tale* because his own worldview is identical with Giulio Romano's and with mannerism in general. That Shakespeare slips Romano's name into his ancient fairy tale—so suddenly, inexplicably, and *so casually*—is not only a reference to the godlike powers of the artist and the artistic powers of the gods, it is a display of his own *sprezzatura*. Shakespeare, like many a mannerist artist, is ultimately just showing off. He is so proud of his creation, and so assured of its ability to arrest our undivided attention under any circumstance, that he thinks nothing of dropping into the play, as he does in many of his works, an utterly, shockingly anachronistic detail, for seemingly no apparent reason.

But there is a reason. Shakespeare mentions only one contemporary visual artist by name in his play, not just because one day he happened to come upon Romano's name in Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. No. From the moment Shakespeare placed an elegant Italianate shoe down on the grounds of the Palazzo Te, he knew that Romano's soul-stirring, all-involving, mannerist masterpiece would allow him to finally rejoice in a sensibility identical to his own, one that was the incarnation—and the visual corollary—of what his written work would someday be.

Whose interests does it serve to ignore Shakespeare's mannerist aesthetic, his complex attitudes to sex and sexuality, and his skeptical, clearly pagan, neoplatonic metaphysic—especially when the evidence of it is staring us in the face? It is a question I am almost afraid to ask.

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