

Ovid was surrounded by a huge critical apparatus. Until we know him in that setting, we do not know the Ovid whom Shakspeare and the sixteenth century knew. Such a study cannot be undertaken here. But perhaps we now have some glimpse of the position Ovid occupied, and some consequent idea of what contemporaries meant by their comparison of Shakspeare with Ovid. Shakspeare himself has shown that he was proud to be Ovid's successful ape.

Poor Shakspeare! He did so many of the things Ascham thought one ought not to do, and he ended up exactly as Ascham predicted such a man would end. Ascham rather proudly confesses that he "had neuer Poeticall head, to make any verse, in any tong," and then proves the statement beyond possibility of doubt by quoting an English poem of his own making,⁹⁶ which is nearly as bad as the elegant concoctions of Holofernes himself. Ascham was interested in training up a Tullian orator, not an Ovidian poet.

And therefore the quickest wittes commonlie may proue the best Poetes, but not the wisest Orators: readie of tonge to speake boldlie, not deepe of iudgement, either for good counsell or wise writing.⁹⁷

Therefore, Ascham will have none of these quick wits so apt to become merely poets. Similarly, he distrusts music and mathematics. So Ascham mentions an epitome of Ovid, and commends Golding's translation as translation (it could not have done much harm as poetry, though Brinsley thought it to be in excellent metre); but he does not waste his time upon Ovid and poetry; he is for Tully and oratory. So, "Grammer scholes haue fewe *Epitomes* to hurt them, except *Epitheta Textoris*."⁹⁸ Unwarned by Ascham's still recent fulmination, a musical-headed London-Oxford Welshman (perhaps!), Thomas Jenkins, no doubt ruined William Shakspeare as a staidly useful oratorical member of society by teaching him Ovid, and forcing him to write verses with the aid of the contaminative Textor. And see what came of it!

⁹⁶ Ascham, *Scholemaster* (1570), p. 32v. Cf. above, p. 381.

⁹⁷ Ascham, *Scholemaster* (1570), p. 4v.

⁹⁸ Ascham, *Scholemaster* (1570), p. 42v.