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LEONARD BARKAN

Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis

SOME of the finest scholarly work on the Renaissance done in the last fifty years has concerned itself with the persistence of classical myths into the art and thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[1] For the student of the arts, the significance of this survival has generally been based on the assumption that the artist has a great and independent power of choice. When he depicts or alludes to a mythological story, he chooses the story and chooses an iconography that will serve his aesthetic and thematic purposes. Therefore by studying iconographic conventions, we use the tradition in order to define particular works of the individual talent. But to say that artists control myths is to offer only one side of the story. While some scholars have been studying the persistence of classical myths in art, others have been studying myth itself; and although they can hardly be said to speak with one voice, they tend to agree that the telling of traditional tales is a vital activity in virtually all cultures and that these tales, even when apparently fantastical or frivolous, act as the bearers for highly significant statements whether an individual teller is consciously aware of them or not.[2] "Les mythes se pensent dans les hommes,

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1. Their publications are too numerous and too familiar to cite, but I am thinking of the work of such scholars as D. C. Allen, Douglas Bush, E. H. Gombrich, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, Jean Seznec, Aby Warburg, and Edgar Wind.

2. See especially E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* Vol. II (New Haven, Conn., 1955); Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York, 1959) and

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et à leur insu," says Lévi-Strauss,[3] and what is true for the anonymous primitive bard is not entirely untrue for the great Renaissance artist. A myth, especially as late in its life as the Renaissance, has its own structures and its own history of interpretations. These structures and interpretations shape the work of the artist as much as he shapes the myth.

Some classical myths inspire these radical reflections more than others. Certain ancient stories develop so richly through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance that they become whole collocations of narrative material and divergent themes; they act as the meeting places for a great range of ideas and aesthetic preoccupations, a melting pot whose separate contents never become entirely homogenized. They are relatively independent of the individual creative artist because in depicting or alluding to the myth, he cannot isolate one set of associations from the intertwining mass of associations that its long history has given it.

The tale of the hunter Actaeon, who beheld Diana bathing and was punished by being transformed into a stag and destroyed by his own hunting dogs, is just such a highly configured myth as we have been describing here. The history of Diana and Actaeon involves in part the development of the story's iconography and interpretation through a series of direct influences. But the history of a myth is also the history of a crux. The presence of a myth in a work of art testifies to a problem, a mystery, a complexity, even a self-contradiction. If we understand the myth, we can perceive at least the elements of the mystery. Only the myth itself—with all its history of narrative and interpretation—can justify the complex or self-contradictory assertion. So to the artists of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance classical myths stand in something like the relation that primitive myths do to their societies: they are the bearers of significant truths that cannot be expressed so well in any other form.

I

While Ovid's account of the meeting between Diana and Actaeon is by no means the first or even the most typical classical version of the story, it is the version that signals the entrance of the myth on the main

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Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities (New York, 1967); C. G. Jung and K. Kerenyi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, Bollingen Series (Princeton, N.J., 1969); G. S. Kirk, *Myth, its Meaning and Functions in Ancient Cultures* (Cambridge, Eng., 1970); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques* (Paris, 1967–71) and *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1967); and B. Malinowsky, *Magic, Science, Religion and Other Essays* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955).

3. *Le Cru et le cuit* (Paris, 1964), p. 20.

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stage of cultural history. Ovid introduces the tale apparently as a private human story. By sheer accident, the mortal hunter comes upon the scene of Diana's bath, and her brutal punishment of him far outweighs the extent of his crime—if there is any crime at all. Seen in this light, it is a story of pathos very much in keeping with a strand of contests between gods and mortals in the early books of the *Metamorphoses*:[4] *at bene si quaeras, Fortunae crimen in illo, / non scelus invenies* ["but if you seek the truth, you will find the cause of this in fortune's fault and not in any crime of his"] (3.141–42),[5] the narrator laments. But there is more to Ovid's account than outraged innocence. We move beyond the straightforward human story when we set the episode in its context within the poem. The hunter's story forms part of a Theban panel in the *Metamorphoses* including Cadmus, Semele, Tiresias, Pentheus, and Bacchus. Each of the mortal figures in this group has an encounter with a mysterious emanation of divinity that is simultaneously beautiful and terrifying. The two clearest examples, which more or less frame the Diana and Actaeon episode, are Cadmus and Tiresias. Cadmus's story is full of images of innocence. He must found a new land to which he is led by a virgin heifer, and she finds the proper spot on tender grass. When Cadmus's men seek fresh water in order to perform a pious sacrifice on this spot, they come upon a setting that is virginal, natural, holy, and beautiful; yet it turns out to be the dwelling place of a repulsively ugly serpent. Finally the serpent proves to be divine and creative. Cadmus slays this serpent, plants his teeth, deflowering the earth with them (as Ovid sees it) and thus implicitly corrupting the earth. The results, while partly creative (giving rise to the people of Thebes), are also mysterious and devastating. Cadmus meets his foe as absolute antagonist, but after his victory he hears a mysterious voice saying "*Quid, Agenore nate, peremptum / serpentem spectas? et tu spectabere serpens*" ["Why, O son of Agenor, dost thou gaze on the serpent thou hast slain? Thou too shalt be a serpent for men to gaze on"] (3.97–98). Cadmus has beheld a holy serpent, affronted it, and—most mysterious of all—has become a mirror image of that serpent. The whole miserable destiny of Thebes goes back to this combination of problems: seeing what is forbidden, offending the gods, and developing a transfigured and mirror-like identity.

4. The best commentary on Actaeon in this connection is Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, sec. ed. (Cambridge, Eng., 1970), pp. 133–37.

5. Citations are to Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1966), and translations are quoted from that edition.

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The vignette of Tiresias repeats and in some respects expands the same vision:

> *Venus huic erat utraque nota.*
> *nam duo magnorum viridi coeuntia silva*
> *corpora serpentum baculi violaverat ictu*
> *deque viro factus (mirabile) femina septem*
> *egerat autumnos; octavo rursus eosdem*
> *vidit, et "est vestrae si tanta potentia plagae"*
> *dixit, "ut auctoris sortem in contraria mutet,*
> *nunc quoque vos feriam." percussis anguibus isdem*
> *forma prior rediit, genetivaque venit imago."* (3. 323–31)

He knew both sides of love. For once, with a blow of his staff he had outraged two huge serpents mating in the green forest; and, wonderful to relate, from man he was changed into a woman, and in that form spent seven years. In the eighth year he saw the same serpents again and said: "Since in striking you there is such magic power as to change the nature of the giver of the blow, now will I strike you once again." So saying, he struck the serpents and his former state was restored and he became as he had been born.

Like Cadmus, Tiresias sees mysterious serpents in a sacred place. He strikes them and in that act is vouchsafed a remarkable visionary experience. The transformation is at once sexual and sacred, and the whole experience is surrounded by mirror imagery, from the intertwining serpents themselves to the experience of Tiresias, who is turned into a mirror image of himself and then back again.

Parallel analyses could be made of other Theban stories. Semele is tricked into demanding a vision of Jove's thunderbolt. That sight, partly holy and partly sexual, amounts to forbidden knowledge that will destroy the girl. Pentheus's experience on Cithaeron also involves an illicit glimpse of holy mysteries. Having been the pursuer of Bacchus, he becomes himself the pursued and, in a further mirror image, is destroyed by the woman who gave him birth.

All the elements in these stories, including sexuality, holiness, mirror images, and the mysteries of human identity, are bound up in Ovid's tale of Diana and Actaeon. Actaeon's sacred serpent is Diana herself, who, like the others, appears in a very special landscape, the vale of Gargaphie: "*cuius in extremo est antrum nemorale recessu / arte laborum nulla: simulaverat artem / ingenio natura suo; nam pumice vivo / et levidus tofis nativum duxerat arcum.*" (3. 157–60) ["In its most secret nook there was a well-shaded grotto, wrought by no artist's hand. But Nature by her own cunning had imitated art; for she had shaped a native arch of the living

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rock and soft tufa."] The setting is dark and secret but it is also marvelous because it confounds real-life categories by transforming nature into art. The goddess Diana appears in nature and performs a holy ritual: her bath.

Actaeon's vision of this ritual, however accidental its cause, becomes a significant and liminal experience. "*Per nemus ignotum non certis passibus errans*" ["(Actaeon) comes wandering through the unfamiliar woods with unsure footsteps"] (3. 175), we are told, and from that moment his life is changed. The attending nymphs are unable to cover their mistress; Actaeon sees unclothed divinity, and he must pay by his own destruction. This holy voyeurism and its disastrous result is one of Ovid's favorite structures for defining or describing divinity, especially as it emerges in nature.[6]

Forbidden knowledge is only a part of Ovid's tale, however. Let us consider the case of another young man who is vouchsafed a special vision in a sacred place: "*fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis, / quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae / contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris / nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus; / gramen erat circa, quod proximus umor alebat, / silvaque sole locum passura tepescere nullo.*" (3.407–12) ["There was a clear pool with silvery bright water, to which no shepherds ever came, or she-goats feeding on the mountainside, or any other cattle; whose smooth surface neither bird nor beast nor falling bough ever ruffled. Grass grew all around its edge, fed by the water near, and a coppice that would never suffer the sun to warm the spot."] Again Ovid simultaneously emphasizes natural beauty and sacred otherness. But this holy vision is a vision of the self, for this is the story of Narcissus. The presence of the Theban stories suggests that Narcissus is making a god of himself, while the presence of the Narcissus story ought to remind us that Actaeon, too, experiences a vision of himself and that the mysteries of selfhood are as profound as those of the gods, and in many ways similar.

The parallels between mysteries of identity and those of holiness

6. The forbidden vision is an image not only in Ovid's works but also in his life: he was banished from Rome in the year 8 in part for having beheld something which the Emperor did not wish him to see. As he bewails his fate in the *Tristia,* he cites Actaeon as an example of his suffering: *Cur aliquid vidi? cur noxia lumina feci? / cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi? / inscius Actaeon vidit sine veste Dianam: / praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis* ["Why did I see anything? Why did I make my eyes guilty? Why was I so thoughtless as to harbour the knowledge of a fault? Unwitting was Actaeon when he beheld Diana unclothed; none the less he became the prey of his own hounds"] (2.103–06). *Tristia,* trans. Arthur Leslie Wheeler, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1965).

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are directly relevant to Actaeon. Diana and Actaeon are both hunters, and they have both entered the grove to escape the hot sun. In seeing the goddess, Actaeon has a glimpse of a transfigured form of himself. When he looks directly at the unshielded brightness of this numinous version of himself, Actaeon shatters his identity and multiplies it. Part of the metamorphosis is the implicit equation between the two figures. This equation—of Actaeon with the holy form of himself as hunter—inexorably brings about the complementary equation of Actaeon with the beastly form of himself as hunter, the stag whom he has been hunting. Yet the most powerful change is neither on the sublime nor on the beastly level but rather inside Actaeon's psyche. What Actaeon sees in the mirror after his transformation is for the first time a sense of his own identity:

> *additus et pavor est: fugit Autonoeius heros*
> *et se tam in celerem cursu miratur ipso.*
> *ut vero vultus et cornua vidit in unda,*
> *"me miserum!" dicturus erat: vox nulla secuta est!*
> *ingemuit: vox illa fuit, lacrimaeque per ora*
> *non sua fluxerunt; mens tantum pristina mansit. . . .*
> *ille fugit per quae fuerat loca saepe secutus,*
> *heu! famulos fugit ipse suos. clamare libebat:*
> *"Actaeon ego sum: dominum cognoscite vestrum!"*
> *verba animo desunt.* (3.198–203, 228–31)

(And last of all she planted fear within his heart. Away in flight goes Autonoe's heroic son, marvelling to find himself so swift of foot. But when he sees his features and horns in a clear pool, "Oh, woe is me!" he tries to say; but no words come. He groans—the only speech he has—and tears course down his changeling cheeks. Only his mind remains unchanged. . . . He flees over the very ground where he has oft-times pursued; he flees (the pity of it!) his own faithful hounds. He longs to cry out: "I am Actaeon! Recognize your own master!" But words fail his desire.)

As Actaeon faces his own dogs unable to prove his own identity, we begin to see that the secret he witnessed when he saw Diana bathing is the secret of self-consciousness. Metamorphosis becomes a means of creating self-consciousness because it creates a tension between identity and form, and through this tension the individual is compelled to look in the mirror. Cadmus only began to develop this self-consciousness; he heard the voice telling him that the serpent was a mirror, but he could not grasp the fact. As a result, the whole Theban destiny becomes a working out of that problem of self-consciousness. Actaeon experiences the full vision, but he pays with his life.

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II

When we turn from the principal source to the mythological tradition that follows, we find in the Diana and Actaeon story—and in all the most frequently retold legends—a great variety of versions. One set of alternatives has to do with the content of the stories: classical myths, like all popular tales, develop many versions through oral and written retellings, and through being conflated in remote antiquity with other myths. The other set of alternatives has to do with interpretation of the story. From antiquity through the Renaissance, mythographers attempt to explain, interpret, and rationalize the stories of the gods, and their influence is very strong upon the poets and painters of the post-classical period. The relation between the tale-tellers and the mythographers is complicated (in part because they are not always two separate groups). By and large, the non-Ovidian sources for the content of the myths (writers like Stesichorus, Callimachus, Apollodorus) are unknown in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Yet they exert a strong influence on the heritage of ancient myths because they were known to the earlier mythographers. These ancient mythographers, including Palaephatus, Fulgentius, and Hyginus, tend to be plagiarized freely by medieval mythographers who are in turn copied by the authors of those all-purpose handbooks of the gods that Renaissance poets and painters seemed to keep near their worktables. So by a complicated system of almost Mendelian genetics, we have in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance versions of classical myths whose narratives remain Ovidian but whose interpretation involves an enormous range of possibilities, some based on versions of the story no longer current or even extant. The effect is not of alternative explanations but of simultaneous ones.

Thus Ovid's stress upon Actaeon's victimized innocence is virtually unique in the myth's history, and all subsequent versions which dramatize the young man's crime and justify his punishment derive in part from the exegesis of non-Ovidian versions. In fact, the story nearly always concerns complex interweavings of guilt and innocence. One common explanation, found first in Stesichorus, is that Actaeon has desired to wed Semele, whom Zeus wishes to reserve for his own pleasure.[7] Another accusation stresses Actaeon's prowess in hunting and his desire to compete with Artemis.[8] Judging from an Apulian Krater now

7. Cited in Pausanius, *Description of Greece,* IX, 2, 4.
8. Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History,* IV, 81, 4–5.

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in Naples, in which Actaeon, already half-transformed, is killing a stag, there may even have been a version of the story in which the young man is punished for killing an animal sacred to Artemis.[9] The most widespread explanation is precisely that which Ovid excludes: intentional voyeurism. But these alternative versions become part of the Ovidian tradition because they demonstrate on the surface what we found to be implicit in Ovid: sexuality, blasphemy, hubris, and a mirroring relationship between the mortal and the goddess.

The events of the story are subject to as much variety of narration as the motives or causes. Knowing only the Ovidian version, one would imagine the two major events of the story, the sight of Diana bathing and the metamorphosis of Actaeon, to be inevitable and immutable. But they are not. We have already seen a number of alternatives to the bathing scene as explanations of Diana's anger. Diana's bath first appears relatively late, in the work of Callimachus, who may have invented the idea since he is discussing the bath of Pallas and using Actaeon as an analogy to Tiresias, who was struck blind by the sight of Pallas bathing. While Callimachus makes it clear that both mortals were the victims of accident, he still moralizes the experiences as forbidden knowledge: "The laws of Cronus order thus: Whosoever shall behold any of the immortals, when the god himself chooses not, at a heavy price shall he behold."[10]

Metamorphosis, too, involves many alternative versions that revert to Ovidian themes. One rationalized type of the transformation appears first in Stesichorus, who states that Artemis threw a deerskin over Actaeon, thus deceiving his dogs into believing that their master was a stag.[11] Whether this is an intermediate phase of the story preceding the invention of metamorphosis or an attempt to explain away metamorphosis in logical terms, the deerskin idea served important aesthetic (as well as rationalist) purposes of certain Greek artists, whose taste shied away from any form of monstrosity. Thus we have an Actaeon fending off a deerskin thrown by Artemis, or else sitting upon a deerskin.[12] The deerskin continues to express the multiplicity of Actaeon's identity but separates the animal form rather decisively from the human.

9. See Paul Jacobsthal, "Aktaions Tod," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* V (1929), 18 and fig. 13.

10. Citation is to "The Bath of Pallas," in *Hymns and Epigrams*, trans. A. W. Mair, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1940), ll. 99–102.

11. Pausanius, *Description*, IX, 2, 4.

12. See Jacobsthal, "Aktaions Tod," p. 16.

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This separation becomes more complex in another visual form of the transformation—heavily influenced by the drama—in which Actaeon's animal form may consist of a theatrical mask.[13]

These kinds of alternatives could be enumerated for almost any classical myth. What sets the story of Diana and Actaeon in a special category is the presence of simultaneous alternatives; for if we examine the whole texture of almost any classical version of the story, we perceive a struggle to weld together different versions of the story into a single narrative. It is a struggle that goes a long way toward explaining how the Diana and Actaeon myth will become a powerful crux in the work of creative artists two millenia later. Visual narratives make this struggle particularly clear. The earliest representation we know of is absolutely simple. It is nothing more than a tangle of man and dogs: there is no bathing scene, no metamorphosis, and no divine explanation for the man's condition (Fig. 1).[14] When we turn to an early fifth-century Bell Krater (Fig. 2) we move from no explanations to multiple explanations. Actaeon suffers a double death: a fully clothed, vengeful Artemis is about to let loose an arrow at the same time as the pack of dogs surrounds and half-destroys the reclining Actaeon. The two forms of death very likely relate to two separate strands of the story. Artemis's arrow reminds us of the power of the gods to avenge mortal presumption, while the dogs relate to Actaeon's own culpability. Finally a Bell Krater by the Lykaon painter offers an even wider range of explanations (Fig. 3). Zeus, at a little distance, sternly oversees the proceedings; Lyssa, a figure of madness, seems to be urging the dogs on; and Actaeon's face is captured in a remarkably double condition with basically human features complicated by a suggestion of fur and antlers, and the beginnings of a squaring-off in shape that approximates the animal. The effect is again to multiply the myth's possibilities. The dramatic center of the composition is Actaeon struggling against the dogs, and each of the other figures acts as a kind of alternative explanation of that scene. Artemis is the immediate cause, and Zeus (perhaps) the ultimate executioner: these circumstantial explanations depend upon the narrative cause of Actaeon's transgression. Meanwhile Lyssa and the dogs belong

13. See especially Louis Séchan, *Etudes sur la tragédie Grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique* (Paris, 1926), pp. 132–38.

14. Jacobsthal in "Aktaions Tod," p. 2, suggests that metamorphosis is already visible on this piece. But it was already lost at the time that Jacobsthal wrote, and from reproductions it is impossible to see any signs of transformation.

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in a different realm of explanation, a psychological or internal description of Actaeon's fate. Lyssa, wearing a small ornamental dog head, is associated with madness, and more specifically with rabies, so that she may be an attribute of the dogs or even of Actaeon's condition. Finally the very realistic metamorphosis accounts for the story in yet another way: the dogs are mistaking their master for their prey.

The written record of the myth in antiquity shows the same tendency to combine versions of the story that are not always, strictly speaking, compatible. Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.) speaks both of the hunting competition between Diana and Actaeon and of the young man's desire to consummate marriage with her: he thus interweaves hubris and sexuality.[15] Apollodorus (probably first or second century A.D.) offers a different pair of explanations: competition for Semele and the voyeuristic scene at the bath.[16] To these two kinds of blasphemy, Apollodorus adds a remarkable detail: Actaeon's dogs were so heartbroken by the loss of their master that the centaur Chiron was obliged to make an image (*eidolon*) of the youth to pacify them. Actaeon's identity and the ironies of his death are thus further multiplied. Finally, many of these motives and meanings are fused in the fifth-century *Dionysiaca* of Nonnos.[17] Actaeon's hunting is made explicitly parallel to his voyeurism and to his lust for the goddess; and once he has been destroyed, his ghost returns with a lengthy, fulsome recognition of his own identity in the midst of metamorphosis. The lustful hunter and the blasphemous voyeur are joined with the self-conscious man.

III

Nonnos can stand as a summation of the narrative tradition for the Actaeon story throughout antiquity. In the *Dionysiaca,* as in Ovid, the wide range of the story's significance tends to fall into three general areas: thwarted love, individual identity, and forbidden knowledge. To these the mythographers add a new set of significations. The tradition of the exegesis of myth, whether in the fourth century B.C. or the fourteenth century A.D., has a strongly rationalist bent. Mythographers attempt to tame, rationalize, or justify a set of stories that are at best implausible and at worst doctrinally unacceptable.

15. Diodorus Siculus, *Library,* IV, 81, 3–5. It is interesting to compare Hyginus, who in *Fabula* CLXXX explains that Actaeon desired to rape Diana, while in the next account he ascribes the metamorphosis to the goddess's unwillingness to let Actaeon speak of having seen her naked.

16. Apollodorus, *The Library,* III, 4, 4.

17. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca,* V, 287–551.

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So the mythographers turn away from love, identity, and insight. They concern themselves primarily with moral lessons based on the assumption that Actaeon is a real-life character in their own societies. One set of social lessons is strictly economic. As early as the fourth century B.C. Palaephatus offers a simple explanation for the hunter's death: any young man who spends his money on a great troop of hunting dogs is likely to be eaten up by his own profligacy.[18] The final scene of the story is a metaphorical enactment of this moralistic truth. According to Fulgentius, "in idly gratifying them [his dogs] he lost all his substance,"[19] while the *Ovide Moralisé* cautions the reader,

> Par cest example prengne esgart
> Chascune et chascuns qu'il se gart
> De tenir oiseuse mesnie,
> Et d'atraire en sa compaignie
> Chose qui li soit damagable,
> Com bien qu'il li soit delitable,
> Quar veoir puet comme il meschut
> A cest riche home, qui dechut
> Pour les chiens oiseuz maintenir.[20]

(By this example take care, let each woman and each man guard against indolent habits and against attracting into their company anything dangerous to them, however delightful. For you can see how ill befell this rich man who fell from high estate by maintaining idle dogs.)

Among medieval mythographers this economic interpretation is generalized to the point where Actaeon becomes the type of the prodigal who is reduced to poverty. Hunting is an emblem for all pursuits that are vain, empty and self-wasting,[21] and the hero's metamorphosis is economic:

> Actheon cervus dominus prius et modo servus.
> Dives erat primum, descendit pauper ad imum.

18. *De Incredibilibus,* VI.
19. *Mythologies,* III, 3, in *Fulgentius the Mythographer,* trans. L. G. Whitbread (Columbus, 1971), p. 85.
20. III, 591–99. Citation is to *Ovid Moralisé,* ed. C. de Boer (Amsterdam, 1915); translation mine.
21. It is also, according to Berchorius, the emblem of pursuits that waste the world: "Actaeon signifies the usurious and avaricious who with their dogs—that is, their co-workers and patrons—plunder the beasts—that is other men—of the the forest of this world so that from that source they can enjoy happiness" (William Donald Reynolds, *The Ovidius Moralizatus of Petrus Berchorius,* Diss. University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 1971, p. 184).

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Iste notat miserum: cui dum substantia rerum
Sumitur in vanum, fit fera preda canum.[22]

(Actaeon the stag was first a lord and then soon afterwards a slave. He was first a rich man, then fell to the depths of poverty. He signifies wretchedness: once his substance has been consumed in vain pursuit, he becomes the beastly prey of his dogs.)

Giovanni del Virgilio confirms the economic interpretation of Actaeon's metamorphosis with the pun on *cervus*, stag, and *servus*, slave.

But economics is only the narrowest of social lessons. By the Renaissance, the theory of Actaeon's profligacy has given way to more intricate rationalizations involving public life:

But this fable was invented to show us how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of Princes, or by chance to discover their nakednesse: who thereby incurring their hatred ever after live the life of a Hart, full of feare and suspicion: not seldome accused by their servants, to gratulate the Prince, unto their utter destruction. For when the displeasure of a Prince is apparent, there commonly are no few Traitors than servants, who inflict on their masters the fate of Actaeon. . . . [Then on the subject of Actaeon's dogs] I . . . agree with those who think it to bee meant by his maintaining of ravenous and riotous sychophants: who have often exhausted the Exchequors of opulent Princes, and reduced them to extreame necessity. Bounty therefore is to be limited according to the ability of the giver and merit of the receaver: else it not only ruinates it self, but loseth the name of a vertue, and converts into folly.[23]

Here we begin to see the rationalization, or socialization, of some of the ancient significations of the story. What was forbidden knowledge of the gods becomes (very logically) espionage. The scene of Actaeon's voyeurism becomes an emblem of espionage against a monarch, while (somewhat inconsistently) Actaeon's death proves him to be a victim of ingratitude. The two scenes, and the interpretations that go with them, have an intricate relation: once Actaeon has spied upon Diana and thereby overstepped his rights toward his leader, then all his underlings feel free to act with the same ambitious presumption toward him. It is again a story of mirroring, in which Actaeon becomes the victim

22. "Giovanni del Virgilio espositore delle 'Metamorfosi,'" *Giornale Dantesco* XXXIV, n.s. IV (1931–32), 52; translation mine.

23. George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures* (Oxford, 1632), pp. 151–52. Sandys summarizes and epitomizes, even plagiarizes a whole tradition of mythographic readings. For other Renaissance mythographers on Actaeon, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Peri Genealogias Deorum* (Basle, 1532), V, 14, pp. 128–29; Natalis Comes, *Mythologiae* (Geneva, 1651), VI, 24, pp. 662–64; Carolus Stephanus, *Dictionarium Historicum, Geographicum, Poeticum* (Geneva, 1650), col. 55–56; Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata* (Lyons, 1548), p. 51. For a discussion of these mythographers, particularly in connection with Ben Jonson, see Dewitt T. Starnes and Ernest William Talbert, *Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries* (Chapel Hill, 1955), pp. 204–12.

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FIGURE 1. Actaeon torn to pieces by his dogs. Black-figure cup, sixth century B.C. Now lost. Photograph by the author.

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FIGURE 2. Pan Painter (?), *Actaeon Krater.* Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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FIGURE 3. Lykaon Painter, *Death of Actaeon.* Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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FIGURE 4. Titian, *Diana Surprised by Actaeon.* Duke of Sutherland Collection, on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland.

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FIGURE 5. Titian, *Diana and Callisto.* Duke of Sutherland Collection, on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland.

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FIGURE 6. Titian, *Punishment of Actaeon.* Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees, The National Gallery, London.

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FIGURE 7. Parmigianino, *Diana and Actaeon* (detail), Fontanellato. Photograph by the author.

FIGURE 8. Jean Mignon, *Diana and Actaeon,* woodcut (detail). Photograph by the author.

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FIGURE 9. Paolo Veronese, *Diana and Actaeon,* John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia. Photograph courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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of precisely the same crime that he would perpetrate upon Diana. Through this political moralization, the story illuminates all the norms of public behavior: both the limits of individual power and (in Sandys' explanation of the dogs) the proper way to use power.

Not all the allegories are social. By the end of the Middle Ages a new kind of moralization emerges to tame pagan myths. The *Ovide Moralisé* and the commentary of Pierre Bersuire, among their many adaptations of Ovidian stories, translate the whole corpus of ancient myth into typological versions of scripture. In the case of Actaeon, the Christian reading revives an ancient divine interpretation of the story that will reappear as Renaissance Platonism, i.e., that the hero enters upon visionary experience and as a result must perish. In the commentary of Alexander Neckam, we can see a clear bridge between the visionary reading and the Christian reading:

Diana enim quasi *dios neos,* id est, per dies innovata, seu innovans, dicitur. Haec est sapientia. Ista dum corpus suum aquis lavat, nullum admittere vult qui se ingerat importune. Nymphae Dianae sunt hi qui sapientiae diligentem dant operam. Cum de mysteriis et arcanis sapientiae disseritur, non est passim quilibet admittendus.... Iste est Actaeon qui importune secretis colloquiis prudentium se ingerit.[24]

(For she is called Diana [as it were "*Dios neos*"] that is, the renewed or renewing day. She is wisdom. When she washes his body with the water, she is refusing to admit anyone who forces his way rudely upon her. Diana's nymphs are those who dedicate themselves assiduously to the pursuit of wisdom. When one speaks of the mysteries and secrets of wisdom, it is not possible to admit just anyone at random into the company. . . . Actaeon is that individual who forces his way rudely into the secret discourses of knowledge.)

This remains a rationalist reading: not everyone can be admitted to follow the secret path of wisdom, and dangers await those who try. From this interpretation it is a relatively short step to specify the nature of the wisdom, the particular dangers attendant upon it, and the identity of Actaeon:

Dyane, c'est la Deité
Qui regnoit en la Trinité,
Nue, sans humaine nature,
Qu'Acteon vit sans couverture,
C est li filz Dieu, qui purement
Vit a nu descouvertement
La beneoite Trinité.[25] (*Ovide Moralisé,* III, 635–41)

24. *De Naturis Rerum,* II, 137, ed. T. Wright (London, 1863); translation mine.

25. Berchorius retains the sense of holy vision but equates Diana with the Virgin Mary whom Christ sees nude, i.e., not obscured by sins.

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Diana is the divinity that reigns in the Trinity, nude, that is, without mortal nature, which Actaeon sees uncovered. He is the Son of God, Who sees nude in its pure undiscovered state the blessed Trinity.

Through this rather perverse hermeneutic, the incarnation is figured forth by Actaeon's transformation into stag. The ancient pun of *cervus* and *servus* develops new meaning in the *Ovide Moralisé* when Actaeon's transformation into a *cerf* reminds us that the incarnate Christ lived "souz forme de serf." The terrible result of the visionary experience is the destruction of Christ by his own people, the Jews, "pire que chiens." In this fable, then, Actaeon/Christ becomes the hero of a Platonic initiation story in which the highest masquerades as the lowest. That individual is vouchsafed a vision of the Trinity and as a result must die to the world.

IV

What we have in all these versions of the Actaeon story is a series of conflicting and yet interrelating alternative significances. From the ancient narratives there is the story of love carnal or visionary, the story of identity, self-consciousness, and transformation, the story of forbidden knowledge in all its glory and terror. The mythographers add moralistic alternatives: the norms of economic behavior, the norms of social and political behavior, and finally the recapitulation of the Christian story. What we shall observe from here on is the way in which creative artists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were able to make powerful syntheses among these subjects by their use of Actaeon's story.

Even the economic reading of Actaeon's experience can be powerfully joined with other significations of the story, raising important questions concerning norms of social action in relation to the self. In the thirteenth canto of the *Inferno,* Dante is depicting the fate of suicides. Suddenly there is an interlude involving two extreme profligates, Lano of Siena and Jacopo da Santo Andrea of Padua, who appear as the objects of a wild chase directly compared with the hunt. Their pursuers are "nere cagne, bramose e correnti / come veltri ch' uscisser di catena" ["black bitches ravenous and swift like hounds loosed from the chain"].[26] We recall that Dante's friend the mythographer Giovanni del Virgilio allegorized Actaeon as a profligate who was destroyed by his lavish

26. *Inferno,* XIII, 125–26. Citation is to *The Divine Comedy,* ed. and trans. John D. Sinclair (London, 1939).

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expenditures on such items as hunting dogs. Here Dante alludes to the destruction of the profligate Actaeon, but he also builds a bridge between profligacy and suicide by evoking the association of Actaeon's story with problems of identity. The profligate Actaeon is a squanderer of himself, much like a suicide. The pursuit by dogs demonstrates the complexities of identity because it establishes complex and paradoxical relationships between hunter and hunted. The dogs enact the ravening desires of their victim-master. The profligates, having financially destroyed themselves, are now destroyed by dogs who are part of themselves, and the scene becomes itself a kind of externalized suicide.

In Renaissance literature, the social and political norms established by Actaeon's story are most frequently joined with much more pagan significances involving love and passion. When Camoens, for instance, wishes to celebrate young King Sebastian in *The Lusiads,* he has an uncongenial subject for praise: a very probably insane young monarch who was refusing to marry and was passionately devoted to the hunt, and whose position was in grave danger from powerful groups of his subjects. Not surprisingly, then, the image of Actaeon runs through the *Lusiads.* When Venus appeals to her father to bless Da Gama and the hapless mariners, she is so beautiful that

> The Huntsman who the Horns (transformed) wore,
> For seeing thus that other Goddess coy;
> Had he seen this, had ne're been torn asunder
> By his own doggs: But di'de of love, and wonder. (2. 35)[27]

The implication that man, even a public man, is safer under the banner of Venus than under the banner of Diana develops a more political meaning in the Isle of Venus passage in Canto Nine. Here the mariners are reaping the just rewards of rest and recreation; but in the midst of this romantic passage we are not allowed to forget that there are tensions in both love and politics:

> He sees Actaeon hunting, so inclin'd
> To that mad *sport* and brutal exercise,
> That a deform'd *wild-beast* to follow (blind)
> The Beauty of a *humane* Face he flyes:
> And (to torment him with a *Fair Unkind)*
> Shows stript Diana to his gazing eyes.
> *Now* let him take good heed he do not prove
> A *Prey,* ev'n to those *Hounds* he doth so love. (9. 26)

27. Luis de Camoens, *The Lusiad,* trans. Richard Fanshawe (Cambridge, Mass., 1940).

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Clearly King Sebastian is being counseled to turn away from the hunt and toward love and marriage.[28] Camoens' profligate Actaeon, in his obsession with the hunt, is wasting not his money but rather his love. Yet Camoens is aware of political as well as amatory associations of the story. The "*Hounds* he doth so love" are not only actual hunting dogs; they also allegorically represent his subjects. This stanza is followed immediately by a satirical passage outlining the dangers to the king posed by nobles, Jesuits, and rebels. These threatening subjects are the king's ungrateful hounds who may destroy their master. If Actaeon/Sebastian makes a misstep in love, he endangers the whole social system that ought to keep him in control of his subjects.[29]

If King Sebastian of Portugal was a difficult figure to celebrate wholeheartedly, Renaissance Englishmen had a much easier task. Queen Elizabeth lived at the center of intricate politics, but she was also presented by her celebrants as the queen in a court of love. Because the virgin queen, so frequently mythologized as Diana,[30] had more than her share of blasphemous, or lustful, or seditious Actaeons, the myth takes on considerable vitality during her reign. We know from the diaries of foreign travelers in England that the Actaeon story was depicted in at least two of the Queen's residences. Paul Hentzner recounts an inscription at the entrance of the Whitehall park:

> The fisherman who had been wounded, learns,
> though late, to beware;
> But the unfortunate Actaeon always presses on.
> The chaste virgin naturally pitied:
> But the powerful goddess revenged the wrong.
> Let Actaeon fall a prey to his dogs,
> An example to youth,
> A disgrace to those that belong to him!
> May Diana live the care of heaven;
> The delight of mortals
> The security of those that belong to her.[31]

28. For King Sebastian's bizarre career and for his addiction to the hunt, see H. V. Livermore, *A History of Portugal* (Cambridge, 1947), pp. 253–54.

29. So far away in time and place as Sir John Denham's "Cooper's Hill," Actaeon seems to be alluded to in political terms as the poet uses a lengthy stag hunt to establish a basis for the power of the commonwealth and the power of the king. At first, the stag seems to represent the king, who is rejected by his own herd; then the stag becomes "Fair Liberty," who took her stand when Magna Carta was signed.

30. See. E. C. Wilson, *England's Eliza* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), pp. 167–229.

31. *Paul Hentzner's Travels in England, during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth,* trans. Horace, Earl of Oxford (London, 1797), p. 23.

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According to Hentzner, the inscription alludes to Philip II, who wooed the young Elizabeth after the death of his wife Mary and who found his presumption punished by the defeat of the Armada; if so, the parallels are apt. Elizabeth, here and elsewhere, is a figure of love at the same time that she represents political power, so that the story here is one of both amatory and political presumption. The reference to "those that belong" to both individuals reminds us of parallels between them, suggesting again how a seditious Actaeon will be in turn the victim of sedition in his own public affairs. That the two parties are both monarchs gives special force to the myth.

Another German traveler, Thomas Platter, reported that in the park of Nonsuch House, the scene of Diana and Actaeon was sculpted at a fountain "with great art and life-like execution."[32] Here there were some verses celebrating chastity and bewailing the dangers of impurity arising in a fountain celebrating chastity—by implication the watering place at which Actaeon spied on Diana. The fountain here is clearly the flow of the court's influence through the whole polity[33] and the scene can be taken almost as a gloss upon a great contemporary celebration of Elizabeth as Diana, Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*. By 1600, Actaeon is no longer Philip II but rather the Earl of Essex. The impetus for the action, as well as for the first reference to the myth of Actaeon, is the presumption of the Earl, who dared to burst in upon the Queen in her chamber:

> The Huntresse, and Queene of these groves, DIANA (in regard of some black and envious slanders hourely breath'd against her, for her divine justice on ACTEON, as shee pretends) hath here in the vale of *Gargaphy*, proclaim'd a solemne revells, which (her god-head put off) shee will descend to grace, with the full and royall expence of one of her cleerest moones: In which time, it shall bee lawfull for all sorts of ingenuous persons, to visit her palace, to court her NYMPHES, to exercise all varietie of generous and noble pastimes, as well to intimate how farre shee treads such malicious imputations beneath her, as also to shew how cleere her beauties are from the least wrinckle of austerity, they may be charg'd with. (I. i. 90–103)[34]

The revels become a cure for the feelings of rigidity and austerity that

32. *Thomas Platter's Travels in England in 1599*, trans. Clare Williams (London, 1937), p. 195.

33. The image of the fountain as source from which the purity or impurity of the monarch flows through the commonwealth is quite common in English Renaissance literature, turning up in such disparate texts as the *Faerie Queene* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Jonson cleverly unites this tradition with mythological sources of water, especially Narcissus' pool.

34. Citations are to *The Works of Ben Jonson*, IV, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford, 1932).

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arise from Diana/Elizabeth's just punishment of the rebel in both love and politics. The goddess/queen is thus opening her mysteries, showing them in brighter moonlight, and trying to present herself as the queen in a court of love, not a court that excludes love.

Jonson, even in such an idealized text as *Cynthia's Revels,* offers multiple points of view on this celebratory project. Once Diana's court becomes more accessible, it becomes the haunt, as the presenter tells us, "for all sorts of ingenuous persons," and Jonson's play is principally devoted to exposing the dangers of these persons. The reprehensible courtiers who monopolize the stage, bearing names like Hedon, Philautia, and Moria, are figures of love, perhaps, but more precisely of self-love. Once they have drunk of Narcissus's fountain, they have no love left to spare for their queen or for Crites, the virtuous poet who is the exemplar of moderation. As a result they come to represent a great danger to Diana in just the sense that Actaeon endangers her or Actaeon's dogs endanger him.

Until late in the play, Jonson keeps the good and bad examples separate, suggesting that Diana has nothing to fear. Cupid even prophesies that the self-loving courtiers "(like so many meteors) will vanish when [Cynthia] appears" (II. iv. 110–11). But this neat state of affairs cannot last. The presence of ingratitude, blasphemy, and folly among courtiers, especially given the imminence of the revels, must soon endanger the court: "To stay with follies, or where faults may be, / Infers a crime, although the partie free" (V. vi. 66–67). The dangers of proximity between good and ill become the precise subject of the masque performed by the courtiers, since the exemplar of each vice dresses up as the neighboring virtue.

The impenetrability of these disguises demonstrates the vulnerability of the monarch to Actaeon and his traits. We observe the courtiers' profligacy, Cynthia herself exclaims against their ingratitude, and at the conclusion of the masque she inveighs against blasphemy and sedition:

> For so ACTAEON, by presuming farre,
> Did (to our grief) incurre a fatall doome; . . .
> But are we therefore judged too extreme?
> Seemes is no crime, to enter sacred bowers,
> And hallowed places, with impure aspect,
> Most lewdly to pollute? Seemes it no crime,
> To brave a *deitie?* Let mortals learne
> To make religion of offending heaven;
> And not at all to censure powers divine. (V. ii. 14–24)

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Without being aware of it, the Queen has taken part in a re-enactment of Actaeon's presumption. She believes that she is addressing exemplary courtiers, but she soon learns that these masquers are corrupted self-lovers who have intruded upon her "sacred bowers" once again:

> How! let me view you! ha? Are we contemn'd?
> Is there so little awe of our disdaine,
> That any (under trust of their disguise)
> Should mixe themselves with others of the court?
> And (without forehead) boldly presse so far,
> As farther none? How apt is lenitie
> To be abusde? severitie to be loth'd?
> And yet, how much more doth the seeming face
> Of Neighbour-vertues, and their borrow'd names,
> Adde of lewd boldnesse, to loose vanities? (V. ii. 50–59)

These presumptions are ultimately punished just as Essex's were, but Jonson does not altogether conceal his pessimism. He uses the myth of Actaeon to draw parallels between the offstage presumption of Essex and the constant presumptions of corrupt courtiers. They are enacting the same mythic crime, an amalgam of blasphemy, voyeurism, lust, ingratitude, and sedition.

V

Some ancient versions of Actaeon's story, as we have seen, stressed the subject of thwarted love; most versions of the story dramatize the metamorphosis as a complex play on Actaeon's identity. Petrarch is the first to combine these significations. From that source Actaeon's story becomes throughout the Renaissance a means of investigating the complicated psychology of love. Petrarch's *Rime* XXIII, the source for this reading of the myth, is a spiritual autobiography of the poet-lover figured forth in a series of Ovidian transformations. Actaeon's story climaxes and concludes the long poem, but earlier Petrarch prepares us for the significations of that story, its associations with ecstatic love, with destruction, and with complex identity. From the start of the poem, love is loss of identity, ("Mi face obliar me stesso," l. 19) a prospect which is at once terrifying and possibly sublime.[35] All the Ovidian metamorphoses in the poem play on this problem, for metamorphosis suggests the loss of one identity and the gaining of another. The positive side of the process emerges in the myth of Daphne. Love gives the poet

35. Citations are to Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere* (Turin, 1974). Translations are from Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

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his identity through transformation: "ei duo [una possente Donna e Amor] mi trasformaro in quel ch' i' sono" (l. 38). The Daphneic transformation is into "un lauro verde / che per fredda stagion foglia non perde" (ll. 39–40). By becoming an evergreen, the lover changes into an unchanging condition. The poet sees this gain of identity through metamorphosis as strikingly positive partly because in time-honored Platonic fashion he is being transformed into his beloved, since she is *Laura* and he becomes *un lauro.* And even if this Ovidian story involves no sexual union or human offspring, it does produce an eternally green laurel tree, the emblem of the poetic creation that Laura inspires.

Being transformed into one's beloved involves a glorious form of union through fixity. But the sequence of transformations that follow dramatizes mutability and the fragmentation of identity. The lover becomes Phaethon, who presumed too high, and Cygnus, the singer of the swan song lamenting Phaethon's death. The combination is highly significant: subject and object at once, the hero of a divine tragedy and the poet chronicling that tragedy. Lest that seem a comfortable combination for the identity of the autobiographical poet, he is next transformed into Battus, whose crime was speech and whose punishment was petrification. The swan-song of poetry is silenced, and metamorphic fixity becomes that of a rock. A similar process emerges in the final pair of transformations. First the lover becomes, Byblis-like, a fountain of sorrow (not unlike Cygnus, who lamented "dallato e dentro a l'acque" [l. 57]), for the power of metamorphosis enables rocks to dissolve through sorrowful suffering. But the flow is stopped when the lover becomes Echo, at once rock and voice:

> . . . i nervi et l'ossa
> mi volse in dura selce, et cosi scossa
> voce rimasi de l'antiche some,
> chiamando Morte et lei sola per nome. (ll. 138–40)

(She turned my sinews and bones into hard flint, and thus I remained a voice shaken from my former burden, calling Death and only her by name.)

As in Petrarch's version of the story of Daphne, the poet as Echo is again transformed into his beloved, but it is an ironically empty union of identities. He is one with her in the sense that he can repeat her name, while his physical form is flinty rock.

Petrarch places Actaeon's story at the climax of the poem:

> I' seguí' tanto avanti il mio desire
> ch'un dí cacciando, sí com'io solea,

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mi mossi; e quella fera bella e cruda
in una fonte ignuda
si stava, quando 'l sol piú forte ardea.
Io, perche d'altra vista non m'appago,
stetti a mirarla; ond'ella ebbe vergogna;
et per farne vendetta, o per celarse,
l'acqua nel viso co le man' mi sparse.
Vero dirò (forse e' parrà menzogna)
ch'i' sentí' trarmi de la propria imago,
et in un cervo solitario et vago
di selva in selva ratto mi trasformo
Et anchor de' miei can'fuggo lo stormo. (ll. 147–60)

(I followed so far my desire that one day, hunting as I was wont, I went forth, and that lovely wild creature was in a spring naked when the sun burned most strongly. I, who am not appeased by any other sight, stood to gaze on her, whence she felt shame and, to take revenge or to hide herself, sprinkled water in my face with her hand. I shall speak the truth, perhaps it will appear a lie, for I felt myself drawn from my own image and into a solitary wandering stag from wood to wood quickly I am transformed and still I flee the belling of my hounds.)

Its placement is significant for many reasons. We have observed how the myth of Actaeon is frequently connected with shifting identities and mirror-like identities. All the identities in the poem have been made uncertain through metamorphosis. "'I' non son forse chi tu credi'" (l. 83), says the beloved, and a few lines later the poet cries, "'Non son mio'" (l. 100). In fact, identities have been shifting as with mirrors: the poet and Laura, Phaethon and Cygnus, and the sequence Battus, Byblis, Echo, all suggest mirrored oppositions. Finally, as Actaeon, the poet is definitively drawn out of himself ("i' sentí' trarmi de la propria imago" [l. 157]), separated in his objective form from the perceiving subject.[36] The lover's identity is finally split between the helpless victim and the poetic lamenter. Most of his earlier transformations have involved these combinations: Phaethon vs. Cygnus, Battus vs. Byblis, and finally Echo who helplessly combined the two roles. Now we have the stag vs. the hounds, the frightened lonely victim and the passionate forces that may represent his love, his moral instincts, or his capacity to perceive. But with this schizophrenic conclusion we have come even further from a favorable view of the transformational process. The first product of metamor-

36. In this connection it is interesting to consider the contention by Durling that "Daphne and Actaeon converge on and point toward the figure of Narcissus" (p. 31). Although Durling draws somewhat different connections from mine with the paragon of self-love, clearly one could say of Ovid's Narcissus that he is "drawn from his own image."

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phosis was the poetic and amorous *lauro,* the next products ranged from swan song to fountain to the relatively empty Echo; finally the schizoid poet can produce nothing more than the barking of dogs—at the furthest possible remove from poetry.

The Actaeon story does more than complete the process begun with the other transformations. Actaeon, as Robert Durling has pointed out, inverts all the positive implications of Daphne's story.[37] But in addition the final myth takes the lover's experience in new directions. Most of the earlier myths involve some sort of commerce between god and mortal, but in each case Petrarch has left the god out: Apollo, whether as Phaethon's father or Daphne's lover, and Mercury as the punisher of Battus have no place in the transformations of those stories. Just as Petrarch omits the gods he keeps the lady relatively remote from the lover. But in the great visionary scene of Actaeon's story, the lover can finally gaze at the divine sight of his beloved. The lowest point in the lover's search for identity is also the moment of his most direct confrontation with the object of his love. The violence of his physical and spiritual metamorphosis is also a kind of ecstasy. Once the poet is being destroyed and also transfigured, his schizophrenia can become sublime in a visionary sense even as it is torturous in a psychological sense. He may be tormented by the bellowing of his internal hounds; but as their victim, the "cervo solitario et vago" is also identified with the "fera bella e cruda" whom he was hunting, and such is the possibility of union that it is no longer clear who is the agent of transformation and who the victim. Earlier in the poem, Amor and his lady transformed him (past tense); now, in the present and in a way that speaks both to his psychology and his vision, "mi trasformo."

Among Petrarch's disciples, Actaeon's story becomes primarily a vehicle for dramatizing the internal psychology of love. Petrarch's reflexive verb seems to take over the story, for Actaeon's sufferings will become self-created and self-destroying. Ronsard joins the myth with the *chasse d'amour,* a fashionable visual topos of sixteenth-century France:

> Franc de raison, esclave de fureur,
> Je vay chassant une fere sauvage,

37. See Durling, pp. 28–29: "In one, it is the beloved who flees, in the other, the lover. In one, the end result is speech: poetry and fame; in the other, silence. In one, there is evergreen eternizing; in the other, dismemberment. Daphne, as she runs, looks into the water and becomes a tree, takes root; Actaeon, who is standing still, grows hooves, flees, sees his reflection and flees the more."

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Or' sur un mont, or' le long d'un rivage,
Or' dans le bois de jeunesse et d'erreur.
J'ay pour ma laisse un long trait de malheur,
J'ay pour limier un trop ardent courage,
J'ay pour me chiens l'ardeur et le jeune âge,
J'ay pour piqueurs l'espoir et la douleur.
Mais eux, voyans que plus elle est chassée,
Loin, loin, devant plus s'enfuit élancée,
Tournant sur moi leur rigoureux effort,
Comme mastins affamés de repaistre,
A longs morceaux se paissent de leur maistre,
Et sans mercy me traînent à la mort.[38]

(Freed from reason, slave of fury, I go hunting a wild beast, now on the mountain, now along the shore, now in the forest of youth and error. For my leash I have a long string of unhappiness, for my bloodhound I have an all too burning heart, for my dogs I have ardor and youth, for my huntsmen hope and suffering. But they, seeing that the more she is hunted, the farther and farther she flees bounding forward, turn against myself their strenuous efforts. Like mastiffs hungry to be fed, in great chunks they nourish themselves on their master and without mercy they drag me to my death. [Translation mine])

The disappearance of the "fere sauvage," or the inability of the hunting party to catch sight of her, becomes the tragic occasion for the lover's self-destruction. The chase of Actaeon has become a psychological allegory.

Once the goddess becomes the unattainable object of an amorous hunt, the story of Actaeon acquires enormous psychological power. In the hands of lesser Petrarchan imitators, this psychological quality can degenerate into abstraction and vacuity, a cliché of self-absorption. The tormenting but fatally remote sight of a beautiful woman realizes the beastliness of the lover and atomizes him into his destructive desires as represented by the devouring hounds. It is a perfect Petrarchan fable, most typical because the psychological dimension has overwhelmed external circumstances. In Elizabethan love poetry the association between self-inflicted love torment and the destruction is almost a cliché. "Behold one to his fancies made a prey! / A poor ACTAEON with his hounds devoured!"[39] writes Barnabe Barnes in an elegy that never refers to any external cause of this torment, and Bartholomew Griffin embodies the Actaeon myth in a sonnet that concentrates upon the self-created nature of the amorous agony:

38. Citation is to *Oeuvres Completes,* ed. Blanchemain (Paris, 1857), I, 67.

39. *Parthenophil and Parthenophe,* Elegy 3, in Sidney Lee, *Elizabethan Sonnets* (New York, 1903), I. 240.

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Grief-urging Guest! great cause have I to plain me,
Yet hope persuading hope expecteth grace,
And saith, "None but myself shall ever pain me!"
But grief, my hopes exceedeth, in this case.
For still my fortune ever more doth cross me,
By worse events than ever I expected;
And, here and there, ten thousand ways doth toss me,
With sad remembrance of my time neglected.
These breed such thoughts as set my heart on fire,
And like fell hounds, pursue me to my death.
Traitors unto their sovereign Lord and Sire,
Unkind exactors of their father's breath.
Whom, in their rage, they shall no sooner kill
Than they themselves, themselves unjustly spill![40]

The old associations of the myth with fractured selfhood become so prominent here that they call attention to themselves and cast doubt upon the reality of the love.

In fact for Gismondo, the proponent of fulfilled sexual love in Pietro Bembo's dialogue *Gli Asolani,* the myth of Actaeon refers specifically to this form of tormented, imaginary love:

For through believing that he was in love while he met his lady only in imagination, he has become a solitary stag whom, like Actaeon, his hounded thoughts have pitifully torn; but he seeks to nourish rather than escape them, desiring to bring life to an untimely end and not aware, apparently, how much better it is to be alive, on any terms, than dead.[41]

If Actaeon is a Petrarchan cliché suggesting self-created imaginary love, then Orsino's reference to the myth at the opening of *Twelfth Night* seems particularly apt:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence.
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.[42]

Orsino means the reference as a compliment to the divine beauties of Olivia and a self-congratulatory reference to the pains of his love. But Shakespeare is reminding us of the self-contained nature of Orsino's

40. *Fidessa,* Sonnet 8, in Lee, *Elizabethan Sonnets,* II, 269. See also Samuel Daniel *Delia V* for a fuller retelling of Petrarch's Actaeon story.

41. *Gli Asolani,* trans. Rudolf B. Gottfried (Bloomington, Ind., 1954), p. 105.

42. I. i. 20–24. All Shakespeare citations are to *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare,* ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York, 1972).

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passion. The lady disappears from the hunt the moment she has been seen; from then onwards the lover is engaged in a chase of himself.

The Petrarchan tradition, then, depicts an amorous, psychological, and visionary Actaeon. Before leaving it behind we ought to note that Petrarchan love can also be politicized. A group of *dixains* from Maurice Sceve's *Délie* is printed under the heading "Acteon," along with an emblem of a man half-transformed into a stag and including the motto "Fortune par les miens me chasse." The connection between the rubrics and the poems in *Délie* is always perplexing, and most of the *dixains* in this group have little to do with Actaeon. But the first of the group recapitulates the motto, and here that bears quite directly on our hero:

> Toutes les fois qu'en mon entendement
> Ton nom divin par la memoire passe,
> L'esprit ravy d'vn si doulx sentiment,
> En aultre vie, & plus doulce trespasse:
> Alors le Coeur, qui vn tel bien compasse,
> Laisse le Corps prest a estre enchassé:
> Et si bien a vers l'Ame pourchassé,
> Que de soymesme, & du corps il s'estrange.
> Ainsi celuy est des siens dechassé,
> A qui Fortune, ou heur, ou estat change.[43]

(Every time that within my understanding thy divine name passes through my memory, my spirit, ravished by such sweet feeling, departs to another, and a sweeter, life. Then my heart, which ready to be enshrined, encompasses such a property, leaves the body and pursues the soul so hard that it becomes estranged from itself and from the body. Just so he who suffers change of fortune, or fate, or condition is driven out by his own. [Translation mine])

As a purely amatory statement, the poem alludes to the problems of selfhood inherent in Actaeon's story. Love is a separation from oneself, producing a problem of self-consciousness because the heart has so pursued the beloved that it is separated from itself and from its body. The pursuit (whether hunting or loving) produces a sublime death suggesting that the hunter's fate may have been more exaltation than punishment. But bearing in mind the motto and the similar concern with fortune in the final two lines, we recollect that there is a kind of social allegory here. The poet's own forces, *les siens,* are a kind of commonwealth. As a visionary experience, love may exalt the poet, but in another sense it turns his own forces into disloyalty and disarray. When his equilibrium is disturbed by amorous ecstasy, he is like those Actaeons of Renaissance

43. Citation is to *Délie,* 168. ed. I. D. McFarlane (Cambridge, Eng., 1966).

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mythographers who see their own underlings disloyally threaten them.[44]

VI

We have demonstrated that versions of the Actaeon story tend always to be syncretic, but in the High Renaissance this syncretism reaches a peak of seriousness, uniting disparate elements under the aegis of Platonism. One set of Actaeon's significances relates to human love, quotidian existence, and nature; another set is concerned with vision, mystery, and godhead. The Platonizing impulse turns Actaeon's experience into a threshhold joining these two realms. Spenser, by introducing a version of the Actaeon story into the quarrel between Mutability and Dame Nature, offers a rather straightforward condemnation of Actaeon's blasphemy. Faunus (Spenser's satyr-Actaeon) has improper visionary ambitions just as Dame Mutability does.[45] She longs to see that which "mortall eyes have never seene" (VII. 6. 32), while he has been lying in wait for Diana: "Though full many a day / He saw her clad, yet longed foolishly / To see her naked mongst her Nymphes in privity" (VII. 6. 42). Spenser is fully aware that Actaeon's story is one of the divine appearing in nature. In purging Dame Nature from the taint of Mutability, Spenser rejects from the natural world what is falsely visionary and therefore merely presumptuous. Spenser construes the act of voyeurism as a blasphemous attempt to impose imperfection upon an ideal that is both divine and natural. He recasts Actaeon as Faunus in order to preserve the idea of Diana as goddess manifest in nature, while the presumptuous voyeuristic satyr has as his true ally the presumptuous would-be goddess Mutability.

Spenser's contemporary Giordano Bruno casts Actaeon as an important figure in *Gl' Eroici Furori*. The issues of nature and divinity and the Platonizing impulse are very similar to Spenser's, but the story becomes a glorious celebration of a sublime unity among disparate realms. Indeed Actaeon becomes the hero *par excellence* of heroic frenzies, the exemplar of the enthusiast who can attain divinity through love and contemplation. Only a myth so rich in diverse significations could become the vehicle for such complex and mystical assertions. In the first place, the

44. It is not impossible that Wyatt's "They Fle from Me" owes something to Actaeon. There too we find a chase and once-loyal animals who are now ungrateful, and there too Petrarchan ideas are combined with satirical reflections on the court.

45. Citations are to *Spenser's Faerie Queene*, ed. J. C. Smith (Oxford, 1961).

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whole of *Gl' Eroici Furori* finds its foundation in the tradition of Petrarchan love and its predecessors. From the dedication to Sir Philip Sidney to all Bruno's sonnets which his dialogues analyze, it becomes clear that the conventional behavior and attitudes of the romantic lover are requisite for the visionary experience, even if the true enthusiast must purge the purely sexual aspect of love. The enthusiast is first a lover, and Bruno builds his visionary structure upon the foundation of Neoplatonic amorous *furor.*[46] Bruno's special contribution to this notion of love equates it with such literary passions as those of Petrarch or Orlando. Actaeon is crucial in making this equation because he is the type of the Petrarchan lover whose torment can be understood as divinely inspired transformation. The first sight of the goddess turns him from the desired path of his hunt to the point where Diana becomes the sole object of his hunt, a motif which we have seen to emerge from the Petrarchan tradition. And Bruno's interpretation of Actaeon's dismemberment by his dogs—that the lover is literally beside himself, the hunter who has become the hunted—also depends upon the Petrarchan psychological allegory. In fact, although Bruno himself soon leaves the path of real-life human experience in his description of heroic frenzy, much of the power of his description derives from an emphasis on human psychology which Bruno has borrowed from the Petrarchan Actaeon.

Once the enthusiast goes through and beyond the Petrarchan experience, he enters a realm where divinity and nature are combined. Here again the traditional sense in the Actaeon story of a godhead appearing in nature is important. In Bruno's first Actaeon sonnet, the hunter has entered upon the "dubious and perilous" paths of nature:

> Here among the waters he sees the most beautiful countenance and breast, that ever one mortal or divine may see, clothed in purple alabaster and fine gold; and the great hunter becomes the prey that is hunted.[47]

The commentary glosses "among the waters" as "in the mirror of similitudes." Again, Actaeon's story is one of mirroring identities. The hunter's sight of Diana in the mirror amounts to a metaphysical conceit in which the whole sublime process is infolded. Diana is the world of nature:

> It is impossible for anyone to see the sun, the universal Apollo and absolute light as the

46. See Dame Frances Yates's citations to Ficino and Cornelius Agrippa in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 280–81.

47. Citations are to *The Heroic Frenzies,* trans. P. E. Memmo, Jr. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1964), p. 123.

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supreme and most excellent species; but very possible to see its shadow, its Diana, the world, the universe, the nature which is in things, light shining through the obscurity of matter and so resplendent in the darkness. (p. 225)

The "mirror of similitudes" is the system of analogies whereby the elements of nature become one with each other and with divinity. But the mirror is also the reflection of Actaeon's self. In the *Metamorphoses,* Actaeon's sight of himself in the mirror was appalling because it showed him his descent from man into beast. Bruno here turns that experience with the mirror into an ascent. Actaeon discovers the divine in nature and in that same vision can identify himself with the divinity that he has been seeking. So the "mirror of similitudes," in which the nature goddess Diana appears, also reflects Actaeon himself as the hunter who becomes the object of his hunt.

The Actaeon story thus expresses in the fullest possible way Bruno's religion of contemplating nature:

I say very few are the Actaeons to whom destiny gives the power to contemplate Diana naked, and the power to become so enamored of the beautiful harmony of the body of nature, so fallen beneath the gaze of those two lights of the dual splendor of goodness and beauty, that they are transformed into deer, inasmuch as they are no longer the hunters but the hunted. . . . In that divine and universal chase he comes to apprehend that it is himself who necessarily remains captured, absorbed, and united. Therefore, from the vulgar, civil and ordinary man he was, he becomes as free as a deer, and an inhabitant of the wilderness; he lives like a god under the protection of the woods in the unpretentious rooms of the cavernous mountains, where he contemplates the sources of the great rivers, vigorous as a plant, intact and pure, free of ordinary lusts, and converses most freely with the divinity, to which so many men have aspired. (pp. 224–25)

So sublime is the experience of Actaeon as initiate that it begins with Petrarchan love and moves through Platonic insight but transcends both in a mystical process of attaining godhead in himself. This last step is taken in the final scene of the story:

Then he perceived that he himself had become the coveted prey of his own dogs, his thoughts, because having already tracked down the divinity within himself it was no longer necessary to hunt for it elsewhere. (p. 125)

The result is that the dogs, as thoughts bent upon divine things, devour this Actaeon and make him dead to the vulgar, to the multitude, free him from the snares of the perturbing senses and the fleshly prison of matter, so that he no longer sees his Diana as through a glass or a window, but having thrown down the earthly walls, he sees a complete view of the whole horizon. (p. 226)

The myth is never more massively syncretic nor more boldly positive than it appears here. A story which could be (and had been) seen as a

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tissue of blasphemy, personal and social victimization, thwarted love, and pagan frivolity has become in this very High Renaissance version a universal affirmation and a testimony to the divinity of man and nature.[48] Two greater works from the same half-century as *Gl' Eroici Furori* will use Actaeon to elaborate and enrich the same kind of affirmation: a painting by Titian and a play by Shakespeare.

VII

One of the masterpieces of Titian's mature years is *Diana Surprised by Actaeon,* executed for the King of Spain but now in the possession of the Duke of Sutherland and on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland (Fig. 4). It is a work of great visual beauty and drama at the same time that it is a bold iconographic statement. Yet Titian's departure from conventional visual representation derives from the peculiarly syncretic nature of the story of Actaeon and its tradition. By placing the painting in the context of this tradition, we can see how the work breathes the spirit of Renaissance classicism, particularly the intellectual and aesthetic drive to synthesize the remotest aspects of experience.

The painting has, to begin with, an aspect that is quotidian in its details and orthodox in its iconography. Titian's version of Diana's bath (like Ovid's) is a quite practical affair: the nymphs have been busy at their assigned tasks, so much so that two of them continue their labors even in the midst of the dramatic moment. Actaeon too is surrounded by realistic details—quiver, hunting dog, bow—that set him in the real-life world of the hunter.

But we need only notice the fallen position of Actaeon's bow, the awkward position of the goddess (half her body being dutifully dried, the other half wrenched in avoidance of the intruder), or the parodic confrontation of his hunting dog and her snarling lap dog in order to see that the moment takes us outside the realm of quotidian experience. The most obvious source of the disorder—and one particularly suited to visual representation—is erotic voyeurism. The rather theatrical framing of the scene with arches and bright red curtains, especially as Actaeon stands on the threshhold of this frame, almost turns the bath into a picture within a picture. As we are forced to see the bath over Actaeon's shoulder and through his gesture, we are reminded of our own

48. Judging from Dame Frances Yates's treatment of Bruno as "Heroic Enthusiast and Elizabethan," we might add that Bruno's Diana and Actaeon is also a political statement, a celebration of Queen Elizabeth and a defense of Bruno's own Actaeon-like involvement with the English court, an involvement that was to prove embarrassing to him in the eyes of the Inquisition.

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voyeurism. Within the picture, eye contact has a particularly striking power. The drama of embarrassment is powerfully conveyed by eye contact between the nymph nearest Actaeon and the nymph shielding her body as she sits on the edge of the fountain. Diana's own stern eye is outlined by the gesture of her uplifted arm. Equally vivid is the very light, almost disembodied figure of a nymph near the center of the composition as she (alone of the group) spies back at Actaeon. Finally, the emphasis on sight and voyeurism is compounded by the abundant variety of female poses that Titian displays for Actaeon's and the viewer's benefit.

Yet despite the picture's delightful eroticism, its references to vision have broader meaning. Titian takes his setting directly from Ovid.[49] We are placed in a carefully restricted *locus amoenus* whose beauty is the work of both art and nature. The carefully wrought construction of arches and fountain is framed by water, trees, and remote land and skyscape. In Titian as in Ovid, the union of art and nature is important in establishing the uniqueness of the experience. Like Actaeon, the viewer must be startled to find so beautiful and artful a creation in the midst of a natural landscape. Titian emphasizes this contrast with his *chiaroscuro:* the background landscape is extraordinarily vivid, reminding us of the opposition between Actaeon's real-life hunting experiences and the shaded, luminescent quality of his encounter with the goddess.

The most important step in Titian's redefinition of voyeurism is his choice of the dramatic moment for the picture. The history of the subject's visual iconography from late antiquity up to Titian's time is not notably varied. From Roman times at least, the usual moment depicted by artists was the beginning of Actaeon's metamorphosis. In late medieval miniatures and in the illustrated editions of Ovid that begin to appear at the end of the fifteenth century, the conventional picture is of Diana and her nymphs bathing in what is either a wholly natural pool or else a wholly artificial tank, while Actaeon, already stag from the neck up, gazes his fill.[50] Titian departs from this practice, as we have seen, by combining art and nature. More significant is the fact that he offers us an

49. For a subtle and suggestive discussion of Titian's indebtedness to Ovid's description—particularly in respect to nature and art—see Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York, 1969), pp. 156–63.

50. For the natural version, see the first illustrated edition, *P. Ovidii Metamorphosis* (Venice, 1497) or Lodovico Dolce, *Le Trasformationi* (Venice, 1553). For the artificial version see the woodcut by Bernard Salomon in *La Métamorphose d'Ovide figurée* (Lyons, 1557) or the Florentine fifteenth-century miniature reproduced by Millard Meiss in *French Painting in the Time of Jean de*

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Actaeon who is gazing but who is not in the process of transformation nor part of a canvas that includes the scene of his metamorphosis and death. So far as I know, Titian's *Diana Surprised* is the first example of Actaeon who is merely viewing the bathing scene.[51] Titian eschews the vividness of metamorphosis so that he can place all his emphasis upon the contemplation of Diana's sublime beauty. The familiar juxtaposition of the bath and the punishment tends to moralize the story, while here we are expected to follow an essentially non-moral line of associations from voyeuristic eyesight to something like Neoplatonic insight. Light in the picture has its source and center in Diana; at its center it is absolute and almost shadowless. In the confrontation between the two figures at opposite ends of the canvas we see a mortal meeting with unmediated divinity. Actaeon's gesture, as unconventional as many other aspects of the picture, is as self-protective in its own way as Diana's: it is a gesture of awe and an attempt to protect himself not from the absent punishment but from the blinding sight of divinity.

In both visual and philosophical terms, the world of this canvas resembles Titian's earlier *Sacred and Profane Love.* The central issue in the story of Actaeon—perhaps even the one that attracted Titian most to the subject—is the sight of the goddess *unclothed,* a condition upon which rests the anitnomy of *Sacred and Profane Love.* However we choose to understand the specifics of the opposition in the earlier picture,[52] it is clear there that Titian combines nakedness with radiance to suggest a kind of rapture that comprehends both the sexual and the sublime. His Diana, similarly compounded of nakedness and radiance, suggests that at the heart of Actaeon's experience is a synthesis of voyeurism and holiness.

Comparison between *Diana Surprised* and *Sacred and Profane Love* reveals differences as well as similarities. In place of the serene conversation while Cupid gently stirs the purified waters, we have in the later picture

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Berry: The Limbourgs and their Contemporaries, II (New York, 1974), fig. 103. Panofsky, in dealing with art and nature in Titian's composition, does not specifically note that the earlier illustrators chose either art or nature, but it is worth speculating whether Titian might have deliberately combined not only Ovid's categories but also the varying conventions of his predecessors.

51. We learn from a letter to the King of Spain which Titian wrote on June 19, 1559 that he intended to provide a pendant picture entitled *Actaeon Torn by His Own Hounds,* but this seems never to have been executed. See J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *Titian: His Life and Times* (London, 1877), II, 275–76.

52. For two contrasting views, both persuasively argued, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York, 1962), pp. 150–60, and Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1967), pp. 142–51.

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a violent intrusion into the world of the goddess.[53] There are diagonals everywhere: landscape, sky, body positions, fountain, flowing water. The *locus amoenus* has become gravely disordered by the violence implicit in the meeting between god and man. The bodies of both are twisting in a surprising, almost ungraceful way,[54] and nowhere in the foreground does there seem to be any level plane. The disorder emanates from the individuals but takes over their world. We view Actaeon's story very much in the context of this newly disordered world. He has discovered divinity in nature, and now that nature becomes transfigured.

Comparison with two other canvases of Titian may help to demonstrate the sublime nature of Actaeon's experience. While Titian may have planned a pendant *Actaeon Torn by His Own Hounds,* the pendant he actually executed for King Philip is the *Diana and Callisto* (Fig. 5), another Ovidian episode of Diana's vengeance upon a breach in chastity. The connections between the two pictures are complex and interesting. Compositionally, they are symmetrical, so that Actaeon in the left-hand picture is paired off with Diana in the right-hand picture, while the two adjacent sides involve the clothing and unclothing of a female form. That emphasis upon nakedness reminds us that both are stories of the flesh, but the presence of flesh in the Callisto picture points to the celebration of the spirit in the Actaeon picture. The subject of the Actaeon picture is love by eyesight, while Callisto's subject is carnal love fulfilled by a pregnancy that is treated as a gross crime. Diana's nakedness in the Actaeon picture is rendered the more sublimely beautiful by its contrast with this painful, distended, and half-dark nakedness of the suffering Callisto. In a sense then, *Diana and Callisto* is the punishment that follows upon Actaeon's crime. The goddess wreaks her (displaced) vengeance by denuding a mortal in return for her own victimization. Such a punishment turns human nakedness into a kind of ugly frailty, but it emphasizes all the more strongly the fact that divine nakedness inspires rapture through beauty.

Near the very end of his long life, Titian did execute a *Punishment of Actaeon* (Fig. 6), but rapture through contemplation of divine beauty is so far from this picture that here we can truly speak of a post-Tridentine

53. Ellis Waterhouse in his excellent monograph speaks of the "horror of uprights and horizontals" in the painting (*Titian's Diana and Actaeon* [Oxford, 1952], p. 19).

54. For an interesting treatment of the twist in Diana's body, see Lars Skarsgard, *Titian's Diana and Actaeon: A Study in Artistic Innovation* (Goteborg, 1968), pp. 57–63.

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rejection of pagan experiences and the philosophical attitudes that they inspire. Here we see a sterner, more moralistic world of color, of composition, of line, and of brush-stroke. Titian reverts to something like a classical representation of the story. The bath is gone, and we again have a double death, Actaeon's hounds, and the goddess's bow. The half-transformed young man is a striking figure because of the vividly human quality of his torso; but the stag head, which ought to be so startling, is almost lost in the landscape, and indeed the whole group of Actaeon and dogs is placed in a somewhat shadowy middle distance. When this scene is compared with the clothed, gigantic, avenging goddess, we begin to see that this is a tragic story of the struggle between a scarcely identifiable human being and the goddess who has plunged him into the lower forms of nature that completely surround him. If there is any glory here, it is the tragic struggle of the young man, but there is clearly no divine insight in the experience.

VIII

In the history of iconography, the tragic classicism of *The Punishment of Actaeon* is almost unique. The cheerful acceptance of the flesh combined with a Platonized paganism which is evident in *Gl' Eroici Furori* and Titian's earlier canvas of Actaeon represents the ruling spirit of the sixteenth century. But the synthesis achieved in these works is so bold and broad that it could not be kept aloft. *The Punishment of Actaeon* represents a reversion to the moralistic Hellenism that we associate with Greek tragedy. The opposite development, which proceeds apace in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, turns the gods into pure decoration, stripped (as it were) of Platonic significances. Thus the fable of Actaeon becomes a pleasant excuse for the showing of naked women in a state of excited *pudeur,* or else Actaeon, whether peeping or being transformed or both, becomes a trivial requisite in the scene of Diana's bathing.[55]

But a development more interesting and widespread than either of these leads us to Shakespeare. The ecstatic synthesis of a Bruno has as its almost inevitable obverse a kind of bathos. If one man's Actaeon is a Pla-

55. By the first half of the seventeenth century there are even examples of Dianas and half- or fully transformed Actaeons in decidedly amatory poses. A marble sculpture, once the property of the Earl of Pembroke, and a contemporary German powder bottle—both seen in reproduction at the Warburg Institute Photographic Collection—involve Diana and the stag in amorous contact. A Domenichino *Hunt of Diana* in the Galeria Borghese involves the conventional triumphant disporting of Diana and her nymphs with a barely visible peeping Tom in the bushes. Actaeon—hardly identifiable as such—has become an iconographic grace-note to the bathing scene.

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tonic high-priest who rises from love by the eyes to divine rapture, another man's Actaeon is a peeping Tom whose ludicrous presumption is punished by grotesque metamorphosis. To present such an Actaeon is to offer a criticism of the whole striving spirit of Renaissance humanism. Mannerist painters offer one particularly witty form of this criticism. Parmigianino's frescoes at the Rocca di Fontanellato place Actaeon quite literally in the boudoir (Fig. 7).[56] The context of the feminine private room and the Correggioesque, trellised borders undercut the seriousness of the story almost to the point of bathos. Although the story is relatively complete in multiple segments, there is no clear portrait of Actaeon the man, for this is a representation entirely presided over by the goddess and her disporting nymphs. Parmigianino omits the almost obligatory scene of voyeurism because he chooses to remove any sense of the hunter's power over Diana. Meanwhile the transformation is particularly witty. Both the half-transformed and the completely transformed Actaeons bear perplexed, anthropomorphic expressions. The stag-headed man gazes across the corner of the room at one of the goddess's hunting dogs, who returns a precisely mirroring expression. The effect is partly grotesque and partly erotic comedy. Actaeon is in two senses of the word unmanned. Countless other examples of this phenomenon can be found among the Mannerists and the younger Cinquecento painters. Jean Mignon's extraordinarily muscular warrior-Actaeon (Fig. 8) finds his manliness fulfilled and mocked by his impressively altered stag-head. In Veronese's *Diana and Actaeon* (Fig. 9), Actaeon is disastrously surrounded by women who control his destiny. He struggles vainly with his long tapering fingers as though to remove the animal head which resembles a jackass as much as a stag.

Actaeon has become a kind of fool, a grotesque comic victim of animal transformation through the regiment of women. In Spenser's Faunus episode, for instance, the long-awaited chance to spy on Diana dissolves into laughter, and Faunus's punishment proves that he is an Actaeon-turned-fool:

> The Goddesse, all abashed with that noise,
> In haste forth started from the guilty brooke;
> And running straight where-as she heard his voice,
> Enclos'd the bush about, and there him tooke,

56. See Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Gli Affreschi Giovanili del Parmigianino* (Milan, 1968), pp. 74–155.

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> Like darred Larke; not daring vp to looke
> On her whose sight before so much he sought.
> Thence, forth they drew him by the hornes, and shooke
> Nigh all to peeces, that they left him nought;
> And then into the open light they forth him brought. . . .
> So did *Diana* and her maydens all
> Use silly *Faunus,* now within their baile:
> They mocke and scorne him, and him foule miscall;
> Some by the nose him pluckt, some by the taile,
> And by his goatish beard some did him haile:
> Yet he (poore soule) with patience all did beare;
> For, nought against their wils might countervaile:
> Ne ought he said what ever he did heare;
> But hanging downe his head, did like a Mome appeare.
> (VII. 6. 47, 49)

The monstrous regiment of women turns Actaeon into a piece of treed game. This is no longer the world of violent sexuality or of sublime insight but rather that of the exposed fool, whose punishment is not only animal transformation but also a kind of castration ("Some would have gelt him," Spenser tells us when the nymphs are deciding on Faunus's punishment). The exposure, the transformation, and the unmanning all make the folly of the Actaeon figure manifest. His folly is the boastful belief in his own combination of sexual and visionary prowess.

It is no surprise that the boastful Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* becomes an Actaeon. The play's ruling idea is cuckoldry, invariably associated with horns, and those horns are directly connected with Actaeon—so that it is even possible to accuse someone of being a cuckold merely by calling him an Actaeon. Falstaff tries to cuckold both Ford and Page, and the combination of punishment and exposure is astonishingly similar to the situation of Faunus, whom the nymphs "drew . . . by the hornes, and shooke / Nigh all to peeces. . . / And then into the open light they forth him brought." In his two female adversaries, Falstaff, like other comic Actaeons, finds overpowering women. He is successively emasculated by being carried out in the laundry basket, dressed as the old witch, and ultimately forced to impersonate Herne the hunter "with huge horns on his head." The first two of these metamorphoses are direct feminizations, while the last makes him a species of foolish Actaeon. Falstaff wants to experience these victimizations as Ovidian metamorphoses of love: "Remember, Jove, thou was a bull for thy Europa; love set on thy horns. . . . For me, I am here a Windsor stag, and

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the fattest, I think, here in the forest."[57] But as so often in the story of Actaeon, the tables are turned. The would-be master criminal of love is pinched to within an inch of his life (rather a mock-heroic version of Actaeon's torment) and is forced to wear horns that identify him not as the satyr but the reverse, the impotent personality who is the proper figure of cuckoldry. Actaeon's sexual crime has become mere impotence.[58]

In a world so full of comic animal transformations, we must not overlook Falstaff's comment when he realizes the import of his victimization: "I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass." This is the real animal transformation at the heart of Falstaff's experience, and Falstaff's case is not an isolated one. When Actaeon becomes a comic grotesque, his transformation is a direct sign of folly; he is not so much a stag as a jackass. In his great Ovidian comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Shakespeare juxtaposes all the profound associations of the Actaeon myth with the comic tradition concerning men who become, first spiritually and then physically, jackasses. The meeting of Bottom and Titania, it seems to me, is the fullest example in Renaissance literature of the Diana and Actaeon story: here we find the sublime aspect of the story re-created through comic bathos.

To understand Bottom's experience and his transformation, we must first consider a crucial source for that episode, the book that Apuleius called *Metamorphoses* and that we call *The Golden Ass.* Apuleius's novel is the *locus classicus* for the notion of a worldly travail that begins in concupiscence, moves through bestiality, and culminates in a vision of the divine. From the start Lucius leads a life of both sexual and religious voyeurism: he likes to peer at beautiful women, and he is unfailingly inquisitive about magic and mysteries. Early in the book he beholds an elaborately sculptured group representing Diana and Actaeon:

> There also the image of Diana, wrought in white marble, stood in the midst of all, holding all in balance, which was a marvellous sight to see, for she seemed as though the wind did blow up her garments, striding briskly forward, so that she was now to

57. V. v. 3–4, 12–13. I omit further discussion of Falstaff as Actaeon because this subject has been so fully and persuasively treated by John Steadman in "Falstaff and Actaeon: A Dramatic Emblem," *Shakespeare Quarterly,* XIV (1963), 231–44.

58. If *Merry Wives* turns the amatory side of the myth into grotesque comedy, then *Doctor Faustus* does the same for the visionary side. The skeptic Benvolio vows he will turn himself into Actaeon if Faustus can actually conjure, whereupon Faustus plants horns on the scoffer's head and calls up a legion of hell hounds to torment him. Benvolio is farcically forced into belief.

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encounter with them that came into the house, a goddess very venerable and majestic to see: on each side of her were dogs made also of stone, their wide nostrils and their grinning teeth, in such sort that if any dogs in the neighbourhood had bayed and barked, you would have thought the sound came from their stony throats. . . . Moreover amongst the branches of the stone appeared the image of Actaeon looking eagerly upon the goddess: and both in the stream and in the stone he might be seen already beginning to be turned into a hart as he waited to spy Diana bathe.[59]

Eyesight is the ruling metaphor here, with Lucius peeping at Diana while Actaeon is peeping at her. This Actaeon is an unabashed voyeur, lying in wait for Diana and half-transformed in the very act of beholding the goddess. The parallels to Lucius permeate the book. Actaeon's "crimes" of curiosity and sexual aggressiveness are perfectly fulfilled by the figure of the jackass, who is proverbial for both traits; and like Actaeon, the transformed Lucius soon becomes the victim of his own animals and friends.

Lucius's attempt to understand the secrets of occult nature backfires as he gets closer to nature than he bargained for. But after a year's travail, the story of Actaeon is given a happy ending. The great affirmation that closes the book comes from the hero's sense that he can behold the goddess in her naked loveliness as much as he pleases. His natural curiosity and his sexual drive are redeemed by a divine worship that is occult but also based on the highest forms of Platonic love. The comic discovery of *The Golden Ass* prefigures the Renaissance understanding of the Actaeon story: that divine powers can find their basis in nature. Lucius's sexuality, his beastliness, and all his other asinine qualities are not, finally, obstacles to his attaining the vision of the goddess but rather necessary steps along the way. The goddess—Isis, of course, but referred to by the name of Diana as well—is at once "rerum naturae parens" and also "summa numinum." Lucius becomes a special kind of wise fool, foolish enough to perform his beastly travail through nature and thus wise enough to catch sight of the divine while the conventional men are looking elsewhere.

To prove that the meeting of Bottom and Titania reenacts the Diana and Actaeon story is not simply a matter of finding explicit textual parallels and supposing that Shakespeare meant us to guess at the allusion. By discerning a presence of the myth in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* I am rather asserting that Shakespeare, in this most original of his inventions, derived his materials from that body of ancient stories and inter-

59. *The Golden Ass,* trans. W. Adlington and S. Gaselee, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1971), pp. 53–55.

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pretations of which the Diana and Actaeon myth is a significant part.

It is not difficult to establish that Titania is Shakespeare's transformation of Diana. To begin with, he borrows her name directly from Ovid's account of Diana and Actaeon. Ovid calls the goddess Titania at the moment when Actaeon enters her grove, and considering that Golding did not use that sobriquet in his translation, this borrowing proves that Shakespeare consulted Ovid in the original.[60] Titania's name reminds us that she too is the victim of a mortal intrusion upon her private amusements with her entourage. Titania is also identified as Diana the moon goddess. "Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania" are the first words addressed to her, establishing her special guardianship of the moonlit forest. Finally, she is Diana in respect to chastity: the stern female who criticizes Oberon's sexual peccadilloes and who banishes all adult males from her company, substituting sexually naive characters like miniaturized fairies and changeling boys. Her chastity is, of course, ludicrously inverted; still it is from her influence that "Dian's bud" can ultimately triumph over "Cupid's flower."

Shakespeare's particular Diana can be understood best in her setting, for she is the Diana of Bruno and Titian, a sternly chaste divinity who nevertheless appears in the lush world of nature. As in any Platonic vision, the image of nature begins with the quotidian: Titania and Oberon, as we learn from their first conversation, rule over the real-world nature of bad weather and confused seasons. It is no coincidence that Shakespeare here uses an uncharacteristically topical and English set of references. Soon, though, Titania's nature is redefined in more idealized and schematic terms. At one extreme there is the soft pastoralism of the bank where Titania sleeps, "Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine, / With sweet must roses, and with eglantine" (II. i. 251–52); and moments later the hard pastoralism of the "spotted snakes" and "thorny hedgehogs" who menace the sleeping Fairy Queen.

Bottom's intrusion into this world has the decisive effect of turning her experience and his away from the quotidian. For his part, even before there is any hint of his metamorphosis, Bottom is an Actaeon of the Apulian and Platonic kind. Like Ovid's Actaeon, he has gone to the woods with his companions, and like Actaeon, he will be separated from them. And like later Actaeons, he is a boastful, inquisitive figure. As an actor, he is already a metamorphic personality. Moreover, he wants to play all the parts in "Pyramus and Thisbe," including the stage-man-

60. See Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London, 1961), I, 371.

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ager's role assigned to Peter Quince, proving his presumptions toward metamorphosis that must, like Lucius's, be punished with a degrading rather than an exalting transformation. From the start, then, Bottom finds himself at both ends of the play's hierarchy of knowledge: he aspires to the highest and achieves gross buffoonery.

As a narrative model, Diana and Actaeon provide the occasion for this meeting of a god and a mortal. For Bottom the woods are the *locus amoenus* in which art and nature (as in Ovid and Titian) join as a setting where divinity can appear. Bottom leaves the normal mechanical path of his life to perform in the forest, and from that point he is snatched away, randomly and without warning, to play a leading role in a divine drama. Nothing about his personality or history specifically qualifies him for this experience. Actaeon, with his heritage as hunter, voyeurist, and blasphemer, comes to be the most remote and most inappropriate of all mortals for visionary experience.

The union of this Diana and Actaeon, like that of others in the Renaissance, comes through the force of love. Indeed the whole play resounds with amatory issues related to both the Petrarchan and the Platonic traditions concerning Diana and Actaeon. From Petrarch's *Canzone* through Ronsard and the Elizabethan sonneteers, Actaeon's hunt became a *chasse d'amour:* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* all the lovers are engaged in such a hunt, with constant reminders of disordered psychological states, confused identities, and a displacement of hunting with loving, of clear sexual roles with twisted ones. The individuals who become victims of Cupid's herb all enact a Platonic and Petrarchan drama in which love enters through the eyes, torturing the victims but ultimately rescuing them. The young lovers move toward a fulfillment of their own natures in this disordered love. But the process for Bottom and Titania is more violent. Their love is, of course, based on reversal—a union between the highest and lowest of creatures, the female wooer Diana pursuing a sexually helpless Actaeon. But it, too, fulfills sexual possibilities inherent in nature. The lush, soft pastoralism of Titania's canopied bank is dramatized (in grotesque fashion) by the deliciously sensuous scenes between the two "lovers"; at the same time, the hard pastoralism of the "spotted snakes" is fulfilled by the very presence of the jackass in Titania's bower.

The experience of ecstatic love in a divinely transfigured natural setting thus appears at first to be thoroughly destructive and disordering. The primary demonstration of disorder is the animal metamorphosis

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that all the lovers undergo. But unlike the lovers, whose animal transformations are merely aberrant steps toward maturation, Bottom fulfills his deepest nature in his asinine form. This self-fulfillment recalls the Renaissance Actaeon who becomes animal and divine, fool and initiate in the same metamorphosis. Bottom's asinine folly is obvious. In true Ovidian style, his metamorphosis reveals what he has been all along: foolish, inquisitive, an imitator of human beings rather than the real thing.[61] When Helena suggests early in the play that "Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity" (I. i. 232–33), she speaks for the passionate young lovers made grotesque by love. Retrospectively, she appears to speak (slightingly) of Bottom and Titania, but the same message can point in Bottom's case to a sublime metamorphosis through love. Shakespeare combines the Apulian tradition with the ecstatic versions of the Actaeon story to show Bottom's triumph through his own weaknesses. Even before his transformation, Bottom's folly is his faith. He leads the mechanicals in the scene during which they reveal their excessive faith in the dramatic illusion. Among the many problems raised, one of the most serious is whether Snug the joiner (not the most gifted member of the troupe) will terrify the audience in his role as the lion. Bottom suggests that Snug recite a speech: "'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'" (III. i. 42–44). In his foolishness, Bottom expresses an understanding of animal transformation far beyond that of the wiser and more powerful characters in the play.

This understanding stays with him throughout the course of his metamorphic experience. A few moments after the speech quoted above he is transformed into an ass, and his companions, like Actaeon's, abandon him. They

> Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky,
> So, at his sight, away his fellows fly;
> And, at our stamp, here o'er and o'er one falls;
> He murder cries, and help from Athens calls. (II. ii. 23–26)

Shakespeare reverses the order of events in the Actaeon story to make its visionary message more logical. First Bottom establishes his folly and

61. For the iconography of the jackass, see Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane* 1450–1600 (Geneva, 1958), s.v. *Ane.* Apart from foolishness and ignorance (obviously applicable to Bottom), Tervarent speaks of incompetence as a musician. This may remind us of Bottom's fascination with "the tongs and the bones" (IV, i. 30). More important, Tervarent's example—an ass "assis comme un être humain sur une chaise grossièrement façonée au dos recourbé . . . portant lunettes"—reminds us that the jackass becomes a parody of human beings.

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wisdom; then he undergoes the metamorphosis that dramatizes that condition; then he is abandoned by his real-life companions; finally he can have the visionary experience of meeting with unmediated divinity, whom no one else has been able to see, even when she was sleeping in full view.

The experience, while it lasts, clearly plays on the Platonic tradition in the Actaeon myth, for Titania's language is particularly apt for the meeting of an animal and a principle of heavenly beauty:

> I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.
> Mine ear is much enamored of thy note;
> So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;
> And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
> On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee. . . .
> I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee;
> And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
> And sing while thou on pressed flowers doth sleep:
> And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
> That thou shalt like an airy spirit go. (III. i. 138–42; 158–62)

According to this speech, both characters play roles in a traditional Platonic love story: Titania moves from the enchantment of her sense to a rapture in recognition of Bottom's virtue, while her swain—in a more orthodox pattern—is to be perfected by confrontation with the goddess whom he has stumbled upon. At the same time, we must not forget Bottom's "I am a man as other men are." The clownish weaver may be on his way to becoming a divine "airy spirit" and he may be developing hilarious animal propensities to bray and eat hay, but unlike all other metamorphosed lovers in the play, his humanity is never in question, and his character never changes.

It is in the moments of waking up from the dream that the full range of the tradition of Actaeon manifests itself. For both Bruno and the Petrarchans, the violent appearance of the dogs has an especially paradoxical relation to the visionary experience. Shakespeare follows and adapts this tradition when he gives Actaeon's dogs to Theseus and concludes the dream with their barking.[62] These dogs are not very threatening as hunters (Theseus admits they are "slow in pursuit"), but their sounds are compared to a kind of discordant harmony of the spheres. The

62. The dogs' "musical confusion," of which Theseus is inordinately proud, forms an important link between the destructive role of the dogs in the most traditional versions of Actaeon's story and the sublime role they play in the more ecstatic Neoplatonic versions. The dogs' music is not precisely appreciated by the various sleepers, but it does conclude their dreams.

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music of the dogs wakes all the dreamers out of their visionary experiences. The young lovers gradually retreat from the vision, but Bottom moves toward greater vision:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. 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. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballet of this dream. It shall be call'd "Bottom's Dream," because it hath no bottom.
(IV. ii. 204–16)

This is the richest moment in the play because it spans the greatest possible gap. The ass, who began as a fool, descended to jackass, and affirmed his humanity in the face of god and beast, has had an experience simultaneously beastly, human, divine. Now, like Apuleius's hero or Bruno's Actaeon he is dead to the ordinary world and alive to a visionary experience. Thus he expresses himself in the ecstatic language of St. Paul, who is speaking precisely of divine mysteries at this point in *I Corinthians:*

We speake the wisdome of God in a mysterie, even the hid wisdome, which God had determined before the worlde unto our glorie.

Which none of the princes of this worlde hathe knowen: for had thei knowe it, thei would not have crucified ẏ Lord of glorie. But as it is written, The things which eye hathe not sene, nether eare hathe heard, nether came into mãs heart, are, which God hathe prepared for them that love him.[63]

It is no coincidence that this passage, which is the source of Bottom's amusing misquotation, deals with mystery and with the inability of world rulers to perceive mysteries. Through his union with Titania and his animal transformation, Bottom has been initiated into a kind of holy mystery. It is almost as though Shakespeare is adapting and conflating what Bruno had said in response to Plato's discussion of rapture in the *Ion:*

There are many species of frenzies and these may be all reduced to two sorts. The first accordingly displays blindness, stupidity, and an irrational impulse which tends to bestial folly; the second consists in a certain divine rapture which makes some become superior to ordinary men. . . . Some of those who experience this sort of frenzy, because they have become habitations of the gods or divine spirits, speak and do admirable things for which neither they themselves nor anyone else understand the reason; and

63. *I Corinthians* 2:9. Citation is to *The Geneva Bible, a Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison, Wisc., 1969).

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these commonly have been raised to this state from having first been undisciplined and ignorant and void of any spirit and sense of their own; in them, as in a room which has been scoured, is introduced a divine sense and spirit which has less chance of revealing itself in those who are endowed with their own sense and reason. (p. 107)

Indeed, the mystery is largely invisible to Theseus, who will shortly discount the whole experience in the forest as imaginary. Bottom turns the experience into art—which for Shakespeare contains its own holy mysteries. But more importantly, his experience consists of a special sort of liminality that is at the heart of the story of Diana and Actaeon. In the extent of his vision, Bottom affirms the whole progress from sexual drives through beastliness to the divine.[64] Shakespeare's Actaeon comprehends the whole range of the subject we have discussed here: the voyeur, the purveyor of multiple identities, the victim of love, the visionary, the gelding, the buffoon, the holy fool.[65] The bridge between visionary and fool is the comic assertion of humanity ("I am a man as other men are") which is Shakespeare's most original contribution to the Actaeon myth. At the end of a living tradition, Actaeon has become virtually overburdened with significances; yet being a figure of paradox and synthesis, he is never more alive than when he so fully bridges the gap between the lowest and the highest things in comedy.

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64. For a more intensive Neoplatonic reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* see Richard Cody, *The Landscape of the Mind* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 127–50.

65. It is interesting to note that the most famous holy fool of the Renaissance, Erasmus's Moria, cites the same Biblical passage that Bottom parodies. See *The Praise of Folly,* Section 39.

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