“A Lion Fell”: Relations Recast and Visions of Hercules in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

This analysis of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* investigates a number of the stage-play’s mythopoetic qualities: the ways in which the Bard diverges from the Greco-Roman mythological record in modernizing the stories of Theseus and Hippolyta. The two, per the accounts of Ovid, Virgil, and Apollodorus, share a contested past, one marked by the former’s abduction of and nonconsensual marriage to the latter, as well as a son, Hippolytus. Moreover, whereas Theseus—slayer of the Minotaur, son of Poseidon—stands a recognizable hero, Hippolyta carries a blurred history, often conflated with other figures pronounced queen of the Amazons. To that end, this explication tracks the relationship between the two as it lies in antiquity and compares it to their interaction in *Midsummer*, noting the cultural transformations that attend their movement from the Classical age to the Early Modern and cataloguing the anecdotes they purport. Then, considering the text’s recurring evocation of Hercules—in passing reference, in memory, in metonym—this study asserts a reading of the play in which the demigod replaces Theseus as the captor and killer of the Amazonian queen. Ultimately, in giving form to Hippolyta and Theseus but suspending Hercules as an off-stage figure, *Midsummer* adheres to his mythological presence: always a mention, never a man. But from the lips of equally fabled heroes revived in the text, Hercules becomes a curious meta-myth, the acme to which Shakespeare’s characters aspire.