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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM AND THE MEANING OF COURT MARRIAGE

BY PAUL A. OLSON

The opinion that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is largely a shimmering fabric of "moonlight, with a touch of moonshine"¹ has become stock among students of Shakespeare. One rephrases habitual insights concerning gossamer and magic whenever one treats of the work. But there is more to the play than a dream. The efforts of historical scholars to place this comedy in the setting of its dramatic tradition, to see it as "*sui generis*, a 'symbolical' or masque-like play"² suggest that we ought to revise our romantic preconceptions of its structure and theme. Elizabethan masques usually afforded pleasures more serious than those of moonshine, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not unlike them in this respect. It was created for the solemn nuptials of a noble house,³ perhaps for those of the Earl of Derby or the Earl of Essex. For our purposes, the specific families involved matter little. Rather it is important that the significance of the play's symbolism and the *raison d'être* of its pageantry can come clear through an examination of the occasion of its presentation.

Commensurate with its origins in a court marriage, this drama speaks throughout for a sophisticated Renaissance philosophy of the nature of love in both its rational and irrational

¹ Marchette Chute, *An Introduction to Shakespeare* (New York, 1951), p. 49.

² John Russell Brown, "The Interpretation of Shakespeare's Comedies: 1900-1953," *Shakespeare Survey*, VIII (1955), 7; cf. E. K. Chambers, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (New York, 1907), p. 13, pp. 18-19; Enid Welsford, *The Court Masque* (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 324-336; C. J. Sisson, ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (London, 1953), p. 207.

³ E. K. Chambers, "The Occasion of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare*, ed. Israel Gollancz (Oxford, 1916), pp. 154-160; Welsford, p. 324; Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and J. Dover Wilson, ed., *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (Cambridge, 1924), p. xv; Paul N. Siegel, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Wedding Guests," *SQ*, IV (1953), 139-144. These references might be multiplied. My essay does not propose to deal with the problem of topical allusions in *MND*.

forms. Even Bottom the fool observes that "reason and loue keepe little company together, now a daies (*MND*, III, i. 147-48)." ⁴ His sententious surmise—and it has been taken as the drama's theme—is best understood in terms of 16th century marriage doctrines. When these and the symbols used to convey them are properly understood, the disparity between Reason and Love will appear figured in the distance from Athens to the woods; it is emblemized in the play's shift from light to darkness. The formal contrasts and similarities between the Duke and Queen of Athens and their fairy counterparts depict like distinctions. However, since such structural effects are organically linked to the philosophy which informs them, the purpose of this essay must be twofold. It must first make a cursory survey of Renaissance thought concerning the function of festival drama and the significance of wedlock. Then it must indicate the methods by which symbol and masque pattern, structure and theme, work together to make luminous a traditional understanding of marriage.

There is reason for such an iconological approach to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The ceremony for which it was written probably took place about 1595. Its audience would have included, from the intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals of the court, men who knew the recently published enigmatic works: *The Faerie Queene* (1590), *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch* (1592), Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590). Furthermore, the play's style and conception relate it to Lyly's court comedies of a decade earlier and Ben Jonson's court masques of ten years later. ⁵ Both these demanded the sophistication of minds swift in catching emblematic meanings, a point convincingly sustained by the studies of D. J. Gordon and B. F. Huppé in the ceremonial dramas of Jonson and Lyly. ⁶ For both the scholar

⁴ Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from the first quartos of *TNK* and *MND* and from the first folio for the remaining plays. Line numbers follow the Globe text. This essay is indebted throughout to the assistance of Professors G. E. Bentley and D. W. Robertson, Jr.

⁵ Welsford, p. 283; cf. Robert Adger Law, "The 'Pre-Conceived Pattern' of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Texas U. Studies in English* (1943), 8-14.

⁶ D. J. Gordon, "Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones," *JW&CI*, XII (1949), 152-178; "The Imagery of Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blacknesse* and *The Masque of Beautie*," *JW&CI*, VI (1943), 122-141; "*Hymenæi*: Ben Jonson's *Masque of Union*," *JW&CI*, VIII (1945), 107-145; Bernard F. Huppé, "Allegory of Love in Lyly's Court Comedies,"

and playwright, the drama's patrons give the drama laws. The laws for Lyly and Jonson were fixed by a court consistently interested in that art which builds its meaning from the materials of traditional emblems and allegories. Such a group Shakespeare also addressed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The guests at the wedding may have been reminded of the intellectual function of the new playwright's poetry—if they needed such reminding—through the definitions of Duke Theseus' speech:⁷

The Poets eye, in a fine frenzy, rolling, doth glance
From heauen to earth, from earth to heauen. And as
Imagination bodies forth the formes of things
Vnknowne: the Poets penne turnes them to shapes,
And giues to ayery nothing, a locall habitation,
And a name. (MND, V, i, 12-17)

Theseus' lines have been interpreted in their context as a jocular degradation of the poet to the level of lover and madman. Poets do not often sell their craft so short, and Shakespeare is not, I think, doing so here. First of all, one must note that Theseus makes some implicit distinctions between the poet and his mad colleagues. It is only lovers and madmen who are said to exhibit fantasies which descend beyond the comprehension of reason (*MND*, V, 4-6). Implicitly, poets, however much they are possessed by a *furor poesis*, may deal in imaginings apprehensible in more rational terms. The speech quoted above perhaps makes clear how this happens. Its syntax suggests that what the poet sees, in glancing to heaven, is the "ayery nothing" or "forme" which his imagination is then empowered to body forth.⁸ In looking back to earth, he bequeaths to this Form a "locall habitation, and a name." In a similar vein, Neoplatonic criticism in the time spoke of

ELH, XIV (1947), 92-113. Cf. Alice S. Venezky, *Pageantry on the Shakespearean Stage* (New York, 1951), pp. 134-145.

⁷ J. Dover Wilson suggests that these lines were added to a 1592 version of the play, but he regards the revisions as inserted for later private performances at weddings; cf. Wilson, pp. 80-100.

⁸ Pico similarly regards the imagination as the faculty which embodies celestial realities; its purpose is to move the uninitiated to a contemplation of higher things, and this functions particularly in Scriptural allegory:

Remoto namque sacorum eliquorum cortice, sequestratoque imaginationis velo, quod cortici litterae juxta proportionem quadrat, sicuti spiritus ipse sub

the artist's duty to incarnate the universal (or "form") in the concrete visual emblem. Professor E. H. Gombrich recently used much the same language as Duke Theseus to summarize the rationale of such Renaissance visual symbols:

They are the forms which the invisible entities can assume to make themselves understood to the limited human mind. In other words, the idea of Justice—be it conceived as a member of the celestial hierarchy or as an abstract entity—is inaccessible to the senses. At best we can hope to grasp it in a moment of ecstasy and intellectual intuition. But God has decreed in His mercy that these invisible and abstract entities whose divine radiance no human eye could support may accommodate themselves to our understanding and assume visible shape.⁹

Professor Gombrich treats of the figure of justice; the theory could as well be used to explain the "Cupid painted blinde (*MND*, I, 1, 235)" placed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to embody earthly as opposed to heavenly love. In fact the entire play may be seen as a skillfully composed fabric of iconological referents giving local habitation to the "invisible and abstract entities" which would be likely to claim the attention of a marriage audience. Thus, while the aesthetic of the work implies a surrender to modes of looking at the world which do not derive their sustenance from phenomenal fact, it also demands a return to this kind of fact for their expression.

Perhaps to strengthen Theseus' general critical position, Bottom remarks in a more comic vein that his dream "hath no bottome (*MND*, IV, 1, 220)." Earlier the same speech echoes confusedly St. Paul's account of the ineffable nature of the heavenly vision (*MND*, IV, i, 208 ff; compare I Corinthians

cortice delitescens depurato phantasmatis intellectui respondet, sese in animam infert spiritus, eamque ad divinum gustum perducit, quae incohatio est quaedam futurae gloriae quae revelabitur in nobis.

Pico della Mirandola, *On the Imagination*, ed. Harry Caplan (New Haven, 1930), p. 92; cf. 86-92. La Primaudaye treats the imagination, properly used, as the vehicle through which such heavenly visions as Nebuchadnezzar's are communicated; Peter de la Primaudaye, *The Second Part of the French Academie* (London, 1594), sig. [K6]. These ideas may be a development from Boethius ("De Consolatione Philosophiae," *Liber V, Prosa IV*), where the imagination is assigned a position between the wit which looks on sensate things and the intelligence which contemplates the simple forms.

⁹ E. H. Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought," *JW&CI*, XI (1948), 180; cf. *passim*, pp. 163-192.

2:7-14). If Bottom's misquotation means anything, it probably indicates that the dream is what Macrobius would have called a *somnium*, a veiled truth from between the gates of horn.¹⁰ All in all, Shakespeare might well have assented to Ben Jonson's belief that the inventions of court drama "should alwayes lay hold on more remou'd *mysteries*."¹¹

The Elizabethan poet who wished to bring before an aristocratic group the "formes of things Vnknowne" in describing the function of marriage, could refer to an old and dignified philosophy of its purposes. This thought had come down to him from the middle ages, but he could have found it in 16th century sermons, scriptural commentaries, marriage manuals, or encyclopedias of general knowledge. According to its doctrines, the love found in well-ordered marriage was regarded—in the words of Chaucer's Theseus—as part of the "faire cheyne of love" which "bond/ The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond/ In certeyn boundes (*KT*, 2988-2992)."¹² This divine love, this "perfect harmonie, like as in musicke . . ."¹³ also maintained the patterned hierarchy of society and kept the stars in their paths. Wedlock fulfilled its part in the concord of things when the male ruled his mate in the same way that reason was ordained to control both will and passions.¹⁴ It was argued that, before the Fall, men propagated their kind according to the promptings of charity. But with the first temptation, Eve's sensuality overcame Adam, and Adam's reason.¹⁵ The

¹⁰ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William H. Stahl (New York, 1952), pp. 87-92; cf. Huppé, p. 99.

¹¹ *The Works of Ben Jonson* (introduction to *Hymenæi*), edited by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1925-1952), VII, 209.

¹² *The Poetical Works of Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Cambridge, Mass., 1933). All quotations and citations from this edition.

¹³ Peter de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie* (London, 1618), Sig. Ooo2^v; cf. Sig. Ooo2-Ooo2^v.

¹⁴ Roland Mushat Frye, "Macbeth's Usurping Wife," *Renaissance News*, VIII (1955), 102; cf. [Erocole Tasso], *Of Mariage and Wiuing*, trans. R[obert] T[ofte] (London, 1599), sig. J[1]^v; [John Knox], *The First Blast of the Trvmpet Against the Montrvous Regiment of Women* ([Geneva], 1558), sig. C4 ff.

¹⁵ This interpretation of the fall, originating as early as St. Augustine (*De Trinitate*, Lib. XII, Cap. 12), was popularized in the 12th and 13th centuries by *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard (Lib. II, Dist. XXIV, Cap. VI ff.). Cf. Lombard, "Collectanea in Epist. D. Pauli; In Ep. I ad Tim.," *PL*, CXCII, 342; Richard of St. Victor, "Adnotatio in Psalmum CXXI," *PL*, CXCVI, 363, and Chaucer, *Works*, p. 282. Arnold Williams in *The Common Expositor* (Chapel Hill, 1948),

fall transformed all divine, rational love in man into unreasonable and selfish lust. In Bottom's words, "Reason and Love kept little company together." Afterward, man's desire sought more to please itself than to follow God's plan for the world in general, especially for the procreation of the race. Since a link in the "faire cheyne" had been broken, the marriage of the first garden was kept as an institution, a fragment shored against the complete ruin of rationality in man.¹⁶ It could in a poetic sense allow Adam's intellect again to rule Eve's willfulness. The *Comedy of Errors* makes Luciana speak no more than the commonplace wisdom of the 16th century when she advises Adriana concerning woman's liberty:

Why, headstrong liberty is lasht with woe:
 There's nothing situate vnder heauens eye,
 But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in skie.
 The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowles
 Are their males subiects, and at their controules:
 Man more diuine, the Master of all these,
 Lord of the wide world, and wilde watry seas,
 Indued with intellectuall sence and soules,
 Of more preheminnence then fish and fowles,
 Are masters to their females, and their Lords:
 Then let your will attend on their accords.

(*C of E*, II, 1, 15-25)

Marriage was assigned not only a positive social value, but various spiritual symbolisms were found in it. The meeting of God and the soul, the relationship of Christ and the Church, these also involved bonds of love which were described in marital terms.¹⁷ The view of wedlock outlined here was expressed in Chaucer by the Knight and the Parson (*KT*, 2986-3108; *PT*, 260-270, 321-348, and 836-957), repeated in La Primaudaye's *The French Academie*,¹⁸ dramatized in Ben Jonson's *Hymenaei*.¹⁹ It was in part further popularized by the manuals which followed Bullinger's *The Christen State of*

p. 128, has indicated the persistence of this interpretation as a subsidiary moralization into the Renaissance. For a literary usage, cf. *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 6 vols. (London, 1928-31), II, 16-19, esp. pp. 18-19.

¹⁶ Peter de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie* (Newbery, 1586), sig. [Hh8]r; John Donne, *Works* (London, 1839), IV, 34.

¹⁷ Donne, *Works*, IV, 40 ff.; La Primaudaye (1586 ed.), sig. [Ii6]r.

¹⁸ Primaudaye (1586 ed.), sig. [Hh7]r-Nn3.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Hymenaei*, pp. 107-145.

Matrimony. The popular manuals added some practical strictures conducive to order which are relevant to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Parents were advised not to force unpleasant matches upon their offspring but to "haue respect to gods ordinance, & to the right ordinate consent of the parties. . . ." ²⁰ Children on the other hand were counselled that marriage must be undertaken only with the permission of their parents.²¹ The modern interpreter needs to be aware of these ideals throughout the play, for they, I think, control the pattern of its action and modify the meanings of individual words and images.

In terms of such concepts, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* discloses a three movement pattern similar in outline to that which Nevill Coghill finds implicit in the mediaeval foundations of Shakespearean comedy.²² The work begins with order (Act I), then passes through the cycle of a Fall which brings the domination of unbridled passion (Acts II-III). Finally, it returns to a realization of the charity and cohesive community morality in which it began (Acts IV-V). Since this essay will trace the manner in which symbol and emblem reinforce this development throughout the play, it will be useful to follow the text as we move through it.

The first movement, the movement toward an orderly subordination of the female and her passions to the more reasonable male, is epitomized at the beginning of the first scene with the announcement of the prospective marriage of Theseus and Hippolita. Long before Shakespeare wrote, Theseus had come to embody the reasonable man and the ideal ruler of both his lower nature and his subjects. Chaucer's Theseus, to whom the ruler of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is indebted,²³ had conquered "all the regne of Femenye" with his wisdom (*KT*, 865-66). Shakespeare and Fletcher, in forming *The Two Noble Kinsmen* out of *The Knight's Tale*, pointed up the same conception; there the women of Thebes name the duke as one whose "first thought is more,/ Then others laboured meditante,"

²⁰ [Heinrich Bullinger], *The Christen State of Matrimony*, trans. Myles Coverdale (n. p., 1546), sig. E3.

²¹ Bullinger, sig. D4.

²² Nevill Coghill, "The Basis of Shakespearian Comedy," *Essays and Studies* (London, 1950), pp. 12-13 and *passim*, pp. 1-28.

²³ Dorothy Bethurum, "Shakespeare's Comment on Mediaeval Romance in *Midsummer-Night's Dream*," *MLN*, LX (1945). 86.

whose “premeditating/ More then their actions (*TNK*, I, i, 135-37).” He gives substance to their observations with his own remarks that the conquest of the lower affections is a man-like task: “Being sensually subdude/ We loose our humane tytle (*TNK*, I, i, 232-33).” During the same period, other writers such as Natalis Conté, Arthur Golding, Sir John Davies, and Alexander Ross confirmed the belief that Theseus should be respected as a mirror of the model ruler and wise man.²⁴

Hippolita was not so fortunate. She was remembered as an Amazon, the ruler of a nation which overturned the fixed hierarchy of wedlock. Celeste Turner Wright, in her exhaustive study, shows that the female warriors had the same reputation in the Renaissance as in the Middle Ages for holding up “a dangerous example of unwomanly conduct, a violation of that traditional order under which ‘Women are born to thralldom and penance/ And to been under mannes governance.’”²⁵ Specifically, they had come to signify a false usurpation of the duties of the male reason by the lower, female passions. The Pyrocles of Sidney’s *Arcadia*, who is costumed as an Amazon, offends Musidorus mainly because he sees in him the overthrow of “the reasonable parte of our soule” by “sensuall weaknes.”²⁶ Spenser pictures a similar inversion of the faculties in his Amazonian Radigund (*FQ*, V, v, 25).²⁷ And John Knox explains the woman : flesh; man : spirit analogy while at the same time attacking the Amazon ruler as transforming men to Circe’s brutes, to the “follishe fondnes ād cowardise of women.”²⁸ That Shakespeare and Fletcher had learned to work these correlations we know from the manner in which Hippolita and her marriage to Theseus are described in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*:

²⁴ Conté remarks Theseus’ “diuinitate . . . & praestantia ingenii.” Natalis Conté, *Mythologiae* (Lyons, 1602), sig. Z[7]r. Cf. Arthur Golding, trans., *The XV. Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (London, 1904), p. 4; *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, facsimile ed. Clare Howard (New York, 1941), p. 91; Alexander Ross, *Mystagogvs Poeticvs* (London, 1648), p. 401.

²⁵ Celeste Turner Wright, “The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature,” *SP*, XXXVII (1940), 456 and *passim*, pp. 433-456.

²⁶ Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge, 1912), p. 77; cf. pp. 76-79.

²⁷ *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Greenlaw, Osgood *et al*, 9 vols. (Baltimore, 1932-1945). All citations from this edition.

²⁸ John Knox, sig. B3.

Most dreaded *Amazonian*, that ha'st slaine
 The Sith-tuskd-Bore; that with thy Arme as strong
 As it is white, wast neere to make the male
 To thy Sex captive; but that this thy Lord
 Borne to uphold Creation, in that honour
 First nature stilde it in, shrunke thee into
 The bownd thou wast ore-flowing; at once subduing
 Thy force, and thy affection. . . . (TKN, I, i, 78-85)

The meaning of the rulers' marriage is here explicit; it is even directly related to the prelapsarian relationship in which man and woman, or the analogous inner faculties, were rightly oriented (TNK, I, i, 83).

It is, I think, with some such associations in mind that the more literate members of the initial audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would have viewed its opening action. Theseus, King of Order, has come to rule an all-too-passionate queen. The duke appears to announce the date of the coming marriage; presumably his undisciplined desires will end when the new moon, Chaste Cynthia, replaces the old stepdame whom Renaissance classicists would have recognized as distraught Hecate. There is to be a season of ceremony and pageantry, a pageantry announced by the formal movement of the verse:

Hippolita, I woo'd thee with my sword,
 And wonne thy loue, doing thee iniuries:
 But I will wed thee in another key,
 With pompe, with triumph, and with reueling.
 (MND, I, i, 16-19)

Such stable conditions could not long remain. If they did, there would be no play. But the set presentation of Hippolita and Theseus and their marriage plan states the ethic which is to govern the rest of the work. The action then begins to tumble toward the chaos of the second movement. Egeus interrupts to announce that Lysander has won the young Hermia against his wishes. Egeus' problem is essentially one for the marriage manuals, a question of the "right ordinate consent of the parties. . . ." Theseus is quick to affirm the principle of order; the child must obey the father or "liue a barraine sister . . . / Chaunting faint hymnes, to the colde fruitlesse Moone (MND, I, i, 72-73)." Athenian law (MND, I, i, 119) is possibly here the law of hierarchy which Plutarch's

Theseus introduced.²⁹ However, Shakespeare's ruler forgets that divine order is maintained by Divine Love and not by law in any mechanical sense. And so there is a failure on both sides, a failure of charity in Theseus, a lack of reason in the lovers. This in turn prepares the way for the break to the woods and the heightening of the drama's psychological tensions.

The duke's exit leaves Lysander and Hermia without an effective guide, and for a time the positive values of the play must necessarily be stated primarily through the imagery. Immediately, the development of disorder shows in images of tempests and of fading roses, and this is intensified by a series of inverted religious allusions which follow. The irony of Lysander's lines, "The course of true loue neuer did runne smoothe (*MND*, I, i, 134)" lies, of course, in the recognition that if one takes charity and its functions for true love, the reverse is obviously true.³⁰ The comparison of class difference, as the hindrance of lovers, to a cross turns upside down the conception of the first cross where One above class was "in-thrald to loue (*MND*, I, i, 136)." Later, the cross as an emblem for patience in suffering becomes a customary thing "As dewe to loue, as thoughts, and dreames, and sighes . . . (*MND*, I, i, 154)." That the Christian cross has some association with heavenly love is evident, as is also the paradox of its connection with Hermia's amorous resignation. Essentially, the argument of the *tête-à-tête* between Hermia and Lysander proceeds along fatalistic lines; the love of which they speak, being temporal and unreasonable, is correctly described as bound for confusion (*MND*, I, i, 141-49). But the references to the crucifixion undercut the argument and appeal to the audience's awareness that there is another kind of love which may move through higher faculties and is not so bound or so temporal.

Lysander, to escape from Athenian restraint, suggests that Hermia go with him to the woods outside the city and attempt a clandestine marriage. Generally such unions were described as illicit in the sixteenth century, and they would hardly be

²⁹ Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. Sir Thomas North, 5 vols. (London, 1895), I, 153-54.

³⁰ La Primaudaye, *The Second Part of the French Academie*, sig. [S6]-[S6]^v; cf. sig. T2-T4^v.

looked on with any favor by parents at an aristocratic wedding. Hermia is not abashed, however. She accedes to the proposition with a fine series of oaths culled carefully from the classics (*MND*, I, i, 169-178). First, she calls on Cupid, a symbol for the power which preserves form in the universe. But this same Cupid, as Natalis Conté shows us, becomes a furor and insanity when transferred to the human mind.³¹ Then she swears by the simplicity of Venus' doves, another emblem for unrestrained desire.³² Finally her oath includes the fire which burned Dido in her final act of self-assertion and self-destruction, a fire which did not, in any known account, either knit souls or prosper loves.

After Helena's entrance, the metaphor returns to a religious area of reference, now overtly used for ironic purposes; Hermia makes use of the concept of grace to explain the process by which her Athenian Paradise was transformed to a more unhappy place as she learned to worship Lysander:

O then, what graces in my loue dooe dwell,
That hee hath turnd a heauen vnto a hell!

(*MND*, I, i, 206-07)

As we shall see, Athens did not always carry such evil connotations. Finally, Helena ties together the whole tenor of the early action with her long closing speech dissecting the effects of Cupid and Cupid's love; this, of course, also directs our attention back to the world of the classics. An early part of her description of the boy's power foreshadows Titania's relation to Bottom: "Things base and vile . . . / Loue can transpose to forme and dignitie (*MND*, I, i, 232-33)." At one level, these lines express the will of such infatuates as the queen of fairy to delude themselves. At another, they represent a perversion by Helena of the belief that Love moves always to impress its form upon the base material of Chaos. The central antithesis between love and reason is first stated explicitly and with a touch of comic incongruity in the same speech: "Loue looks not with the eyes, but with the minde (*MND*, I, i, 234)." How-

³¹ Conté, sig. C4^r; cf. *A Midsommer Nights Dreame*, variorum ed. H. H. Furness (Philadelphia, 1895), pp. 23-24, note.

³² "[Venus'] Doues are wanton . . . being meanes to procure loue and lust." Abraham Fraunce, *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch* (London, 1592), sig. M3.

ever, the girl makes clear two lines later that love's mind is a little eccentric as minds go, for, she observes, it is altogether lacking in rational judgment. Moreover, Helena bothers to point out that the Cupid who figures the emotions which have been evident on the stage is painted blind (*MND*, I, i, 235). Now in the Renaissance, there had come to be two Cupids.³³ One was pictured without the bandage over his eyes and waited upon *Venus Coelestis*, the mother of supernal love. The other was a blind boy associated with *Venus Vulgaris* who shot the hot darts of irrational, earthly desire. By having Helena here speak of the blind member of the pair, Shakespeare explicitly adopts an icon from a sister art to clarify the significance of the lover's emotions and unify the scene.

Since the first section of the play is a crucial one, I have analyzed its language in some detail. Here the dramatist sets up his major themes. Here bright things begin to come to their confusion through a psychological decay, through a dissociation of man's rational, ordering social capacities from his desires. The poet indicates this through the inverted metaphor—predominately a counterpoint of religious and classical allusion—which, though it is used seriously by the lovers, is probably intended to turn back upon them and mock them in the eyes of the audience.

The irony relaxes to farce in the next scene where the mechanicals, with all their crudity, offer a fine dramatization of the proper respect for hierarchy. All through the play these common life characters, unlike those in *Love's Labours Lost*, furnish a rule of ignorant common sense against which the vagaries of their superiors may be measured. So the first act closes by showing the persistence of order in the lower segments of society.

The shift at the beginning of the second section (Acts II-III) leads from Athens to the woods, from light to darkness. The Athens which Theseus ruled dedicated itself to Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. It became a city of philosophers.³⁴ In this play, its antithesis is represented by the near-by woods. They

³³ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York, 1939), pp. 95-128; one should not ignore the ironies which Shakespeare places in the speech, ironies which link it more closely to the "old" moralizations than Panofsky admits (cf. Panofsky, pp. 123-24).

³⁴ "Athenes whilom, whan it was in his floures/ Was callid notice of philisophres

belong in a tradition with Dante's "selva oscura," Spenser's Wood of Error, or the forested, craggy place which Ariosto created for the necromancer, Atlanta. Harington explains Ariosto's allegory as follows: Atlanta is "that fond fancie we call loue," and this kind of folly is like the "darkesome wood" in which Dante found himself or the "wandring wood of which the dolefull *Petrarke* complains so often in those his sweet mourning sonets, in which he seemes to haue comprehended all the passions that all men of that humour haue felt (Compare *MND*, II, ii, 35)." ³⁵ Shakespeare plays upon this convention in one of Demetrius' speeches ("And here am I, and wodde, within this wood . . . [*MND*, II, i, 192]") through a pun which establishes the association between the woods and unreason. In a more generalized sense, the dark wood could signify the confusions which beset the earthly life.³⁶ Thus, the contrast between the play's two settings is a stage projection of the thematic center of the entire work, the contrast between reasonable and unreasonable love. To move from the city to the forest is to choose madness. Shakespeare reinforces the symbolic implications of the wood by having the scenes which take place in them occur at night. Hence, he can draw on the traditional associations between darkness, evil and disorder (*MND*, III, ii, 378-87). The briars of this wood (*MND*, III, ii, 29; III, ii, 442-45) have possibly bothered wanderers ever since the earth first brought forth thorns.

Consistent with its dissimilar setting, act two begins by reversing the situation which opened act one. There Theseus had mastered Hippolita; here Oberon, king of fairies, has lost his sovereignty over Titania, and things are topsy-turvy. The fairyland which Shakespeare presents is no more the Celtic underworld than that in the *Faerie Queene*. Like Spenser, Shakespeare uses the shadow country to represent the "Other-

wise, . . . (ll. 4243-44)." John Lydgate, "The Story of Theseus," *The Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 vols. (London, 1924-27).

³⁵ [Ludovico Ariosto], *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, trans. Sir John Harington (London, 1591), sig. C4^r.

³⁶ Torquato Tasso, *Godfrey of Bulloigne; The Recovery of Ierusalem*, trans. Edward Fairfax (London, 1600), sig. A3^r; cf. George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures* (London, 1640), sig. Nn[1]^r; Margaret Galway, "The Wilton Diptych: A Postscript," *Archaeological Journal*, CVII (1950), 9, notes that the "selva oscura" is frequently a meeting place for earthly and celestial beings in later literature.

world of allegory—that is, of Platonic Ideas, which constitute a higher reality of which earthly things are only imperfect copies.”³⁷ Consequently, the dramatist is able to work the fairy rulers for fairly complex artistic purposes. First of all, they are cosmic or mythological projections of the same qualities which Theseus and Hippolyta embody in the world of the state. At the same time, the action of their plot forms a commentary upon the foibles of the lovers. They are the higher reality and the lovers their imperfect copies. This technique Shakespeare may have learned from Chaucer’s use of Pluto and Proserpina as analogues to January and May in the *Merchant’s Tale*. To understand the artifice of the device, however, we must identify the literary traditions back of the King and Queen of this otherworld.

In Bernier’s *Huon of Burdeux*, Oberon is a kind of grace figure who protects Huon, when he is sinless or penitent, on his way to the conquest of Babylon. This Oberon was born some forty years before Christ’s nativity and is never to age; his place has been appointed for him in Paradise when he leaves the mortal world.³⁸ To Huon he gives the cup from which only the guiltless can drink,³⁹ a vessel which is almost certainly a Eucharistic symbol. Again, the Oberon of Greene’s *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, proclaims himself ruler “Of quiet, pleasure, profit, and content,/ Of wealth, of honor and of all the world.”⁴⁰ His function is to state the play’s Boethian moral: content is virtue and the love of worldly things vanity. In the first scene, he raises Bohan back to life and gently informs him, “I visit thee for loue,”⁴¹ though the angry Scot objects that true love long since took her flight to heaven.⁴² Ben Jonson’s masque of *Oberon* shows the same fairy as king in a celestial palace of those knights who have been “Quick’ned by a second birth (l. 147).”

³⁷ Josephine Waters Bennett, “Britain Among the Fortunate Isles,” *Studies in Philology*, LIII (1956), 136.

³⁸ *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux*, trans. Sir John Bouchier (London, 1882-87), pp. 71, 74.

³⁹ *Huon of Bordeaux*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁰ Robert Greene, *The Scottish Historie of Iames the Fourth* (London, 1598), sig. C4^v.

⁴¹ Greene, sig. A3.

⁴² Greene, sig. A3. Another instance of the use of “true love” for heavenly love, cf. *supra* note 34.

In this tradition, Shakespeare's king of Shadows is also a delicate figure for grace. He is the play's Prospero. Like Theseus, he may have wandered in the mazes of love and war, but, again like Theseus, he has overcome these. When properly sovereign, Oberon furthers the celestial love which preserves chaste marriages and keeps the cosmos in order. His relation to the higher love is clarified in a late scene. There Puck points to the damned spirits who deliberately exiled themselves "from light,/ And must for aye consort with black browed night (*MND*, III, ii, 386-87)." Oberon immediately objects that he is not the same sort of spirit. By reminding Puck that he has often sported with the morning's love, he introduces an image which has behind it an accumulated tradition of reference to the sun of God's charity.⁴³

Since Oberon's mate symbolizes the opposite, earthly love, she is of quite a different mold. Her name comes from Ovid, who used Titania most conspicuously as an epithet for Diana (*Met.* III, 173). Donald Miller has observed that Shakespeare's fairy queen does not seem to be the chaste goddess of the hunt, however. "Oberon is nearer the truth when he calls her 'a wanton.'" ⁴⁴ The paradox of a licentious goddess of chastity may be solved if we look at the Diana in Shakespeare's main source, *The Knight's Tale*. There Emelye's prayer addresses her as goddess of heaven and earth, and "Queene of the regne of Pluto derk and lowe (*KT*, 2299)." In the Renaissance as in the 14th century, Diana presented three aspects: ". . . in heauen she is called Luna, in the woods Diana, vnder the earth Hecate, or Proserpina."⁴⁵ Emelye's prayer emphasizes the Proserpina aspects of the goddess, and in Shakespeare's time Thynne described her sacrifice as addressed to Diana Hecate.⁴⁶ It is my thesis that Shakespeare, using his Chaucerian sources freely, developed his woodland goddess from such a figure. Like Proserpina in the *Merchant's Tale*, Titania is the "queene of Fayerye (*MT*, 2316)," and like her earlier counterpart she knows something of the ways of

⁴³ The image of Aurora, if it controls the passage, would carry the same connotations; cf. Conté, sig. M4.

⁴⁴ Donald C. Miller, "Titania and the Changeling," *ES*, XXII (1940), 67.

⁴⁵ Fraunce, sig. [L4]^v-M.

⁴⁶ Francis Thynne, *Animaduersions*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London, 1876), pp. 48-49.

lechery. The moon appears in its last phase through most of the play, and so it is appropriate that Diana Hecate should rule. Considering the definition quoted above, she should not be a woodland goddess, yet this mythology could be manipulated in several ways. Lyly creates a Luna in *The Woman in the Moone* who is both queen of the woods and wife of Pluto (V, i, 281-84).⁴⁷ Some corroborative evidence indicates that writers in the period so regarded Shakespeare's ruler of summer (*MND*, III, i, 158). Campion has an air, "Harke, al you ladies that do sleep," which is sometimes cited as a source or analogue of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but which may be derived from it. It sings of a "fayry queen Proserpina"⁴⁸ who following Titania's example, dwells in an arbor, leads rounds of dancing by moonlight, and sends abroad her servants to satisfy her capricious desires. Similarly, Drayton's *Nymphidia* tells us that Oberon's wife is a Queen Mab, that she is aided by her classical counterpart, her ally and ancient friend (l. 574), Proserpina.⁴⁹

These suggestions would hardly have been in the minds of the first group to see the play. Yet, a Renaissance audience which knew its classics might have perceived the same thing when it saw Titania appearing with the flowers which her ancestor picked on the fields of Enna or altering the seasonal cycle as Proserpina did when Pluto took her down to Hades. Puck's assertion that the fairies run "By the triple *Hecates* teame (*MND*, V, i, 391)," the fact that the snake leaves his "enammeld skinne (*MND*, II, i, 255)" near the proud queen's bower,⁵⁰ these may have further signalled Titania's relationship with the Roman goddess.

Since Proserpina had power over the coming and going of the seasons, she was allegorized from ancient times as a naturalistic representation of the potency of seeds, as a kind of

⁴⁷ *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1902).

⁴⁸ *Campion's Works*, ed. Percival Vivian (Oxford, 1909), p. 16.

⁴⁹ *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. J. William Hebel, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1931-41), III, pp. 125-46. Shakespeare may have received the hint for making Oberon's wife a Proserpina type from the Elvetham entertainments, where Aureola, Auberon's wife, is said to abide in places underground.

⁵⁰ See Jonson's note on viper's skin, *Works*, VII, 294; the dragons in Ovid slough off their skin in connection with Medrea's rites to Hecate (*Met.*, VII, 236-37).

fertility goddess.⁵¹ This traditional interpretation could in turn be easily extended to make her stand for the forces of the lower passions in man. An Ovidian moralization once attributed to Thomas of Wales emphasizes that aspect of the goddess, and Champion's song notes with some wit that "The Fairie Queene Proserpina/ Bids you encrease that louing humour more (ll. 30-31)." ⁵² Similarly, Titania is queen of summer and a goddess of the earth. Its products, Peaseblossom, Mustardseed, and Cobweb, wait upon her court. Following the fashion set by Lyly's Tellus, she is laden with flowers; like Proserpina and Tellus, she becomes in this play a symbol for the earth and its earthly love. Her function in human psychology and her title in the fairy world are both taken over in *Romeo and Juliet* by Mercutio's Mab.

All the objects which surround Oberon's queen befit her station. Her bower is a sensual paradise.⁵³ Near it, Philomel, the bird of lascivious loves, sings its melody while the wise owl hoots at the "quaint" spirits which appear (*MND*, II, ii, 1-26).⁵⁴ Her erotic games with Bottom and the changeling fit the symbolic frame which Shakespeare has placed about her, since she is princess of sensual passion. In the total conceptual scheme of the play, the king and queen of the woods dramatize the two poles of the scale of values which gave meaning to marriage. They are types of the forces of Reason and Passion which in a more complex and human manner move through Theseus and Hippolita respectively.

As we observed earlier, the world of the woods, unlike Athens, is upside down. Oberon, prince of grace, is no longer sovereign over the fertile earth and its characteristic lusts. It

⁵¹ Conté, sig. q4^v. The idea is commonplace and may also be found in Cartari, Giraldi, and Fraunce.

⁵² [Pierre Bersuire] attributed to Thomas of Wales, *Metamorphosis Ouidiana* (n. p., 1515), sig. [B8]; cf. sig. G1^v-G2.

⁵³ It may be related to the Bower of Bliss; cf. Don Cameron Allen, "On Spenser's *Muiopotmos*," *SP*, LIII (1956), p. 152, note.

⁵⁴ "Quaint" is a bawdy pun which comes down from Middle English; cf. Paull F. Baum, "Chaucer's Puns," *PMLA*, LXXI (1956), p. 243. For the tradition of the nightingale, see D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Historical Criticism," *English Institute Essays* (1950), pp. 23-24. According to the anonymous author of *The Raigne of King Edward the Third* (London, 1596), sig. C[1], "The nightingale singes of adulterate wrong . . .;" cf. D. Filippo Picinelli, *Mondo Simbolico* (Venice, 1678), sig. O1. The nightingale generally sings, in Shakespeare, in scenes in which desire is getting somewhat out of control (*TGV*, V, iv; *R&J*, III, v).

is one of the clichés of the Elizabethan period that macrocosm and microcosm mirror one another. Since the rulers of fairy-land and Platonic archetypes, their struggle has fairly broad effects. It reflects itself in the chaos of nature, the reversal of the seasons, and so forth (*MND*, II, i, 81-117). A parallel to this appears in Jonson's *Masque of Queenes*. There the witches attempt to raise a spell which will "strike the World, and *Nature* dead (l. 314)" and restore shrunk-up Chaos to his ancient dominions. During their rites of disorder, the hags describe the earth as it appears when triformed Hecate is powerful. As in Shakespeare, the seasons alter, floods come, the corn is removed, and storms trouble the land (ll. 221-242). Jonson specifically attributes this collapse of the natural order to Hecate, and we err if we fail to see the parallel passage in Shakespeare as something similar, as more than a mere versified account of the inclement weather of 1595. The disorders described in both passages are caused by the same figure, and both likewise fit into the conscious intellectual purpose of the larger works in which they are placed.

The battle which makes all the trouble concerns a very elusive changeling boy who was carried into the otherworld by the fairies. In like manner, Ganymede was taken by Jove, and Ganymede's tale was commonly thought to be a parable of the capture of man's rational soul by the love of God.⁵⁵ Again, Spenser's Red Cross Knight, who is obviously at one level a symbol for the soul, was as a child a changeling kidnapped into the world of Platonic ideas (*FQ*, I, x, 65-66).

Now to regain this changeling and recover control over Titania, Oberon sends for the obscure flower, love-in-idleness. He informs Puck that it has power to make the fairy queen dote on any creature, "Be it on Lyon, Beare, or Wolfe, or Bull . . . (*MND*, II, i, 180)." The herb has been suspected by modern critics of containing some superstitious magical potion, perhaps some aphrodisiac. However, the association of love and idleness goes back as far as Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*: "Otia si tollas, periere Cupidinis arcus . . . (l. 139; cf. ll. 135-150)." Idleness is porter of the Narcissian garden of self-love in *Le Roman de la Rose*; Spenser calls the same personification the

⁵⁵ Andrea Alciati, *Omnia Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1581), sig. C3^v. Cf. Conté, sig. Rrl^v, and Sandys, sig. [Dd4]-[Dd4]^v.

“nurse of sin,” and makes him lead the parade of the seven deadly vices (*FQ*, I, iv, 18-20). Euphues observes that “idleness is the onely nurse and nourisher of sensual appetite, the sole maintenance of youthfull affection, the first shaft that *Cupide* shooteth into the hot liuer of a heedlesse louer.”⁵⁶ Shakespeare’s love-in-idleness takes its color from the same Cupid (*MND*, II, i, 165-68), the Cupid whom Helena and Hermia found so attractive. The herb is rather obviously a source of “sensual appetite,” and no one should be surprised when it makes Titania dote on the first beast she sees, Bottom in the role of an ass.

There is an allegory in this doting. As Arthur Golding observes, only those who live under reason’s law are to be accounted truly human; those who succumb to their bestial nature must be considered no more than beasts.⁵⁷ Bottom’s ass head may be the development of several traditions, but a fairly accessible interpretation sees it as the symbol for stupidity and sensuality, for the carnal man as opposed to the spiritual.⁵⁸ Bottom, of course, does not stand for such qualities throughout the play, but the Bottom who appears in the dream, the ass who is the object of Titania’s seduction is probably such a symbol. He is—in Titania’s phrase—as wise as he is beautiful (*MND*, III, i, 151). Rather striking support for this is to be found in the passage in St. Paul mentioned earlier. Bottom says that it is “past the wit of man, to say; what dreame it

⁵⁶ Lyly, *Works*, I, 250; cf. La Primaudaye (1586 ed.), sig. Bb1.

⁵⁷ Golding, p. 17; cf. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. A. R. Shilleto, 3 vols. (London, 1893), III, 177.

⁵⁸ Helen Adolf, “The Ass and the Harp,” *Speculum*, XXV (1950), 49-57. The tradition was current in the Renaissance; Petrus Valerianus says that the ass symbolizes those who live a “brutalem & stolidem vitam,” who are “ab omni rationis vsu semotos.” [Petrus Valerianus, *Hieroglyphica* (Lyon, 1610), sig. K4^v; cf. sig. K5^v for an explanation of the ass among flowers, a motif relevant to Bottom.] Cf. Caesario Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome, 1603), sig. [O5]^v under *ignoranza di tutte le cose* and sig. Aa[1] under *Ostinatione*. Cf. Harington, sig. [T2]. Lyly’s Midas, because he prefers the sensual music of Pan to Apollo’s (or wisdom’s) harmony, receives the ears of the ass, “of all beasts . . . the dullest,” which are symbolic of the “beastly life.” (Lyly, *Works*, III, 144). Apuleius’ metamorphosis has been compared to Bottom’s, and Aldington asserts that “under the wrap of this transformation, is taxed the life of mortall men, whē as we suffer our minds so to be drowned in the sensuall lusts of the flesh, & the beastly pleasure thereof.” Apuleius, *The XI Bookes of the Golden Asse*, trans. William Aldington (London, 1582), sig. A5^v.

was. Man is but an Asse, if hee goes about [to] expound this dreame . . . it shall be call'd *Bottoms Dreame*; because it hath no bottome (*MND*, IV, i, 208-220).” St. Paul puts it a little differently in Tyndale’s translation: “For the sprete searcheth all thinges, ye the bottome of Goddes secretes. For what man knoweth the thinges of a man: save the sprete of a man which is with in him? . . . For the naturall man perceaveth not the thinges of the sprete of god. For they are but folysshnes vnto him.”⁵⁹ It is the bestial or natural man who is unable to see to the bottom of things; he is the fool or ass who cannot expound the dream. This does not mean that Shakespeare denies to the more perceptive spirit of his audience the privilege of perceiving “these invisible and abstract entities which no human eye could support.”

What then are the invisible and abstract entities which may be seen in the comic fairy plot? Paraphrase is always bad for a stage piece; it tends to impoverish and rationalize the richness of a dramatic symbol. Yet, if one were to apply this malpractice to the Oberon-Titania-Bottom triangle, one might say that celestial love in the form of Oberon attempts to capture the young man (the “sprete” or the changeling) into his train and bring earthly love under his control in order that the rational and animal in man may form a proper marriage. To accomplish this, Divine Love “providentially works through imperfect human love”⁶⁰ as in the *Knight’s Tale*. That is, Oberon uses love-in-idleness to force Titania to release her hold upon the changeling and to seek only the carnal or physical man, Bottom. Bottom recognizes the earthy character of Titania’s love when he speaks of her having little reason for loving him, and then tosses off the jest which sets the theme of the play (*MND*, III, i, 145-50). The service which Titania’s coterie, especially Peaseblossom, Mustardseed, and Cobweb, pay to Bottom is obviously a miniature picture of the satisfaction which the products of the earth can give to the grosser senses. There is a plot analogous to this one in Lyly’s *Endimion*; there Cynthia, the higher love, forces Tellus or earthly passion to release her hold upon Endimion (the rational soul)

⁵⁹ *The New Testament*, trans. William Tyndale (Cambridge, 1938), p. 349.

⁶⁰ H. S. Wilson, “*The Knight’s Tale* and the *Teseida* Again,” *U. of Toronto Quarterly*, XVIII (1949), 145.

but allows her to retain her love for Corsites (the body). Shakespeare was possibly as aware as Lyly that the body quite naturally will have its sexual appetites. He may also have recognized, as more recent dramatists sometimes do not, that these appetites need not undermine man's reason, his social responsibility, or his spiritual seeking.

Thus, having reduced physical love to her proper sphere, Oberon can use "*Dians budde*" to release her from the unchaste power of "*Cupids flower*." At that point the third movement of the play begins in the fairy plot. Oberon regains his sovereignty over the fairy queen; the two loves are matched as they should be in any true marriage. The pair beats the ground in a circular dance, and Oberon calls for music which strikes "more dead/ Then common sleepe: of all these, fl[v]e the sense (*MND*, IV, i, 84-85)." This harmony may be the *mundana musica* which preserves chaste loves and keeps the stars from wrong. The dance was given the same universal significance as a symbol for the concord of divine love in Sir John Davies *Orchestra* (1595).⁶¹ Finally, all this is knit together when the fairies hear the song of the lark, a bird which sings at heaven's gate and which well into the seventeenth century was a symbol for the ascent of the reasonable soul toward God.⁶² Thus the king and queen of the otherworld arrive at the ordered condition which Theseus and Hippolita had reached at the play's beginning. Such an interpretation of the fairy plot may be incomplete, but it seems to me somewhat more consonant with what we know of the literary use of fairies in the 1590's from the *Faerie Queene* than the view we sometimes get that Shakespeare was here a slightly amateurish Warwickshire folklorist.

To see the mythical plot in this way is to see it as an integral part of the total dramatic meaning of the play. It amounts to a stage projection of the inner condition of the lovers, of the pattern of fall and redemption which they experience. Shakespeare is craftsman enough to establish carefully stage links

⁶¹ Davies, p. 74 (stanza 28).

⁶² John Woolton, *A Treatise of the Immortalitie of the Soule* (1576), pp. 29^v-30^r, cited T. W. Baldwin, *On the Literary Genetics of Shakspeare's Poem & Sonnets* (Urbana, 1950), p. 40; cf. Phineas Fletcher, "The Purple Island (LX, ii, 1-4)," *The Poetical Works of Giles and Phineas Fletcher*, ed. F. S. Boas, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1909), II, 119, and Picinelli, sig. L2^v.

between the two plots. Thus, when Demetrius and Helena first appear in the woods, Helena comes running after Demetrius (*MND*, II, i, 188); ten lines earlier Oberon has predicted that Titania will pursue the first beast she sees with the soul of love. Later Titania sleeps and receives the juice of love-in-idleness upon her eyelids; then Lysander and Hermia sleep, and Lysander is treated with the same philtre. Under its influence, Lysander worships Helena (*MND*, II, ii, 83-156)); the next scene gives us a Titania enamoured of Bottom's shape. Throughout, Shakespeare uses formal parallelism between scenes from the two plots to stress their inner relationship and to heighten the humor of both.

Though the flight to the woods is obviously the beginning of the lovers' fall, their subjection is not such a serious one. Shakespeare is not writing a serious play in that sense. Hermia preserves her humane modesty though Helena is less worried about the worth of her virginity. In any case, Oberon again providentially works through imperfect human love, using the philtre to transform the initial foolishness into behavior which is more obviously irrational. The ridicule which is the most potent enemy of the wrong kind of love, is intended to act both upon the lovers and, it is hoped, upon their audience. Puck makes a mistake with Lysander, but this only serves to heighten the comedy. The boy sinks to sleep protesting everlasting love for Hermia; he awakens from the herb eager to run through fire for Helena. He has arrived at that unsound condition where he can adduce scholastic arguments for his sanity, and so give the theme of the play another ironic twist:

The will of man is by his reason swai'd:
And reason saies you are the worthier maide.
Things growing are not ripe, vntill their season:
So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason.
And touching now, the [point] of humaine skill,
Reason becomes the Marshall to my will,
And leads mee to your eyes. . . . (*MND*, II, ii, 115-121)

Incidentally, Reason in *Le Roman de la Rose* does not attempt to marshall the will to the eyes of a beautiful woman, but to a different kind of jewel.

However, the climax of the dramatization of the troubles of irrational love is reached in Act III, scene ii. The exaggerated

praise and worship of the mistress common in Ovidian satiric love poetry, the suspicions of friends are all there. Hermia even endeavors to tear out Helena's eyes (*MND*, III, ii, 298). A moralist might say that the concupiscible passions have led on to the irascible. This is also what happens to Palamon and Arcite in the *Knight's Tale*. Yet, the troubles of heroic love do not lead the lovers in Shakespeare's work to the same violent end which Chaucer's Arcite suffers. It is part of Shakespeare's art that while the plight of the lovers seems more and more desperate to them, it appears increasingly comic to their audience, possibly because in this play the benevolent Oberon can send in his Robin to rescue the squabbling pairs and apply the *Remedia Amoris*:

On the ground, sleepe sound:
He aplly your eye, gentle loue, remedy. . . .
Iacke shall haue *Ill*: nought shall goe ill:
The man shall haue his mare again, & all shall be well.
(*MND*, III, ii, 448-63)

Thus Oberon, with his servants, returns the lovers to reason; by allowing them to see for themselves the humor of their situation, he makes it possible for them to extricate themselves permanently from the fond fancy which misdirects the will and leaves one enamoured of an ass.

The lovers are ready for the type of "bond of love" speech which Theseus gives in the third section of the *Knight's Tale*. Here again Shakespeare chooses the appropriate dramatic symbols. The song of the lark, the music, and dance symbolize the "faire cheyne" in the fairy plot; in the other plot Theseus appears at dawn to remark the same effects:

How comes this gentle concord in the worlde,
That hatred is so farre from iealousie,
To sleepe by hate, and feare no enmitie. . . .
(*MVD*, IV, i, 146-48)

This concord is a reflection of the concord between Oberon and Titania, between their loves. It suggests a return of the world of nature from seasonal disorder to a similar harmony. And the state comes to its own order; Theseus now preserves hierarchy by overruling Egeus. His success results from a more profound understanding of the principle of consent as the basis of mar-

riage than he exhibited in the first scene. Finally, he proposes the ritual which will confirm a union not “ Briefe, as the lightning in the collied night . . . (*MND*, I, i, 145)” but rather more lasting:

. . . in the Temple, by and by, with vs,
These couples shall eternally be knit.

(*MND*, IV, i, 183-84)

The last act is lighter in tone. The contract complete, the lovers see enacted the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe. But even this fits into the total pattern. For this story is, as Arthur Golding knew, a tragedy of the “ headie force of frentick love.”⁶⁸ At one level, it is the potential tragedy of the lovers in the woods. It becomes, of course, a comedy because of the crudity in its poetry and in the stagecraft of the mechanicals; even this crudity gives Shakespeare an opportunity to show Theseus manifesting that kind of charity toward his subjects which holds societies together. It is also a comedy because the Renaissance view of marriage did not hold that fallen man must always be torn by the briars of the wild woods. Oberon’s final benediction upon the wedded couples is not so specifically concerned with Christian theological redemption as that which the Knight gives to Palamon and Emelye:

And God, that al this wyde world hath wrought,
Sende hym his love that hath it deere aboght. . . .

(*KT*, 3099-3100)

Yet the “ true loue ” which Oberon promises to the newly married ones may be related to Divine Love, and the blots which are not to appear in their offspring were blots first made when Nature’s hand was scarred in the fall.

Since the play operates according to no normal Aristotelian laws of psychological causality, critics have expected to find in it arcane fertility myth and ritual. But the ritual with which the work is concerned is after all the marriage rite. And the symbols come not from the Celtic twilight but from more conscious and intellectual literary traditions. Shakespeare was able to celebrate the marriage occasion at the noble mansion with archetypes more alive to the noblemen of his time than the

⁶⁸ Golding, p. 3.

superstitions of their Druidic ancestors. The major symbols used in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had been made the property of the court by the works of Lyly and Spenser, authors who also exercised an influence on Shakespeare at the time he wrote the play. Shakespeare's purpose is to bring to life certain truths about wedlock which may have seemed at best abstractions, at worst clichés, to his audience. He widens their significance by mirroring them in an elaborate series of parallelisms between Athens and the woods, between the world of the fairies and the world of the lovers, between the orders of the individual family, of society, and of nature in general. The values which the drama supports are not trivial. That society in which sexual mores are governed well, in which marriage is relatively unselfish, may exhibit a deeper unity in other matters. It is in terms of such values that the dream becomes more than a fanciful illusion and grows, in Hippolita's phrase, "to something of great constancy (*MND*, V, i, 26)."

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