

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



The Danish Romance Play: *Fair Em, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes, and Hoffman*

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In this essay, I want to explore three early modern playwrights' representations of women from around the Baltic Sea as framed or conditioned by stories from classical mythology. I have explored elsewhere how allusion to classical stories works in plays explicitly set in the period when Danish invasions were a real and actual threat to England, including Anthony Brewer's *The Lovesick King*, Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent*, Henry Burnell's *Landgartha*, and *Hamlet*,¹ and have argued that in those plays the treatment of female characters is conditioned by two paradigms: firstly the prominence and visibility of Queen Anna, the Danish wife of James VI of Scotland and I of England, and secondly – and more surprisingly – the figure of Dido. Here I focus on three plays with less deterministic chronological settings: *Fair Em, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, and *Hoffman*. I argue that not only do these have elements in common but that they are also pointedly different from plays which are centred on or refer to Viking invasions. Curtis Perry has described the cultural work performed by the Danish history play as largely political, specifically in the shape of contesting ideas of hereditary royal power,² but *Fair Em, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, and *Hoffman* are all very

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¹ See Lisa Hopkins, *From the Romans to the Normans on the English Renaissance Stage* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2017), chapter four, 'Dido in Denmark: Danes and Saxons on the Early Modern English Stage'. For a direct linking of *Hamlet* to Danish history see Richard Hillman, who connects the play to Antoine de Bourbon's attempts to be elected king of Denmark (*French Reflections in the Shakespearean Tragic* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012], pp. 45-7).

² Curtis Perry, "'For They Are Englishmen": National Identities and the Early Modern Drama of Medieval Conquest', in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, edited by Curtis Perry and John Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 172-195 (pp. 176-7).

pointedly *un*-history plays. The actual wife of William the Conqueror, Matilda of Flanders, might not enjoy a very high public profile, but everyone knew that William did *not* marry a Danish princess and become king of Denmark after her death; there was also never a king of Denmark called Clyomon, and if there had been he could not have hobnobbed, as Peele's prince does, with Alexander the Great;³ and the multiple killings and bizarre anatomical displays of *Hoffman* clearly belong to the generic conventions of revenge tragedy rather than those of the history play. These are not Danish history plays; they are, I suggest, Danish romance plays, and they perform specific and distinctive cultural work. Like the Danish history play, the Danish romance play trades in gender difference, but it does so without incriminating women: Fair Em gives her name to the play, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes fade into insignificance beside the female characters, and in *Hoffman* Martha in particular deploys an agency that the male characters do not expect and becomes one of the few women to survive to the end of a revenge narrative. Secondly, while the Danish history play works hard to connect Danish women to Dido, the Danish romance play features women who evoke classical narratives but simultaneously resist inscription in them: Martha, for instance, is prepared to lure Hoffman into the cave by telling him how Dido and Aeneas went into one, but she is not going to follow him inside.⁴ The female characters of the Danish romance play move self-consciously amongst the stories of the classical past, but they create their own stories of the present. In so doing, they recuperate the Viking contribution to British histories and identities.

In the Danish history play, Danes are coded as both a religious and a sexual threat, although in ways we might not necessarily expect. When real Danes invaded English territory in the eighth and ninth centuries, they were perceived as threatening pagans.⁵

³ Brian Walsh points out that the prologue 'adopts the language of the chronicles and other works of historiography as it promises to provide "famous facts." In actuality, the play provides none, but, like *The Old Wives Tale*, it evokes a kind of mythical, chivalric past' (*Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p. 31) and Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean argue for similarities between *Clyomon and Clamydes* and *The Old Wives' Tale*, a play with obvious affinities to romance (*The Queen's Men and their Plays* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], p. 109).

⁴ Henry Chettle, *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, in *Five Revenge Tragedies*, edited by Emma Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2012), 5.3.93-8.

⁵ Gordon McMullan notes of *The Love-sick King* in particular 'either Danes, fully alienated, cannot be constituents of Britishness (*pace* the Speed and Drayton frontispieces) or else they are both Turkish and British, in which case the British themselves absorb the violent and alien attributes of militaristic Muslims' ('The colonisation of early Britain on the Jacobean stage', in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. by Gordon McMullan and David Matthews [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], pp. 119-140 [p. 127]).

When Danes invade the English stage in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, they are still pagan, but they do not, as we might expect, believe in Woden, Thor, and the rest of the Viking pantheon; instead they are improbably associated with Islam. In *The Tragical History, Admirable Atchievements and various events of Guy Earl of Warwick* (anonymous, 1590s?), Swanus, King of Denmark, invokes Mahound, while in Henry Burnell's 1641 play *Landgartha*, first performed in Dublin, the Norwegian heroine Landgartha (who would have been strongly associated with Denmark since Christian IV ruled both countries, and the marriage of James and Anna actually took place in Oslo) has a cousin called Fatyma. Most notably, as Robert W. Dent points out, the story of Anthony Brewer's *The Lovesick King* is 'an Anglicized version of a frequently dramatized story, that of Mahomet and the fair Irene at the fall of Constantinople'.⁶ This might partly be a consequence of the fact that Anna of Denmark herself was religiously suspect, for although James VI had married her in order to contract a suitably Protestant alliance, she had in fact converted to Catholicism by a very early stage in their marriage, but it is also connected to the historiography of Denmark. Kurt Johannesson notes that in Johannes Magnus's account of Swedish history 'Two brave kings [...] died through the false and evil nature of Danish women' and 'The three royal saints of the north, Olav, Knud, and Erik [...] all suffered a martyr's death through the evil of the Danes'. This may have permeated to England since 'In 1559 a Danish professor, Hans Münster, sounded an alarm from London, where the works of the brothers Magnus were being sold in bookshops, blackening the Danish name in the eyes of foreigners'.⁷ Shakespeare very probably read at least some of Olaus Magnus,⁸ and other playwrights may have done so too. In the rather different genre of what I am calling the Danish romance play, however, the Danes are both more likely to be connected to other dwellers around the Baltic than to England, and also more likely to be innocently and indeed joyously exoticised. In the Danish history play, Danish women are often explicitly and insistently figured as Dido, which both sexualises them and connects them to the story of the *translatio imperii* and thus to the history of Britain. The Danish romance play also connects the Baltic to Greece and Troy, but it is typically interested not only in the story of Dido but in a more generally (and

⁶ Robert W. Dent, 'The Love-sick King: Turk Turned Dane', *The Modern Language Review* 56.4 (1961), 555-57 (p. 556).

⁷ Kurt Johannesson, *The Renaissance of the Goths in Sixteenth-Century Sweden: Johannes and Olaus Magnus as Politicians and Historians*, translated by James Larson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 110, 113, and 216. On the differing views of the past by Danish and Swedish scholars see also Martin Arnold, 'On the Origins of the Gothic Novel: From Old Norse to Otranto', in *Bram Stoker and the Gothic: Formations to Transformations*, edited by Catherine Wynne (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 14-29 (p. 16).

⁸ See Julie Maxwell, 'Counter-Reformation Versions of Saxo: A New Source for *Hamlet*?', *Renaissance Quarterly* 57.2 (2004), 518-560.

generically) classical feel, and in it the female inhabitants of the Baltic's shores are not cunning seductresses, who pose a threat to England, but interesting, determined women who wield power in their own right rather than through manipulating male rulers. In *Hamlet*, which has affinities to the Danish history play, we see an armed, virile society in which Fortinbras takes over at the end as military strongman, but in the Danish romance play the men of the Baltic regions are weak: in play after play, Danish men in particular are presented as sexually susceptible as well as prone to drunkenness, a reputation which the notorious visit of James's brother-in-law Christian IV of Denmark in 1606 would have done nothing to dispel; indeed Sir John Harington acerbically commented on the occasion that 'I do often say (but not aloud) that the Danes have again conquered the Britains, for I see no man, or woman either, that can now command himself or herself'.⁹ The women of these plays, though, are versatile, compelling, and the bearers of multiple layers of significance and resonance.

The earliest example of what I am calling the Danish romance play is *Fair Em*, published in 1591 with the information that it had been acted by Lord Strange's Men. This is only two years after James (then still only king of Scotland) had married Anna of Denmark, and the connection to Lord Strange, who had a potential claim to the throne, might make us expect a coded and covert glance at the succession, though in fact the interests of the patron are mainly served by the references to Manchester, Liverpool and Chester, where he had his principal seats. However, like Greene's *James the Fourth* (c. 1590), *Fair Em* is partly about the difficulties which arise if a king does not like the foreign princess whom he has married or ought to marry, and like *James the Fourth* it imaginatively glances at Scotland because there had been no royal marriage in England since Queen Mary's to Philip II in 1554. This hint of topicality suggests that the play tells a story which still has resonance, especially since *Fair Em* also foreshadows Brewer's *The Lovesick King* in constructing an insistent series of parallels between a long-dead king of England (William the Conqueror in *Fair Em*, Canute in *The Lovesick King*) and a story set in much more modern times (the mediaeval merchant Thornton in *The Lovesick King* and the Miller, whose friend Sir Edmund Trafford of Manchester has more of a sixteenth-century ring than an eleventh-century one, in *Fair Em*); Valingford and Mountney both explicitly frame their pursuit of Em in the context of what they believe to be William's pursuit of Blanch, as each in turn declares, 'Goe William Conqueror and seeke thy loue' (sig. B2r). As this refrain suggests, *Fair Em* features William the Conqueror, whose father Rollo, Duke of Normandy had been of Danish descent, and his friend the Marquess of Lübeck. The

⁹ Quoted in James Shapiro, *1606: William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), p. 305.

play opens with William seeing a portrait of Blanch, daughter of Zveno, king of Denmark, and falling instantly in love with it. He sails to Denmark disguised as Sir Robert of Windsor, perhaps recalling James VI's expedition to bring home Anna of Denmark, but when he sees Blanch in the flesh he is horribly disappointed:

May this be shee, for whome I crost the Seas?
I am ashamde to think I was so fond.
In whom thers nothing that contents my mynd.
Ill head, worse featurde, vncomly, nothing courtly.
Swart and ill faouored, a Colliers sanguin skinne.
I neuer sawe a harder faouurd slut.
Loue her? for what: I can no whit abide her.¹⁰

There is perhaps an ironic reversal here of the Helen of Troy motif – is *this* the face? – and maybe also a glance back to Henry VIII's revulsion at the physical presence of Anne of Cleves after having been initially attracted by her portrait. Either way, William instantly transfers his affections to Mariana, a Swedish captive at the Danish court, although she is already in love with Lübeck and he with her.

Blanch, however, has views of her own on the matter. Although the men seem to assume that she is entirely passive, an object for them to look at and to approve or not as they please, Blanch is in fact a desiring subject. As William mentally and physically moves on from his brief infatuation with her, Blanch steps forward to claim the audience's attention:

Blanch speaketh this secretly at one end of the stage.

Vnhappie Blanch, what strange effects are these
That workes within my thoughts confusedly,
That still me thinks affection drawes me on,
To take, to like, nay more, to loue this Knight.

(sig. B1r)

At first Blanch presents herself as someone to whom things happen – effects are working within her, affection is drawing her on – but, very shortly, the agency has become hers, as she proposes to take, like, and love William. She continues to develop in complexity when she overcomes her initial irritation with Mariana and agrees to work

¹⁰ Robert Wilson (?), *A Pleasant Commedie of Fair Em the Millers Daughter of Manchester. With the love of William the Conquerour* (London: T. N[ewman] for J. W[innington], 1591), sig. B1r.

with her in a sort of variant of a bedtrick: Mariana will agree to run away to England with William and Blanch will take her place in disguise. It is in proposing this plot to Blanch that Mariana introduces a classical motif into the story:

But rather then I will be found false
Or vniust to the Marques Lubeck,
I will as did the constant ladie Penelope
Vndertake to effect some great taske.

(sig. C4r)

Once the Trojan War has entered the narrative, it can't stay away: William declares 'Nor may I make my loue the seege of Troye / That am a stranger in this Countrie' (sig. C4r). Soon he is implicitly presenting himself as Aeneas when he explains that he is proposing to put to sea, though he expects to take his mistress with him. We may be in the Baltic, but imaginatively we are in the classical world – except that it is a version of the classical world in which women are the primary agents in shaping the story.

Perhaps more surprisingly, William of Normandy has suddenly ceased to be Norman: he is 'the Saxon Duke' (sig. D4r), a title which makes it seem ironically appropriate that his substitute Demarch initially fails to recognise him at this point. Perhaps the playwright distances him from Normandy in this way to downplay the close ties between Normandy and Denmark (including the Danish origins of William's father Rollo), because the immediate result of William's rejection of Blanch is that the Danish king becomes hostile, following William to England and instructing his follower Rosilio to 'See all our men be martialed for the fight' (sig. E3v). The image of the armed and aggressive Dane was a familiar one from both history and literature, including *Hamlet* where England is paying tribute to Denmark and Marlowe's *Edward II* where Mortimer Junior warns the king that 'The haughty Dane command the narrow seas, / While in the harbour ride thy ships unrigged'.¹¹ That image is clearly evoked here by the Danish king's words, but it is defused when William, impressed by the behaviour of Fair Em, performs his second *volte-face* of the play:

I see that women are not generall euils.
Blanch is faire: Methinkes I see in her,
A modest countenance, a heauenly blush.
Zweno, receive a reconciled foe,

¹¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, in *The Complete Plays*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), 2.2.167-8.

Not as thy friend, but as thy sonne in law,
If so that thou be thus content.

(sig. F2v)

So, one minute Blanch was beautiful, the next she was ‘Swart and ill fauoured’, and now she is apparently beautiful again. To some extent the play has prepared for such volatility by making Em feign blindness and thus drawing attention to vagaries of sight, but nevertheless the overwhelming impression is one of radically unstable identities, with William starting out as a Norman and becoming a Saxon, Blanch veering between loveliness and hideousness, and both at one point or other disguised. Only three things are clear: first, while the men vacillate (as well as William’s fickleness, the Marquess of Lübeck at one point contemplates resigning his beloved Mariana to William, while Em’s first lover Manvile is deterred by her apparent blindness and deafness), Mariana and Blanch, the Swedish woman and the Danish woman, both know what they want and both actively go and get it; second, classical templates provide a helpful way of understanding these women’s situations, as Mariana compares herself to Penelope and Blanch is implicitly figured as a potential Dido, but those templates have been adjusted to allow for female agency; and finally, the play strongly connects the past to what feels like the present. In *Fair Em* we are only at the very beginning of the Danish romance play, but already the principal features of the form are emerging, and the most striking is the resilience, narrative agency, and capacity for bearing symbolic freight of Scandinavian women, together with the sense that they are not solely and simply foreign but are also imaginatively and symbolically connected to Britain.

The same features of disguise, uncertain identity, female resourcefulness and female amenability to classical figuration are found in other plays too, as if these were stories about home as well as abroad. In Peele’s *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, printed eight years after *Fair Em* in 1599, the Danish princess Juliana appears only at the beginning and end of the play, but she is around long enough for the Swabian prince Clamydes to trope her as a Dido figure who has saved him from shipwreck:

For had she not bene mercifull, my ship had rusht on Rocks,
And so decayed amidst the stormes, through force of clubbish knocks:
But when she saw the daunger great, where subject I did stand,
In bringing of my silly Barke, full fraught out from my land,
She like a meeke and modest Dame, what should I else say more?
Did me permit with full consent, to land vpon her shore:

Vpon true promise that I would, here faithfull still remaine.¹²

We discover later that Juliana has both a mother and a father living (not to mention a long-lost brother who surfaces during the course of the story), but she is treated here as though she were the only power in the land, as Dido was. Dido is not the only model evoked, though. Juliana is further aligned with the classical world in that she, like Andromeda, needs rescuing from a monster (in this case a flying serpent) which preys on virgins, and Clamydes' acceptance of this challenge is framed in explicitly classical terms as he promises to slay the monster 'though the dangers should surpass stout Hercules his toyle, / Who fearing nought the dogged feend, sterne Serbarus did foyle' (sig. A3v). Meanwhile Juliana's absent brother Clyomon, who is travelling in disguise for reasons that are never really explained, has actually met a classical figure in the shape of Alexander the Great, who in due course enters in person, as announced in the charmingly pragmatic stage direction, '*Enter King Alexander the Great, as valiantly set forth as may be, and as many soldiers as can*' (sig. B4r), and also repeats the rescued-from-the-water motif when he lands on the territory of Patranus, King of the Strange Marshes, and is rescued by Neronis, daughter of the king, who is walking on the seashore rather as Nausicaa is when she rescues Odysseus. Clyomon falls in love with Neronis and pursues her when she is subsequently abducted by Thrasellus, King of Norway, but she does not need his help: escaping unaided from the Norwegian court, she is helped by the shepherd Corin, who seems as much at home in Norway as he would in Arcadia.

Despite this recurrently classicising context, though, *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* also gestures at more distinctively modern contexts and concerns. The vice Subtle Shift (himself a figure with obvious links to mediaeval rather than classical drama) swears by 'Iesu' (sig. C2r) and the villainous Bryan sance foy has a distinctly Arthurian and/or Spenserian feel, while Corin sounds for all the world like a sixteenth-century Englishman when he starts talking of 'neighbour Nychols' and 'neighbour Hodges' (sig. F1v; he also shares an accent with the disguised Edgar in *King Lear*). There is a marked disjunction between the fact that Corin goes to church while his king, Thrasellus, dies with the obviously pagan prayer, 'Ah heuens, Thrasellus he is slaine, ye Gods his ghost receiue' (sig. D2r), though religious differences seem hardly to matter when Providence descends in person to stop Neronis committing suicide.¹³ The play builds up to an

¹² [George Peele], *The historie of the two valiant Knights, Sir Clyomon Knight of the Golden Sheeld, sonne to the King of Denmarke: and Clamydes the white Knight, sonne to the King of Suauia* (London: Thomas Creede: 1590), sig. A3v.

¹³ Helen Ostovich notes the importance of female power here: 'The clearest representation of this feminine bias is in the vision of Providence (sc. 18), staged "above" as a female full of promise for the

expected fight between the rival champions Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes, which is imagined by both in classical terms: Clyomon will fight ‘though the other Hector were’ (sig. G1r), while Clamydes will not be afraid of ‘who incounter shall with me: / Although he were with Hercules of equall power and might’ (sig. G2v). Actually, though, the promised combat never materialises, and attention is diverted instead to the marriages between Clamydes and Juliana and Clyomon and Neronis.

For all its setting abroad, *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is also a play which speaks to distinctively English concerns. Peter T. Hadorn argues that the play ‘dramatically supports Queen Elizabeth’s use of chivalry as an ideology of power and order and criticizes military adventurism’¹⁴ and Helen Ostovich notes the way it speaks to the Queen’s Men’s ‘duty to the queen in connecting the spiritual and national (especially the value of knighthood) with the domestic and local’.¹⁵ Both Hadorn and Ostovich also recognise, though, that Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes are comic figures and that the power (and the interest) lies with the women. Ostovich refers to ‘the Queen’s Men’s corrective lens of female agency in the three assertive ladies who lead the way: Juliana, Neronis and the Queen of the Isle of Strange Marshes’¹⁶ and Hadorn too points to the degree of power held by the Queen of the Isle of Strange Marshes in particular.¹⁷ Central to both their arguments is an insistence that it is crucial to remember that *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* was a Queen’s Men play, and thus expected to uphold the values of the Elizabethan court. It was a problem for Elizabeth that the only precedents for female rule in England were her half-sister Mary I, disparagingly termed Bloody Mary, and the mediaeval Maud/Matilda, whose fight against her cousin Stephen was ultimately unsuccessful. In its combination of powerful women, a Baltic setting, and an implicit connection to the present, *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* goes some way towards redressing that absence by reminding its audiences of their historic connection to countries where women are seen to rule better than men.

My final play, Chettle’s *Hoffman* (1602–3?), might seem initially to be the antithesis of a romance play, since it contains so much that is violent and grotesque, but part of the shock value of the play arises from the fact that the macabre is in such close contact

future’ (‘Knights and Daze: The Place of Romance in the Queen’s Men’s Repertory’, in *Performing Environments: Site-Specificity in Medieval and Early Modern Drama*, edited by Susan Bennett and Mary Polito [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014], pp. 100-18, [p. 115]).

¹⁴ Peter T. Hadorn, ‘*Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*: A Revaluation’, *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 12 (1991), 85-102 (p. 85).

¹⁵ Ostovich, ‘Knights and Daze’, p. 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁷ Hadorn, ‘*Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*’, pp. 94-5.

with classic elements of the romance play such as disguise, wandering princes and princesses in rustic or even Arcadian settings, and unexpected reappearances of long-lost family members. *Hoffman* is also connected to Denmark, and may indeed be the second part of the same author's apparently lost *Danish Tragedy*. Hoffman's base, named as Burtholme, is generally taken to be the Danish island of Bornholm, famous since the fourteenth century as a haven for pirates such as Hoffman's father had been,¹⁸ and Jerome refers to his castle of Helsen, which seems to suggest Helsingor.¹⁹ It is therefore somewhat unexpected that Hoffman should tell Lodowick and Lucibella that the disguises he has prepared for them include 'Grecian habits for your heads' (2.3.52). The society shown in *Hoffman* is, however, one conditioned by its engagement with Hellenic culture, which in the Renaissance imagination often made a surprising pairing with the north. Thomas Nashe observed of the Icelandic volcano Mount Hecla that 'a number conclude [it] to be hell mouth; for near unto it are heard such yellings and groans as Ixion, Titius, Sisyphus and Tantalus blowing all in one trumpet of distress could never conjoined bellow forth',²⁰ and in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* Orcanes declares that Greenland is inhabited by 'Giants as big as hugy Polypheme'.²¹ *Hoffman*'s pairing of *Hamlet* and Greece reaches its height when the hero/villain Hoffman asks, 'What is Lorrique to you, or what to me?' (5.3.63), obviously recalling Hamlet's 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to her' (2.2.553), and Katherine Heavey notes that the burning crown used to murder Hoffman's father echoes 'the burning or poisoned crown that Medea traditionally uses to murder Creusa or Glauce',²² an idea picked up when Hoffman says of Otho, Prince of Luneburg, whom he has murdered,

He was the prologue to a tragedy,
That, if my destinies deny me not,
Shall pass those of Thyestes, Tereus,
Jocasta, or duke Jason's jealous wife.
(1.3.18–21)

¹⁸ See Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World: How the North Sea Made Us Who We Are* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 235.

¹⁹ Anthony Brewer's *The Lovesick King* certainly seems to think that there is a connection between the name Hoffman and Denmark, since among the characters in Brewer's *dramatis personae* are 'Osrick, Hoffman, & Huldrick, Danes'.

²⁰ Thomas Nashe, 'The Terrors of the Night', in *The Unfortunate Traveller' and Other Works*, ed. by J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 222.

²¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, edited by J. S. Cunningham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), Part Two, 1.1.25-32.

²² Katherine Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea: Medea in English Literature, 1558-1688* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 112.

Hoffman may be only the son of an executed Baltic pirate, but he aspires to inhabit the world of Greek tragedy.

It is not only Jason and Medea who are recalled in Chettle's play, but the characters of the *Iliad*. Austria says,

Saxon's proud wanton sons
Were entertained like Priam's firebrand
At Sparta: all our state gladly appeared
Like cheerful Lacademons, to receive
Those demons that with magic of their tongues
Bewitched my Lucibel, my Helen's ears.
(2.2.13–18)

Here is the tale of Troy, as Lodowick and Mathias become a kind of composite Paris, Lucibella is figured as Helena, the Duke of Saxony is implicitly Priam, and Austria himself is understood as echoing both Agamemnon and Menelaus. Later Greek tragedy is invoked to almost comic effect when Hoffman says Martha 'will be missed' and Lorrique ripostes,

By whom? By fools: gross, dull, thick-sighted fools,
Whom every mist can blind. I'll sway them all
With exclamation that the grieved duchess,
When she beheld the sea that drowned her son,
Stood for a while like weeping Niobe,
As if she had been stone; and when we strived
With mild persuasions to make less her woe
She, madder than the wife of Athamas
Leapt suddenly into the troubled sea,
Whose surges greedy of so rich a prey,
Swallowed her up, while we in vain exclaimed
'Gainst heaven and hell, 'gainst fortune and her fate.
(5.2.129–41)

Invoking a classical framework, in Lorrique's opinion, is enough to make people believe any old rubbish: the story that the Duchess jumped into the sea while two grown men stood by and did nothing will be believed if she is cast in the mould of a mythological figure. This is typical of the way *Hoffman* invests in an aesthetic of excess

rather than one of credible representation; this is not a play which is interested in the exploration of character or in the evocation of emotion, but one which is interested in out-Hamleting *Hamlet*, with *The Spanish Tragedy* thrown in for good measure.

Hoffman is also prepared to echo *The Spanish Tragedy* in imagining a classical rather than a Christian eschatology. *Hoffman* says to *Otho*,

You, virtuous gentleman,
Sat like a just judge of the under-shades,
And with an unchanged Rhadamantine look,
Beheld the flesh, mangled with many scars,
Pared from the bones of my offended father.

(1.1.161–6)

Hoffman's contemporary *Jerome* has, like *Hamlet* and *Faustus*, been to Wittenberg, and *Hoffman* himself is presumably a Christian, but he thinks of the afterlife in strictly classical terms (and also terms which directly echo *The Spanish Tragedy*, whose situation is inverted when a son uses a father's body for a prop instead of a father using a son's). In a similar vein *Jerome* says of *Lucibella* 'Heart, you would not unhorse Hercules for her, father?' (1.2.68) and *Hoffman*, after he has anatomised *Otho*, declares,

If there live e'er a surgeon that dare say
He could do better, I'll play Mercury,
And like fond Marsyas flay the quacksalver.

(1.3.1–3)

Hoffman also prays 'Rhamnusia, help thy priest: / My wrong thou know'st, my willingness thou seest' (1.3.37–8); *Lucibella* says 'I have robbed Prometheus of his moving fire' (4.1.40); and *Mathias* declares,

The mead is ringed with tents of stranger knights,
Whose rich devices and caparisons
Exceed the Persian monarch's, when he met
Destruction and pale death sent from the sword
Of Philip's son, and his stout Macedons.

(2.3.118–22)

We may be literally in Germany, but imaginatively, as in *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, we are at the court of Alexander the Great.

Above all, classical echoes accrue to the female characters. Hoffman rhapsodises over the sleeping Martha:

Endymion's love, muffle in clouds thy face,
And all ye yellow tapers of the heaven
Veil your clear brightness in Cimmerian mists.
(4.2.59–61)

Martha is the moon-goddess, who loved Endymion, as staged in Lyly's play. She is also figured as another character from ancient Greece when Lorrique tells Hoffman 'Then strangle her: here is a towel fit' (4.2.69), evoking the means by which Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon, and Lorrique connects her to other characters from Greek mythology when he declares that he has led them 'in a labyrinth' (5.1.304) and advises Hoffman that if Martha resists he should 'Make her a Philomel, prove Tereus' (5.2.127). Later, Martha herself, when she is leading Hoffman on by pretending to consent to his lust, reminds him that Dido and Aeneas went into a cave. Lucibella meanwhile is Helen, but she also acquires another classical identity when she and Lodowick, convinced that there is a plot against their lives, flee the court and find themselves in a wooded landscape:

Lodowick. Are you not faint, divinest Lucibell?
Lucibella. No, the clear moon strews silver in our path,
And with her moist eyes weeps a gentle dew
Upon the spotted pavement of the earth,
Which softens every flower whereon I tread.
(3.1.1–6)

Lodowick's opening question to Lucibella echoes Lysander's remark to Hermia in a similar setting: 'Fair love, you faint with wand'ring in the wood'.²³ There are a number of other words and phrases here which recall *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the moon is 'like to a silver bow' (1.2.9) and is associated with dew (4.1.52), while Demetrius is 'spotted' (1.1.110), as too are snakes (2.2.9). There is a further set of echoes when Lodowick adjures Lucibella 'behold a bank / Covered with sleeping flowers that miss the sun' (3.1.9–10). This is the landscape of *Dream* too:

²³ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979), 2.2.34.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows.
(2.1.249–50)

Later Lucibella specifically mentions violets:

My heart is troubled with some heavy thing.
Rest on these violets, whilst I prepare,
In thy soft slumber to receive a share.
Blush not chaste moon to see a virgin lie
So near a prince, 'tis no immodesty.
For when the thoughts are pure, no time, no place,
Hath power to work fair chastity's disgrace.
(3.1.50–7)

She also promises 'No, I'll be sentinel; I'll watch for fear / Of venomous worms' (3.1.39–40), echoing both *Dream*'s interest in snakes and its use of the word 'sentinel' (2.2.25). Hoffman's remark to the dying Lodowick: 'I judged you for a Greek as you appeared' (3.1.104), further recalls *Dream*, where Oberon tells Puck 'Thou shalt know the man / By the Athenian garments he hath on' (2.1.263–4).

The scene ends, however, in a very undreamlike way, as Lodowick and Lucibella are both stabbed and left for dead, leading the apparently dying Lucibella to lament,

How now! what have ye done? my Lodowick bleeds.
Some savage beast hath fixed his ruthless fang
In my soft body: Lodowick, I faint,
Dear, wake: my Lodowick – alas what means
Your breast to be thus wet? Is't blood or sweat?
(3.1.66–70)

In fact, this recalls something that is feared in *Dream*, though there it does not actually happen. Hermia awakes from a nightmare exclaiming,

Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
Methought a serpent ate my heart away,

And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.
Lysander! What, remov'd? Lysander! lord!
(2.2.144–50)

Lucibella, however, is not actually dead but only wounded, and as if to underscore the extent to which her situation both does and does not echo *Dream*, proceeds to morph into a succession of other Shakespearean heroines. First comes Juliet, as Lodowick says 'your daughter is become a bride for death, the dismal even before her wedding day. Hermit, God pardon thee: thy double tongue hath caused this error' (3.1.164–6), though 'double tongue' is also found in *Dream* (2.2.9). Saxony tells Austria 'Lodowick shall be my burden: brother, yours / The lovely but the luckless Lucibel' (3.1.224–5), echoing Montague and Capulet reconciling over the bodies of their dead children, and Hoffman calls Lucibella 'new–deflowered by death' (3.1.276). Juliet in turn is followed by Ophelia as Lucibella herself, now mad, declares,

For I am going to the river's side
To fetch white lilies and blue daffodils
To stick in Lodowick's bosom, where it bled;
And in mine own. My true love is not dead,
No: y'are deceived in him.

(4.1.19-23)²⁴

Lucibella is thus in effect a composite Shakespearean heroine, passing from comic to tragic as the mood of the play darkens. First and foremost, though, she is Hermia, as the fantasy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* turns here into reality. These echoes of *Dream* are not only the primary reason why we are able to read *Hoffman* as participating in a romance mode rather than being simply a revenge play, they also serve to connect it firmly and insistently to Greece, and Lucibella is the primary means of doing that.

It is also the female characters who take charge of recuperating meaning from the chaos of competing theologies and symbols on offer in the second half of the play. Like *Hamlet*, *Hoffman* touches on a question likely to have been at the forefront of the minds of many of the audience: their personal salvation. The Baltic regions were among the last parts of Europe to be converted to Christianity, with crusades still being mounted at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and this would have been known about in England. Eric Christiansen notes that 'Between 1329 and 1408 several hundred

²⁴ The echo of Ophelia is also noticed by Tom Rutter ('Marlowe, *Hoffman*, and the Admiral's Men', *Marlowe Studies* 3 [2013], pp. 49-62 [p. 56]).

Englishmen served under the Teutonic Order in the crusade against Lithuania, and in 1399 one of them, Henry Bolingbroke, became King Henry IV of England'. Christiansen also observes that later in his reign Henry IV withdrew support for Prussia, the region in which *Hoffman* was set, because he felt it was too likely to fall to the 'infidels'.²⁵ In addition, the vicinity of the Baltic was strongly associated with witchcraft and the devil. Colleen Franklin notes that

The patristic insistence on the fall of Lucifer into the north acted in concert with the belief that demons were materially present on earth, and that they were responsible for a multitude of sublunar afflictions, such as drought, poor crops, hail, thunder, lightning, and storms. The known north experienced particularly bad weather, and so, naturally, was assumed to contain a high complement of evil spirits.²⁶

Hoffman glances at the process by which the north was Christianised when he recalls how Otho sailed from the Hansa capital of Lübeck (4.2.125), and the audience could probably have been expected to understand the allusion; Edward T. Bonahue notes that 'Describing the great warehouses crumbling along Galley Key in Tower Street Ward, Stow explains how great merchants from Germany, Bordeaux, and the Hanseatic League previously "procured the place to builde vpon for their lodgings and storehouses" (1: 136)'.²⁷ Martha may evoke older belief systems when she laments over her dead son, 'Where is the apparel that I bad him wear / Against the force of witches and their spells?' (5.1.114-15), in what looks like a direct glance at the persistent association between witches and the north and a reminder that old beliefs died hard, but she, like Hamlet, also knows that it matters that 'Thou wert not houseled'. There is a pointed contrast between Martha's worry about Otho's not having been houseled and Hoffman's declaration that 'This scene is done. / Father, I offer thee thy murderer's son' (1.1.230-1). This idea of sacrifice to the dead is fundamentally pagan, and Hoffman is not alone in subscribing to it: Mathias says

Come, lend hands
To give this princely body funeral rites,

²⁵ Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades* (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 256-7, 3, and 229.

²⁶ Colleen Franklin, "An Habitation of Devils, a Domicill for Unclean Spirits, and a Den of Goblins": The Marvelous North in Early Modern Literature', in *The Mysterious and the Foreign in Early Modern England*, ed. by Helen Ostovich, Mary V. Silcox, and Graham Roebuck (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 27-38 (p. 28).

²⁷ Edward T. Bonahue, Jr, 'Citizen History: Stow's Survey of London', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.1 (1998), 61-85 (p. 74).

That I may sacrifice this hand and heart
For my peace-offerings on their sepulchres.
(3.1.217-20)

The suggestion of paganism may prompt us to ask whether the device of ‘a tree’ for the spectacle of ‘a father hanged up by his son’ (1.1.184) is simply a reference to the tree of the cross or whether it might also suggest the tree on which Odin was hanged in Norse mythology. Moreover, Hoffman’s theft of his father’s corpse suggests a bizarre physicalisation of death very different from the ghostly form taken by Hamlet’s father, and this is an emphasis developed later in the play when Ferdinand, told that Hoffman is dead, immediately demands ‘Where is the villain’s body?’ (1.2.113), and Martha asks ‘Where have you laid the body of my son?’ (4.2.194). When Lucibella looks at skeletons, though, she feeds the spiritual back into the physical as she says, ‘Nay, look you here, do you see these poor starved ghosts? Can you tell whose they be?’ (5.1.150-1). In a world in which men insistently reduce the idea of the human to bodies, the women cling to the idea of souls, as Martha speaks of being houseled and Lucibella talks of ghosts.

The Danish romance play, then, shows itself different from the Danish history play in a number of ways. In *Fair Em, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, and *Hoffman* the inhabitants of the Baltic regions pose little or no threat to England (of which some of them indeed seem hardly to have heard), and the male characters in particular tend to be ineffectual, or heroic in a slightly comic way, rather than sinister. Above all, though, the difference lies in the treatment of the female characters. In *The Lovesick King*, *Hengist, King of Kent*, and even *Hamlet*, the women are essentially honeytraps, exotic and seductive females luring weak-willed male rulers from the proper performance of their duties. In *Fair Em, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, and *Hoffman*, they are richer and more complex figures who exercise agency and to whom a wider range of symbolic resonances accrues. While the Danish history play presents the Danes as threatening, violent, and alien, the Danish romance play recuperates, romanticises, and domesticates them.