

# Storming the Stage: Jupiter in Classical Myth, Renaissance Tradition, and Thomas Heywood's *Golden Age*



Cameron Stirling, Department of English, University of Victoria  
Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Award (JCURA); Supervised by Dr. Janelle Jenstad



## Introduction

Thomas Heywood's *The Golden Age* (1611) is a dramatic adaptation of the Classical myth of Jupiter overthrowing Saturn. Heywood's portrayal of Jupiter in *The Golden Age* only partially follows Renaissance understandings of **Classical myth**. Heywood deviates from some of the Renaissance traditions, in favour of either the Classical texts newly available in English in Heywood's lifetime or his own unique adaptation of the mythology. Over the last eight months, I have worked with Linked Early Modern Drama Online (LEMDO) to lay the groundwork for an open-access digital edition of *The Golden Age*. I read scholarship on **Renaissance interpretations** of Classical myth to write notes on the characters. This editorial work provided the base text for a March 8th performance of *The Golden Age*, directed by C.W. Marshall and sponsored by UBC's Public Humanities Hub. The edition (<https://lemdo.uvic.ca/classroom/>) and performance together will illuminate Heywood's deployment of Classical myth and the appeal of these stories to Renaissance playgoers.



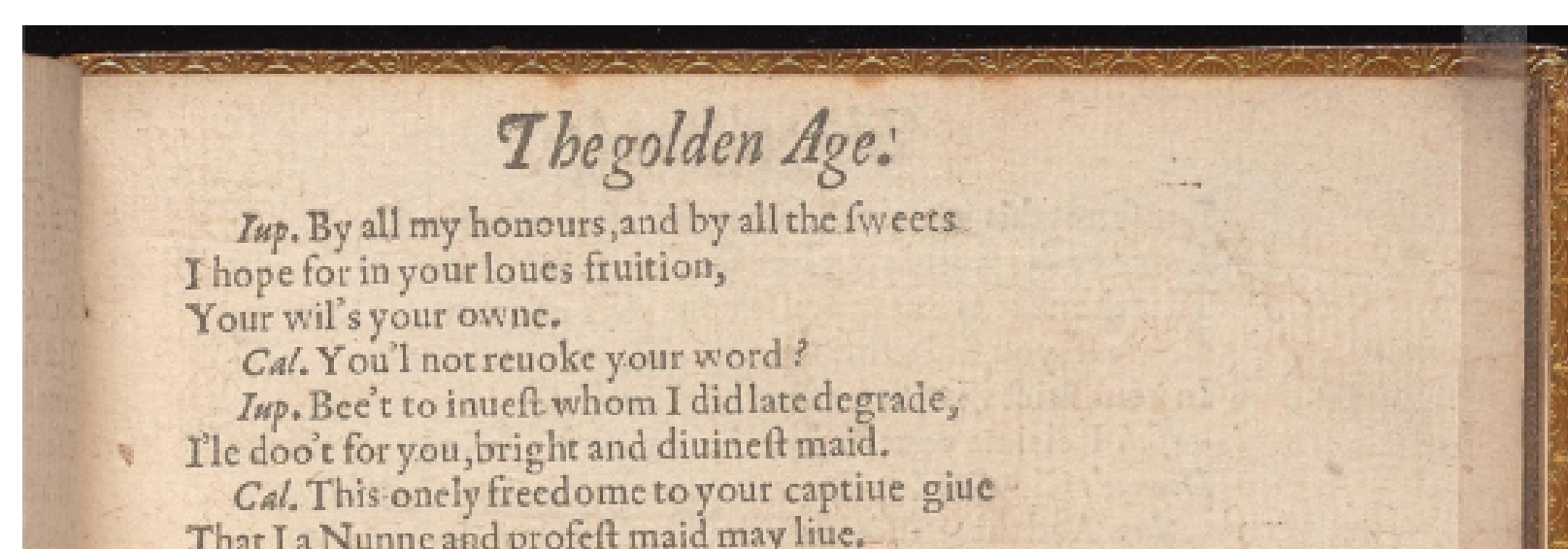
## Textual Troubles

The 1611 quarto publication of *The Golden Age* survives in 20 copies. For my semi-diplomatic transcription, I worked from a colour scan of the Beinecke (Yale) copy and referred to the monochrome scan of the Huntington Library copy on Early English Books Online. For the modern text, Janelle Jenstad and I followed the "DRE Editorial Guidelines," collated our text against the critical editions by Collier (1851) and Gaines (2023), and documented our judgement calls for editor C.W. Marshall to adopt or modify. Jenstad departed from previous editions in our scene divisions (for which we followed the model long applied to Shakespeare's texts). I chose Classical spellings for characters' names, on the grounds that they are more familiar to modern audiences. For example, I standardized on "Lycaon," instead of Qi's "Licaon."



## Encoding Escapades

I encoded my transcription and our modern text in TEI-XML (the eXtensible Markup Language of the Text Encoding Initiative consortium). The semi-diplomatic transcription offers a digital representation of how Heywood's work looks on the page, whereas the modern text offers a teaching and performance text (see right). LEMDO's processing generates both an HTML edition and a .docx file for the director to cut. (See [https://lemdo.uvic.ca/classroom/emdGldA\\_edition.html](https://lemdo.uvic.ca/classroom/emdGldA_edition.html).)



## The Many Faces of Jupiter

For each character, my notes in the Character List described Classical and Renaissance understandings of the character as well as the play's adaptation of the source material. For example, in **Classical myth**, Jupiter was the king of the gods, and the god of the sky, hospitality, and justice. The Greeks and Romans understood Jupiter to be all-powerful and omnipotent; they considered their gods to be embodiments of nature, rather than exemplars of goodness. They also believed that power corrupted. Thus, the Classical Jupiter, the highest power, was a fickle husband and serial rapist. If all sources are taken into account, Jupiter was the father of over 100 children, only three of whom were by Juno, his wife, and most of them conceived non-consensually.

In the **Renaissance context**, however, Jupiter takes on some of the qualities of the Christian god; Renaissance syncretic thinking drew analogies between their roles as justicers and between their heavenly residences. Jupiter became associated with the "aether" of the upper atmosphere. Jupiter's iconography in the Renaissance included the thunderbolt. In the concluding lottery of Heywood's play Jupiter "draws heaven" (while Neptune and Pluto draw the domains of the sea and hell). The stage direction tells us that "Iris descends and presents him with his eagle, crown and sceptre, and his thunder-bolt" ([a5\\_s5.sp1](#)). These attributes are also visible in printer Nicholas Okes' title-page ornament (see right). Aligning Jupiter with the Christian God changes the tenor of his many sexual conquests. The story of Jupiter and Callisto, which was a story of rape in Classical times, becomes a story of seduction with a moral about "the bestializing effect of lust" (Brumble 63).

*The Golden Age* is interesting because Heywood occasionally strays from the Renaissance conception of Jupiter. Until the final scene, Jupiter is not even a god; he is a mortal prince who ascends to "heathen" godhood at the end of the play. Heywood's stage Jupiter relies on human tricks like disguise rather than the divine powers Jupiter possesses in both Classical myth and Renaissance tradition. In *The Golden Age*, Jupiter is at times a noble prince who upholds justice; at others, he is a flagrant womanizer who prioritizes serial sexual pleasures over responsibilities. Until his apotheosis, he reads like a pastiche of Renaissance and Classical characters.



```
<speaker>Iup/</speaker>
<ab>
  By all my honours, and by all the sweets
  <lb>I hope for in your luses fruition,
  <lb>Your will's your owne.
</ab>
</sp>
<lb/>
<pb/> <!-- EEBO image 17 --> <sp><speaker>Cal.</speaker>
<ab>
  You'll not reuoke your word?
</ab>
</sp>
<lb/>
<sp>
  <speaker>Iup.</speaker>
  <ab>
    Hee't to inuent whom I did late degrade,
    <lb>'Tis doo't for you, bright and diuineft maid.
  </ab>
</sp>
<lb/>
<sp>
  <speaker>Cal.</speaker>
  <ab>
    This onely freedome to your captiue giue
    <lb>That I a Nunne and profest maid may liue.
```

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</sp>
<sp who="femGldA_M_Jupiter" smid="emdGldA_M_a2_s1.sp20">
  <speaker>Jupiter</speaker>
  <lb>By all my honours, and by all the sweets</lb>
  <lb>I hope for in your luses fruition,</lb>
  <lb>Your will's your owne.</lb>
</sp>
<sp who="femGldA_M_Callisto" smid="emdGldA_M_a2_s1.sp21">
  <speaker>Callisto</speaker>
  <lb>You'll not reuoke your word?</lb>
</sp>
<sp who="femGldA_M_Jupiter" smid="emdGldA_M_a2_s1.sp22">
  <speaker>Jupiter</speaker>
  <lb>Hee't to inuent whom I did late degrade,</lb>
  <lb>'Tis doo't for you, bright and diuineft maid.</lb>
</sp>
<sp who="femGldA_M_Callisto" smid="emdGldA_M_a2_s1.sp23">
  <speaker>Callisto</speaker>
  <lb>This onely freedome to your captiue giue</lb>
  <lb>That I a nun and professed maid may liue.</lb>
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## The Golden Touch

In Act 4, Heywood reworks the Classical myth of Jupiter and Danae to align with the English proto-capitalism that permeates his canon. In the **Classical myth**, Danae is locked in a tower by her father in order to thwart a prophecy; Jupiter enters her tower in the form of a shower of gold and Danae subsequently gives birth to Perseus. In *The Golden Age*, however, Jupiter arrives at Danae's tower accompanied by a clown, both of them disguised as peddlers. Jupiter bribes the beldames and wins Danae's affection with lavish gifts from his peddler's pack (a metaphorical "shower of gold"). This Jupiter, a thief in disguise, has commonalities with Autolycus from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Heywood's earlier peddler character in *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* (1605) is by contrast scrupulously honest. One can see evolution in Heywood's deployment of this very English character type.



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## Family "Fugue"



The Olympian family tree in *The Golden Age* deviates perplexingly from Classical myth. In **Classical myth**, Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, is the sister of Jupiter and a daughter of Saturn; Saturn's parents are Uranus (Sky) and Terra (Earth). In *The Golden Age*, Vesta is Saturn's mother and Jupiter's grandmother. Like other Renaissance writers, Heywood understood Vesta to be "the mother of the gods," as he writes in his *Gynaikeiōn* (1624); he follows Renaissance thinking by recasting Vesta as earth goddess and mother of the gods in Terra's place.



## Summary

Thomas Heywood's play *The Golden Age* offers us insight into how Renaissance writers interpreted Classical myth, and how the ancient world was perceived by and changed via the early modern lens. Understanding how adaptation worked in the Renaissance can in turn inform our understanding of classical adaptations in the modern day. *The Golden Age* also shows us how an author can choose to change these ancient stories independently of their wider social context, and the effect that both social context and individual artistic choices can have on each other. As LEMDO works to encode, edit, and perform the rest of the plays in Heywood's *Ages* series, we will be able to gain further and more detailed insight into these questions.

