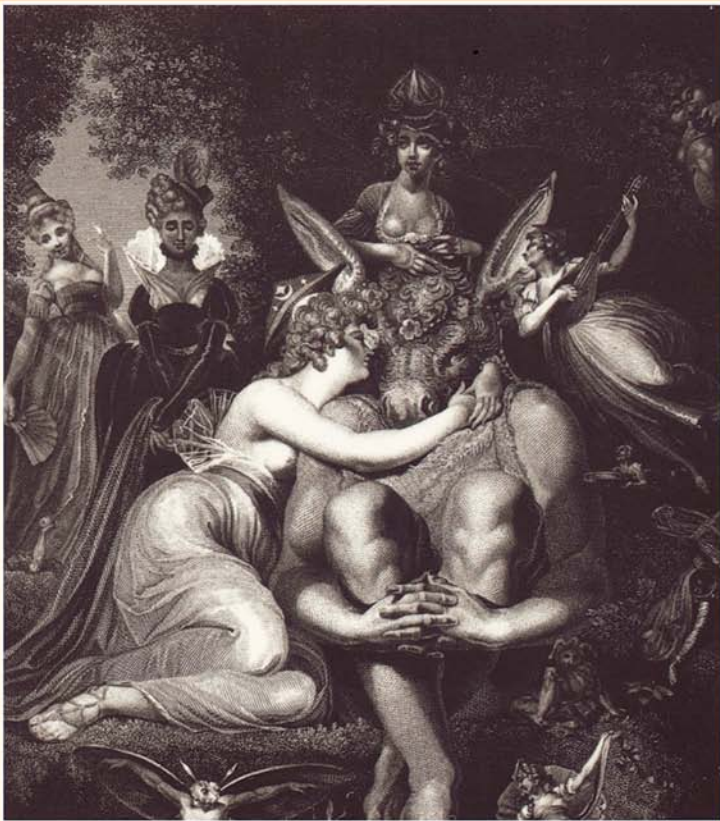


# A Midsummer Night's Dream

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Edited by Dorothea Kehler

*A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S  
DREAM*

# SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM

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*A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S*  
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CRITICAL ESSAYS

EDITED BY  
DOROTHEA KEHLER

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*FOR JESSICA*

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine . . .



*Figure 1 (Frontispiece). Act 3, scene 1, of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," painted by H. Fuseli and engraved by R. Rhodes. Published 1794. Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The continuing goal of the Garland Shakespeare Criticism series is to provide the most influential historical criticism, the most significant contemporary interpretations, and reviews of the most influential productions. Each volume in the series, devoted to a Shakespearean play or poem (e.g., the sonnets, *Venus and Adonis*, the *Rape of Lucrece*), includes the most essential criticism and reviews of Shakespeare's work from the late seventeenth century to the present. The series thus provides, through individual volumes, a representative gathering of critical opinion of how a play or poem has been interpreted over the centuries.

A major feature of each volume in the series is the editor's introduction. Each volume editor provides a substantial essay identifying the main critical issues and problems the play (or poem) has raised, charting the critical trends in looking at the work over the centuries, and assessing the critical discourses that have linked the play or poem to various ideological concerns. In addition to examining the critical commentary in light of important historical and theatrical events, each introduction functions as a discursive bibliographic essay that cites and evaluates significant critical works—essays, journal articles, dissertations, books, theatre documents—and gives readers a guide to research on the particular play or poem.

After the introduction, each volume is organized chronologically, by date of publication of selections, into two sections: critical essays and theatre reviews/documents. The first section includes previously published journal articles and book chapters as well as original essays written for the collection. In selecting essays, editors have chosen works that are representative of a given age and critical approach. Striving for accurate historical representation, editors include earlier as well as contemporary criticism. Their goal is to include the widest possible range of critical approaches to the play or poem to demonstrate the multiplicity and complexity of critical response.

In most instances, essays have been reprinted in their entirety, not butchered into snippets. The editors have also commissioned original essays (sometimes as many as five to ten) by leading Shakespearean scholars, thus offering the most contemporary, theoretically attentive analyses. Reflecting some recent critical approaches in Shakespearean studies, these new essays approach the play or poem from a multiplicity of perspectives, including feminist, Marxist, new historical, semiotic, mythic, performance/staging, cultural, and/or a combination of these and other methodologies. Some volumes in the series even include bibliographic analyses that have significant implications for criticism.

The second section of each volume in the series is devoted to the play in performance and, again, is organized chronologically by publication date, beginning with some of the earliest and most significant productions and proceeding to the most recent. This section, which ultimately provides a theatre history of the play, should not be regarded as different from or rigidly isolated from the critical essays in the first section. Shakespearean criticism has often been informed by or has significantly influenced productions. Shakespearean criticism over the last twenty years or so has usefully been labeled the "Age of Performance." Readers will find information in this section on major foreign productions of Shakespeare's plays as well as landmark productions in English. Consisting of more than reviews of specific productions, this section also contains a variety of theatre documents, including interpretations written for a particular volume by notable directors whose comments might be titled "The Director's Choice," histories of seminal productions (e.g., Peter Brook's *Titus Andronicus*) in 1955), and even interviews with directors and/or actors. Editors have also included photographs from productions around the world to help readers see and further appreciate the way a Shakespearean play has taken shape in the theatre.

Each volume in the Garland Shakespeare Criticism series strives to give readers a balanced, representative collection of the best that has been thought and said about a Shakespearean play or poem. In essence, each volume supplies a careful survey of essential materials in the history of criticism for a Shakespearean play or poem. In offering readers complete, fulfilling, and in some instances very hard to locate materials, editors have made conveniently accessible the literary and theatrical criticism of Shakespeare's greatest legacy, his work.

Philip C. Kolin  
University of Southern Mississippi

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The general editor of this series, Philip Kolin, has been a kindly reader and mentor; my editor at Garland Publishing, Phyllis Korper, and her staff have been most supportive. I would also like to thank those who generously gave of their time to read and comment upon drafts of my introduction and essay on the McClinton production: Curtis Bright of the University of Pittsburgh, Jeanie Grant Moore at the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh, and my colleagues Clare Colquitt and Peter C. Herman. Thanks to Marion McClinton for taking the time to speak to me at length about his production.

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PART I

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
and the Critics

# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## A Bibliographic Survey of the Criticism

*Dorothea Kehler*

A remarkable fantasy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of the best-loved Shakespearean comedies. Probably written sometime between 1594 and 1596, that is, between *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, *Dream* belongs to the playwright's early-middle period when Shakespeare revelled in lyricism. His poetic achievement in *Dream* may be equalled in the later works but is never surpassed. Here he creates atmosphere, in turn, charming, lush, and darkly erotic, through iterative imagery; distinguishes between character groups through elegantly patterned discourse; and employs phonic and rhythmic sound variations to make music out of language. The text, which exists in three versions differing primarily in the number of stage directions, draws on many different sources, but the delightful theatrical composite, like the poetic texture, is a triumph of originality.

The focus of *Dream* criticism has varied with the age. Restoration and eighteenth-century commentators on drama most frequently fastened on plot, nineteenth-century critics on character, and twentieth-century writers on language and theme—though in the last several decades on explicitly political issues as well. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while no glaring exception to trends as much socio-political as aesthetic, early evoked interest in its philosophic underpinnings. Appearance and reality, art, imagination, and above all love were central. The play has been understood as implying, platonically, that life is a dream, or, skeptically, that romantic love is a dream. The faculty of imagination, both celebrated and mocked in *Dream*, is integral to the audience as well as to the playwright; the one takes

appearance—a dream of sorts—for reality, the other creates a reality from appearance. Where Shakespeare stands on the question of whether lovers are deluded by appearances or rather are receptive to a transcendent reality remains moot. The answers are apt to tell us more about the critics than about the play.

Because of the fairies, the music, the comical mistakings of the lovers, and the incomparable farce of Pyramus and Thisbe, *Dream* had often been considered especially suitable for introducing children to Shakespeare. For those unpersuaded by Jan Kott's 1960s vision of the play as cruelly, even bestially, orgiastic, no doubt it still is. But that prominent reading revolutionized criticism and stage productions. In its wake, to issues long explored, critics added often fascinating psychoanalytic and sociological excursions into the delineation of class and gender roles; of sexual maturation and preference; and most recently, of early modern but lingering racialism.

My survey of pre-twentieth-century *Dream* criticism is not subdivided into categories, since most men of letters—and they *were* men—wrote impressionistically and touched on multiple issues. As literary study became increasingly specialized, critics often chose to address a particular aspect of the play, although such thematic subjects as dream, love, imagination, and the supernatural are often linked. Analyses of *Dream*'s many complex issues are sometimes grounded in the four character groups or story lines, sometimes in a literary component such as language, sometimes in a favored critical approach. Inevitably, some essays overlap these categories, which themselves overlap.

Charting English-language twentieth-century criticism, I have for the most part proceeded chronologically within categories in order to reveal lines of development. This selective overview—*Dream* criticism is a world without end—cites some of the more important and interesting works. No census, it is also not a historical reception study, though it may invite such work. Some trends are well-known, e.g., the progression from historical backgrounding to the foregrounding practice of the various new historicisms, from a functionalist view of gender to feminist and queer theory readings. Recently, the negotiations between criticism and performance have become more visible, and performance criticism has assumed new significance. Accordingly, historicist, gender, and performance studies are the last of the critical

categories, with a brief theatrical history concluding this introduction to the reprinted and new essays.

In the twentieth century, particularly the last third, as our awareness of the politics of criticism amplifies, readers are more apt to recognize whether the critic is politically and theoretically self-conscious, to ask why the critic focuses where s/he does, to speculate about whose interests are furthered by a particular piece of criticism, and about what cultural work has been achieved. For example, R.W. Dent, in his fine defense of the imagination written in the early 1960s, takes for granted that “Lysander and Hermia may not behave rationally in their flight from authority” (123,n.18); just a few years later, in the wake of the United States’s civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the protests against the Vietnam war, political trend setters would find such behavior eminently rational and embark on a *fin de siècle* project that has transformed critical practice. We are learning, as Terence Hawkes observes, that “Shakespeare doesn’t mean; we mean by Shakespeare” (“By,” 3). Apropos of the meanings we bring to the play, I should mention that although this account is mainly descriptive, I have not entirely resisted editorializing about criticism whose baneful treatment of class and gender can only have a regressive influence.

A number of reference works are especially useful: D. Allen Carroll and Gary Jay Williams’s annotated bibliography devoted exclusively to *Dream* (1986); the Shakespeare bibliographies compiled by Linda Woodbridge (1988), Joseph Rosenblum (1992), and Larry Champion (1993); *Shakespeare Quarterly*’s annual World Shakespeare Bibliography; and Gale Publishing’s *Shakespearean Criticism* volumes on *Dream*. In his Twayne book on *Dream*, James L. Calderwood (1992) provides valuable references.

### 1662-1896

Given the exceptional creativity of Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the prescriptive rules which most Restoration and eighteenth-century neo-classicists upheld, it is not surprising that a work so appealing and popular today should have had to struggle for approbation in the theater, winning praise largely for the quality of the poetry or for such incidentals as Shakespeare’s acquaintance with the classics. That his plays have survived the fads and biases of earlier

times is a tribute to Shakespeare. For a practical spectator like the admiralty's Samuel Pepys (1662), who in confiding to his diary gave posterity the first written judgment of *Dream*, it was "the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life." Luckily, it was not without redeeming qualities: "I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure" (3: 208). An initial problem for neo-classicists honoring the new scientism were the fairies. Should they be depicted? *Some* should, said Dryden in 1677, by then a major writer and arbiter of taste. He contended against excessive restraints on writers' subject matter as he justified Shakespeare's use of supernatural creatures; for

Poets may be allow'd the . . . liberty, for describing things which really exist not, if they are founded on popular belief: of this nature are Fairies, Pigmies, and the extraordinary effects of Magick: for 'tis still an imitation, though of other mens fancies: and thus are Shakespeare's *Tempest*, his *Midsummer nights Dream*, and Ben. Johnsons *Masque of Witches* to be defended.

Charles Gildon, an early eighteenth-century commentator, rescued Shakespeare for neo-classicism by commending his "beautiful Reflections, Descriptions, Similes, and Topics," his observance of decorum, and his apparent familiarity with Ovid and Virgil in the original Latin; such felicities made up for the play's action, which seemed to take less than two days and nights rather than the promised four, a curious issue that lingered into the late nineteenth century with Halliwell-Phillipps (1841) arguing that Shakespeare's many inconsistencies in the play in no way "detract from the most beautiful poetical drama in this or any other language" (5), Clapp (1885) calling the play "unrealistic," and Furness (1895) defending it; more recently the debate inspired Neil Taylor's 1971 note proposing a "double time-scheme" (134) that incorporated a minimum of four nights and yet was also timeless, and Anne Paolucci's 1977 article arguing for a *five-day* duration.

William Duff (1770), a Scottish critic and clergyman, thought the supernatural was Shakespeare's forte; he especially admired the scherzo-like poetry of the fairies, "the quick returns, and (if we may use the expression) brisk boundings of the verse" (143). Francis Gentleman (1774), a man of the theater, also admired Shakespeare's

poetry and commended the play's characterization and originality but nevertheless regarded the plot as "puerile" and regretted the "odd mixture of incidents" and "forced connexion of various stiles" (8: 137).

One of the most important of eighteenth-century Shakespeareans, Edward Malone (1778), offers the most revealing criticism. Though he finds *Dream* splendidly imaginative, he faults the characterization and fable on grounds of decorum—that is, for not making enough of class distinctions: "Through the whole piece, the more exalted characters are subservient to the interests of those beneath them" (2: 336). Aristocrats, especially Theseus, are insufficiently distinguished from their inferiors, and any suggestion of a Saturnalian structure unnerves Malone, who concludes that this must be an early play. Presumably, had Shakespeare been older, he would have known better. That Malone, an Irish scholar who chose to live in London, writes two years after the American colonies declared their independence and little more than a decade before the onset of the French Revolution may in part account for his views. Not until the mid-nineteenth century—in the writings of Charles Knight—are class concerns addressed self-consciously and democratically.

Significant nineteenth-century criticism begins in 1808 with Shakespeare's German translator, the Romantic critic August Wilhelm Schlegel. He wisely perceived unity in the multiple plot lines, noted that the ass head literalizes Bottom's true nature, identified the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe as a burlesque of the adventures of the Athenian lovers, and regarded the entire play as a source of delight. An important English literary and theater critic, William Hazlitt (1817), liked the play no less but found that "when acted, [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*] is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. . . . Poetry and the stage do not agree well together" (247). Of course, prior to Madam Vestris's 1840 production (see the theater history below), stagings of *Dream* played havoc with the text as was true for all of Shakespeare's plays.

The English Romantic poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1811-12), whose Shakespeare criticism is still influential, made two points about the play. The first, that Shakespeare thought of it as "a *dream* throughout," led to further discussion later in the century (see Hudson and Brandes); the second, that Helena is guilty of "ungrateful treachery" to Hermia, served Coleridge as a springboard for misogynous maundering. Helena's betrayal of Hermia is

too true a picture of the lax holds that principles have on the female heart, when opposed to, or even separated from, passion and inclination. For women are less hypocrites to their own minds than men, because they feel less abhorrence of moral evil in itself and more for its outward consequences, as detection, loss of character, etc., their natures being almost wholly extroitive [concerned with externals]. (90)

Thus are gender issues introduced into the critical canon of *Dream*. (See Lisa J. Moore's essay in this volume for an actress's take on Helena.)

William Maginn, an Anglo-Irish writer, is notable for an 1837 essay on Theseus's "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" speech and Hippolyta's response to it. Maginn regards Theseus as Shakespeare's voice and the speech as a call for imaginative audiences. Maginn was also responsible for the first character study of Bottom—"the lucky man, . . . on whom Fortnne [sic] showers her favors beyond measure"(97)—who is aware only of his peers' adulation and is unfazed by the fairy queen's love. Awareness of class issues almost surfaces in Maginn's amusement at Bottom's democratizing nature: "Theseus would have bent in reverent awe before Titania. Bottom treats her as carelessly as if she were the wench of the next-door tapster" (102). Patriarchal thinking is just as soundly rooted. Maginn excuses Oberon for humiliating Titania; accidents happen: "Oberon himself, angry as he is with the caprices of his queen, does not anticipate any such object for her charmed affections [as the weaver/ass]" (99).

Hermann Ulrici (1839), like his countryman August Schlegel, was a Romantic but taught philosophy rather than literature. Linking class to platonism, Ulrici thought *Dream* organically unified in a particularly platonistic way: ". . . Shakspeare has regarded human life in this play as a dream. . . ." (274). Noting class differences among the character groups, Ulrici explained what Malone considered lack of decorum through the notion of self-parody, e.g., Theseus and Hippolyta parody their station by behaving like ordinary people. Parody becomes another unifying principle which, together with platonism, constitutes the play's informing comic vision. Charles Knight (1849), a British friend of the proletariat, takes a quite different tack regarding social stratification. Replying to Malone, he argues that *Dream* demonstrates

Shakespeare's maturity as a playwright; its Thesean harmony is a product of decorum of character, the best-drawn character being Bottom. Acknowledging Bottom's self-confidence, authority, and self-love, Knight maintains, "Why, Bottom the weaver is the representative of the whole human race" (209). Knight continues by echoing Hazlitt: *Dream* is best appreciated when read rather than acted. Moreover, critical analysis of so "subtle and ethereal" a play would be reductive (213). Best that it speak for itself in the study.

In the same year, G.G. Gervinus, among the most prominent of German critics, makes a number of notable points. The play is not a dream, as Coleridge suggested; instead it is an ethical construct, an allegorical depiction of the errors of sensual love which here correspond to dream. Gervinus' notion of ethics is grounded in filial obedience: "Alike devoid of conscience, Hermia errs at first through want of due obedience to her father . . . and Lysander through mockery of his father-in-law (188)." Pyramus and Thisbe are "two lovers, who behind their parents' backs 'think no scorn to woo by moonlight' . . ." (188-89). The fairies are no better; "personified dream gods," they represent "the caprices of superficial love" (194) and lack intellect, feeling, and an ethical sense. They bring dreams and *are* dreams. This argument dissolves into orientalism, misogyny, and elitism. Gervinus first locates fairy land "in the aromatic flower-scented Indies, in the land where mortals live in a half-dreamy state." Then he devalues Titania's loyalty: "Titania has no spiritual association with her friend, but mere delight in her beauty, her 'swimming gait,' and her powers of imitation"; she is also blamed for not initiating a "scene of reconciliation with her husband; her resentment consists in separation. . . ." (196). Also blameworthy are "[t]he homely mechanics, who compose and act merely for gain, and for the sake of so many pence a day, the ignorant players, with hard hands and thick heads. . . ." Only Theseus, "the intellectual man" (199), is deserving of respect. Finally, like various others, Gervinus concludes that it were better not to act the play than to act it badly as has been the case in Germany.

Charles Cowden Clarke (1863), husband of Mary (*The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*), took a more becoming view of the mechanicals than Gervinus, noting both their individualization and their collective richness. Good-natured though conceited, Bottom "displays no inconsiderable store of imagination in his intercourse with

the little people of the fairy world" (101). Bottom's conceit, Clarke asserts, reflects a quality inseparable from the acting profession. The comments of H.N. Hudson, an American clergyman and editor of *Shakespeare* (1872), are largely derivative. Hudson does perceive, however, that Shakespeare's lightness of characterization is appropriate if, like Coleridge, we understand *Dream* as a dream. Edward Dowden (1881), an Irish critic, is notable for his critique of Theseus's reflections on art. Albeit Dowden views Theseus as central to *Dream*, one of Shakespeare's "heroic men of action" like Henry V or Hector—or Essex (60)—he disputes Theseus's yoking together "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet," and the conflation of the best and the worst dramas. Only insofar as the poet must awaken his audience's imagination does Theseus speak for Shakespeare.

Henry A. Clapp (1885) returned to problems of duration (loss of a day), finding a solution "in the nature of the play, whose characters, even when clothed with human flesh and blood, have little solidity or reality" (392). A decade later, a protective Henry Howard Furness defended Shakespeare by discovering three references to dawn by means of which the playwright can both "condense time . . . and expand it" (xxxiii). An American Hegelian, Denton J. Snider (1887), championed the play by faulting the stage. Like so many nineteenth-century critics, he felt that the stage could not do justice to Shakespeare's most popular comedy. Snider stressed ethics, reading *Dream* as a dialectic between understanding and imagination or between prose and poetry. His work anticipates metadramatic theory insofar as he traces three "phases or movements": the first, the "Real World" of reason; second, the "Ideal Realm" or "Fairy World" of imagination and the supernatural; and, finally, their "representation in Art," in which "the first two parts mirror themselves—the action reflects itself, the play plays itself playing; it is its own spectator, including its audience and itself in one and the same movement" (383). Unfortunately, integral to this otherwise forward-looking interpretation is an assertion of Titania's fault of caprice and deserved punishment by "a dutiful husband" (403) who says, in effect, "if you cannot live in peace with me, one of your own kind, then try the contrary, a horrid brute" (402).

Happily, nineteenth-century studies of *Dream* end on a more promising note. Denmark's George Brandes (1895-96), aside from pointing to various sources and to influences on the Romantics, looks

forward to Jan Kott's significant 1964 piece (see below under Theme), though without Kott's excesses and, more broadly, anticipates psychological readings. Brandes discerns that "Oberon's magic is simply a great symbol, typifying the sorcery of the erotic imagination" (67), that Shakespeare "early felt and divined how much wider is the domain of the unconscious than of the conscious life, and saw that our moods and passions have their root in the unconscious" (71). Frederick S. Boas (1896), better known as the coiner of the label "problem play," looks at *Dream* not as an ethical treatise or psychological study but rather as a historically situated and consciously constructed entertainment which, like *The Comedy of Errors*, comes wrapped in classical trappings but nevertheless is "essentially English and Elizabethan." Boas' Theseus, therefore, is "a great Tudor noble" (184), his Helena is no morally weak betrayer but part of "a transparently clumsy device for concentrating the four lovers on a single spot" (185), and the play of Pyramus and Thisbe a parody of contemporary exploitation of classical subjects as well as a nod to a favorite Elizabethan *topos*, appearance and reality—"the relation of shadow to substance. . ." (189). This is recognizably modern criticism.

## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

### Textual Criticism, Chronology, Occasion

Citations in both this section and the next are limited to contributions that generated continuing research and/or are noteworthy for their critical sophistication; see the standard editions—Brooks (1979), Foakes (1984), and Holland (1995)—for more detailed surveys. Samuel B. Hemingway (1911) reflects on chronology, arguing that *Midsummer Night's Dream* followed rather than preceded *Romeo and Juliet*, insofar as *Dream*, and especially the Pyramus and Thisbe playlet, parodied the extreme passions of the love tragedy. In a controversial study, Edith Rickert (1923) finds topical allusions to Elizabeth, James, and various aristocrats, which she offers as evidence of revision. She explains "Shakespeare's part in the political game . . . either through his friendship with Southampton . . . or through his connection with the Careys. . ." (154).

Editor and critic John Dover Wilson (1924), advanced an important revision theory. Comparing the quarto and folio texts, he argues that *Dream* was composed in three stages. In 1592 or earlier

Shakespeare first worked on the play, revising it a few years later by adding Bottom and the Puck scenes, then revising it again in 1598, perhaps for the Earl of Southampton's wedding. The poet Walter de la Mare (1935) explained lines he found bland, undifferentiated, and stylistically discordant (particularly those of the lovers) by suggesting that *Dream* was either composed piecemeal or was in part Shakespeare's revision of another playwright's work. (See Janis Lull's 1997 essay on the critical implications of Wilson's and De la Mare's theories.) Paul N. Siegel (1953), addressing the question of occasion, suggests that *Dream* having been written as a wedding entertainment, the guests were invited to consider the characters' act 5 bed-rites as betokening the appropriateness of the host and hostess consummating their own marriage. Harold F. Brooks's discussion of text, chronology, and occasion introducing the Arden edition (1979) remains a valuable summary; also see Brooks's appendices. R.A. Foakes's Introduction to the New Cambridge edition (1984) and his appended "Textual Analysis" are useful, too.

Criticism of the past decade seeks to understand the consequences of textual variation for the theater. Barbara Hodgdon (1986) examines the critical issues related to Egeus's presence at the wedding in the folio text versus his absence in the quarto, and concludes that the folio variants "complicate and enrich the performance possibilities" (541); she suspects that they reveal "Shakespeare's own revising mind" (542). Marion Colthorpe (1987) evaluates previous work on the play's occasion, considering the various weddings for which *Dream* may have been written and finding none of the speculations convincing. Invoking anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep on rites of passage, Philip C. McQuire (1989) builds on Hodgdon's work. He teases out the theatrical ramifications of Shakespeare's act 5 revisions with regard to Egeus's silence in act 4, scene 1, when Theseus allows Hermia to marry Lysander. Whether Egeus accepts Hermia or rejects her depends on whether the director follows the folio version or the quarto. A concomitant effect is the degree of cohesion between Hermia's birth family, her new marital family, and the state. Hodgdon's and McQuire's essays demonstrate the benefits of linking textual study to interpretation.

Patricia Parker (1994) and her students, in a remarkable pedagogic exercise, pondered the literary associations of "more," "moral" and "mural" in the Folio's "Now is the moral down between the two

neighbors” (5.1) as opposed to the quarto’s “Now is the moon used between the two neighbors,” in order to determine which text to follow. In the process, they unearthed

the sources for its play-within-a-play, from Ovid and from Golding, the network of biblical allusion that had led us to, and beyond these, both the resources of what Spitzer called “historical semantics” and, more serendipitously, the linguistic talents of the students themselves. . . . (213)

A review of research on *Dream*’s date and text can be found in Peter Holland’s Introduction to the Oxford edition (1995). In the appendix, “Shakespeare’s Revisions of Act 5,” Holland considers the interpretive implications of Egeus’s speaking Philostrate’s Q1 lines.

In her “Textual Theory, Literary Interpretation, and the Last Act of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” written expressly for this volume, Janis Lull marries textual criticism to sensitive close reading. Like Barbara Hodgdon and Philip C. McGuire, Lull is concerned with differences between the quarto and folio texts. But whereas their subject is Egeus, hers is Theseus. Lull revisits Dover Wilson’s theory that Theseus’s “the lunatic, the lover, and the poet” speech had been revised in order to chart its consequences for interpreting the character of Theseus and act 5 generally. Wilson’s theory allows for Shakespeare’s conscious fashioning of a duke who comes to appreciate the irrational, whereas the postmodern, collectivist view produces a Theseus whose ear is coarse and who mismanages language, like Bottom and Quince, albeit not as blatantly. Exploring these options, Lull concludes that “where origins remain shrouded in doubt, the juxtaposing of apparently antithetical textual theories may prove more fruitful for literary interpretation than choosing between them.”

### **Sources, Parallels, Allusions**

Source study exerts a special fascination for students of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, conflating eras as it does, melding the classical, medieval, and Renaissance worlds in a historical synesthesia much like the bodily amalgam Bottom makes of I Corinthians 2:9. Geoffrey Bullough (1957) remains the basic repository of source materials. Bullough examines George Pettie’s *The Petite Palace of Pettie His*

*Pleasure* for parallels to the play-within-the-play, Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, and various tales of Romeo and Juliet. Kenneth Muir's *Shakespeare's Sources* (1961), actually a 1957 volume reprinted with new appendices, is especially useful for the sources of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Roger Lancelyn Green (1962) expands upon prior folklore studies, incorporating the role of the mythological, while Madeleine Doran (1962) discusses post-Ovidian versions of the Pyramus and Thisbe story—a twelfth-century Norman lay and a sixteenth-century Italian retelling. Shakespeare, she believes, would have known just such parody-inviting versions of the story. For *Pyramus and Thisbe*'s comic inspiration, J.W. Robinson (1964) looks to hybrid plays like *Cambises*, *Damon and Pithias*, and *Histrion-Mastix*, and to the Elizabethan pre-professional acting companies. Thelma N. Greenfield (1968) finds comparable allusions and ideas in *The Praise of Folly* and *Dream*; Shakespeare may have used Erasmus as a source, since in both works the fools at least momentarily triumph, their contexts having provided “ironic but sublime hints of fleeting non-rational modes of perception. . .” (244).

Outstanding work of the '70s includes an early feminist source study by D'Orsay W. Pearson (1974) that significantly corrected received opinion. Investigating Theseus's reputation in literature from Ovid to *Dream*, she finds it other than admirable. Once past his heroic youth, Theseus became known as lecherous, faithless, and tyrannical. Moreover, many Elizabethan spectators, knowing that Theseus caused the death of his son, Hippolytus, would have found the blessing of the “best bride-bed” ironic. T. Walter Herbert's unusual and delightful book-length source study (1977) ranges over the intellectual landscape from which *Dream* derives, from the classics (Part One: The Old Learning) to the late-sixteenth century (Part Two: The New Learning and Business). Herbert reads the play from the viewpoint of a Cambridge graduate inclined to skepticism, whose response to *Dream* is great sympathy and love for his friends, himself, and his difficult world. Thomas B. Stroup (1978) was the first scholar to suggest, in a Christian reading, that Shakespeare took Bottom's name from the words “the bottom of Goddes secretes” in I Corinthians 2: 11 of the 1557 Geneva Bible, a claim disputed the following year by Robert F. Willson, Jr., but of interest to Louis Adrian Montrose (1995; 1996). Harold F. Brooks (1979), in his introduction to the Arden edition, rehearses some of the most important sources located through the late

1970s, including Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and the tiny fairies of Welsh folklore; he reprints sources in his second appendix.

In the 1980s and '90s, most commentators plumbed previously identified sources. Jan Kott (1981), in "The Bottom Translation," a moderated view of *Dream* unlike the chapter in his 1964 *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (see below under Theme) explicates the play's dualism, its juxtaposing of Paul with Apuleius, of Neoplatonism with Bakhtinian carnival, by cataloguing the play's constituent myths and literary allusions. Kott now believes that *Dream* is susceptible to *light* as well as dark interpretations. John S. Mebane (1982) considers Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" the most important source for the Theseus material in *Dream*. Aside from the Theseus/Hippolyta frame, Chaucer supplies various structural characteristics and the much remarked upon *discordia concors* motif. Shakespeare's philosophic content, however, is presented more subtly than Chaucer's. Providing another summary, R.A. Foakes (1984) devotes eight pages to a discussion of sources in his introduction to the New Cambridge edition and appends "A Further Note on Sources." Hugh M. Richmond (1985) maintains in his "Shaping a *Dream*" that Shakespeare's most likely primary source for *Dream* was the ninth novella of the second decade of Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, which includes lovers whose bonds are in flux; patriarchal authority; the supernatural; and marriage grounded, if uneasily, in romantic love. Winfried Schleiner (1985) provides a new source character: the *Pluck* of the anonymous *Most Strange and Admirable Discovery of the Three Witches of Warboys* (1593), referred to by the exorcist John Darrell in his *A Detection of that Sinful . . . Discoverie* (1600).

In the year's most charming contribution to source study, E. Talbot Donaldson (1985) compares Chaucer's attitude toward romantic love with Shakespeare's and affirms that Shakespeare presents a grimmer and more skeptical picture. Shakespeare's Theseus is more like *Dream*'s other male lovers, who owe their "obsessive single-mindedness in love" (37) to Palamon and Arcite. Helena's and Hermia's constancy in love, which destroys their friendship, is another motif borrowed from Palamon and Arcite. Noting that Oberon and Titania derive from Pluto and his victim Proserpina in *The Merchant's Tale*, Donaldson defends Titania from the attacks of Bonnard, Brooks, and others: "Shame on you, Titania, for holding out on that nice male chauvinist King of the Fairies!" (45).

In the past decade inquiry into diverse sources persists in conjunction with a resurgence of interest in Ovid. Leonard Barkan (1986) analyzes Shakespeare's introjection and revision of Ovid's "antique fables." With love and metamorphoses as its focusing events, an Ovidian *Dream* brings together beings supernatural, legendary, and familiar. Clifford Davidson's article (1987) grows out of Robinson's 1964 study. Davidson regards the *Pyramus and Thisbe* material as a parody of the style and subject matter of pre-1585 plays for the public theater and of the amateur acting in the mysteries and moralities. Thomas Moisan (1987) compares "Solempnytee" in "The Knight's Tale," in *Dream*, and in *Romeo and Juliet*, finding them "three variants on the same experience, three re-visions of the same book, read and re-writ by Chaucer and Shakespeare with varying emphases but comparable irony" (36). Barbara A. Mowat (1989) studies Theseus, constructed out of tendentious writings on witchcraft and imagination, as one example of how Shakespeare typically employs disparate and contradictory sources to create a character.

In this decade, Anthony Brian Taylor (1990) questions the generally accepted notion that *Pyramus and Thisbe* parodies Golding's translation of Ovid; rather, Shakespeare is satirizing his own "small Latin" through Quince's misprisions. For Jonathan Bate (1993), "Shakespeare's capacity to metamorphose Ovid into a different medium is what makes his art *imitatio* of the highest form" (144). Robert L. Reid (1993) discusses the debt Shakespeare owes to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* for his conceptions of Titania and of the nature of poetry; Reid avers that Shakespeare rejects art which might "devalue common earthly passion" (25). Introducing the Oxford edition of the play, Peter Holland (1995) surveys accepted and proposed sources at length, including Renaissance notions about dreams and the allusions to dreams in Elizabethan plays.

Two contributions to this volume employ new approaches to source study. Douglas Freake analyzes the play's debts to the Theseus story while rejecting the supposed universality of mythic tales. He notes that C. Kerényi, in his account of Theseus's ancestors, the early rulers of Athens, describes conflicts over both the naming of children and women's political power. Since these accounts resonate in Oberon's and Titania's quarrel over possession of the changeling boy, Freake concludes that the Theseus myth resurfaces in *Dream* because the question of patriarchal power was as vital in Elizabethan England

as it had been in classical Athens and that the comic mode to some degree cloaks an underlying social theme: women's submission to men in marriage.

Thomas Moisan addresses those most traditional subjects and approaches—textual criticism and literary allusion—as a postmodernist. In his “Antique Fables, Fairy Toys: Elisions, Allusion, and Translation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” Moisan relates allusion and literary translation to the elisions that mark the integration of *Dream's* sources. These produce the conflation of boundaries and the collapsing of distinctions of time, genre, gender, and social status. He remarks that *Dream* derives much of its comic energy from that collapse, which also produces the “rude” juxtapositions that highlight its ideological resonances. To examine the elisions and distortions generated by the evoking/quoting of sources is to unexpectedly align—at least parodically—the tropics of allusion and translation with the “rude” dramaturgy of the artisans' interlude. That alignment underscores an affinity between the workings of allusion throughout the play and hypallage—the rhetorical figure in which a symmetrical exchange of parts produces nonsense—which marks Bottom's “translation” of I Corinthians and other instances of the artisans' rhetorical misadventures. At the same time, to examine the shreds and patches of allusion in *Dream* is not only to interrogate the violent collocations they produce, but to consider the violence to which they are subjected. Moreover, the study of allusion clarifies the relationship between Shakespeare's own dramaturgical procedures and generic claims and the interest an authoritative figure like Theseus has in shaping the present by suppressing the past.

### **Atmosphere and Tone**

Boas's turn-of-the-century reading of *Dream* as Tudor in its mood appeals to the well-known writer and critic G.K. Chesterton (1904), who calls “Shakespeare's description of Athens . . . the best description of England that he or any one else ever wrote.” Not only is Theseus “an English squire” but so, too, are the fairies, and of course “[t]he mechanics are English mechanics, talking to each other with the queer formality of the poor” (19). Chesterton acknowledges the darker aspects of *Dream* but insists that they never dominate its sparkling tone:

The events in the wandering wood are in themselves, and regarded as in broad daylight, not merely melancholy but bitterly cruel and ignominious. But yet by the spreading of an atmosphere as magic as the fog of Puck, Shakespeare contrives to make the whole matter mysteriously hilarious while it is palpably tragic, and mysteriously charitable, while it is in itself cynical. (15)

Enid Welsford (1927) also discusses the English quality of *Dream* but in another respect. In her work on the Elizabethan court masque she notes that “Shakespeare has absorbed the scenic splendour of the masque, not only in description and picturesque language, but also in a blending of tones, a harmony of colours . . .” (326). The mechanicals provide the anti-masque, while “[t]he influence of the dance has affected not merely isolated songs and speeches, but the whole structure of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (331). G. Wilson Knight (1932), perhaps the best-known investigator of atmosphere, finds a “tempest . . . at the heart of the play” (144) in Titania’s “forgeries of jealousy” speech. Likening *Dream* to *Macbeth*, he concludes, “Darkness and fear permeate this play. It is a darkness spangled, or shot, with light” (151). Critics attuned to the music of *Dream* are more apt to agree with Welsford.

W. Moelwyn Merchant (1961), is engaged with the play’s atmosphere as interpreted outside the theater as well as within it. His “Visual Re-creation” of the play, a post-Commonwealth survey of paintings, book illustrations, and costume and set drawings, reveals that “while some artists have recognized the disturbing moments of irrationality, treachery, and demonic power, rarely have these been seen as qualities which are transformable to order and grace” (184). In “The Voices of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (1992), Maurice Hunt locates the atmosphere of *Dream* in tonality. The characters’ distinctive voices, the invective, the off-stage sounds, the cries, etc.—all are cues for the imaginative auditor to fill with meaning. When we recall that Elizabethans went to *hear*, not see, a play, Hunt’s approach seems especially productive.

### **Structure and Formal Design**

John H. Long (1955) attributes structural unity and harmony to *Dream*, qualities denied it two centuries earlier and not to be questioned for

another two decades. More than any other element, music creates unity and harmony. Music lends the fairies airiness; moreover, "You spotted Snakes," the fairy song, "itself is an ayre" (85). Equally important, Oberon's call for music and a dance mark the harmonious reconciliation of king and queen, while hunting horns intimate harmony among the newly awakened lovers; the play ends with the fairies' song and dance in blessing. Shakespeare used music, says Long, "to symbolize the concord arising from the settlement of the fairy quarrel, and to foreshadow the resulting harmony between the mortals—thus emphasizing the turning point of the play" (101).

For Bertrand Evans (1960), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, like all of Shakespeare's plays, is structured on the principle of discrepant awarenesses. Oberon, an "outside force" (34), controls events, creating a gap between the lovers' awareness and the audience's. Although Hermia and Helena, unlike the young men, sense something uncanny in their situation, only Hippolyta comes close to sharing the spectators' awareness. Their perception of Oberon's benevolence towards the lovers provides "an environment in which comic effects can flourish even in dark moments" (40). For Sheldon P. Zitner (1960), on the other hand, the play's primary structural principle is not awareness but avoidance, complications being suggested but then avoided. The consequence is "the purest of comedies without the cruelty of farce or the zeal of comedy of manners" (402).

G.K. Hunter (1962), who groups *Dream* with *Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, holds that *Dream* is above all a patterned, dance-like play in which no single element predominates, although Theseus's "achieved self-possession" (17) is perhaps most exemplary. The structure contrasts attitudes and types of love with little regard to individuating characterization or realistic passion. For James E. Robinson (1968) the play's structure inheres in the fusion of ritual—magic and marriage—with rhetoric—love and law. The action proceeds both logically and magically within the two worlds of Athens and the forest, the one societal, the other natural, a binary opposition reproduced in the language. The interlude's styles parody "the very threads out of which the language of the play has been woven" (390).

Larry S. Champion (1970) holds that Shakespeare's most significant accomplishment in *Dream* "is primarily in structure—the arrangement of the plot strands to achieve the most effective comic perspective" (50). While we are distanced from the "virtual caricatures

of lovesick youth" (47), who are manipulated by the plot, the choric subplot sharpens the play's comedic focus. Shakespeare has adapted Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" to romantic comedy.

Work on the structure of *Dream* assumed greater prominence with the assimilation of French structuralist theory. The past quarter century has seen a variety of approaches to *Dream's* structure. Mark Rose (1972) views it diagrammatically as simple and formal, two concentric circles around a target scene. The outer circle is composed of acts 1 and 5 located in Athens, the inner circle of acts 2 and 4—the forest scenes. The central scene is 3.1, bringing Athens and the forest together in the love of Titania for Bottom. In "Comedy, Orality, and Duplicity: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*," Terence Hawkes (1978) conflates the comedic theories of Frye, Barber, and Bakhtin, adding his own sense of the oral, participatory nature of Elizabethan comedy; he thus uncovers the structural importance of the Pyramus and Thisbe material. For M.E. Comtois (1980) the play's structure accounts for its durability in the theater. Like Rose, she offers a diagrammatic analysis. Contained within the dream concept are eight actions (one private, one public) to be effected by each of the four couples, culminating in marriage. The structure, "both graceful and tight" (311) is pyramidal, composed largely of independent scenes. Ruth Nevo (1980) also assesses the play as carefully unified: "Through his basic comic structure of initial privation or perversity, comic device both deceptive and remedial, knots of errors and final recognitions, Shakespeare has achieved . . . a complex and witty exploration . . . of the imaginative faculty itself" (96).

Like Welsford, Alan Brissenden (1981) points out the fundamental role of dance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: ". . . Shakespeare made dancing an essential part of the plot, a summarising action and a universal symbol [of concord] instead of merely leaving it the delectable embellishment it might have been" (43). Skiles Howard's subject is dance (1993), but she is at pains to contradict "Tillyardized" simplifications (327); the structural opposition between courtly and country dancing is not resolved into cosmic harmony, naturalizing an aristocratic patriarchal hierarchy, but rather exposes it as "provisional and man-made" (342). Whereas Howard is alert to the play's political aspects, John Wilders (1994) eschews questions of power. In a heuristic essay he suggests that performance offers a key to Shakespeare's structure, which is above all dramatic—"constructed out

of hundreds of small units or sections which are to an entire play as bricks are to a house" (153-54). Wilders illustrates by showing his students the five sections of 1.1. Peter Holland (1995) discusses the play's structure under the heading *Shapes*, first by invoking role-doubling as an indicator of structure, then by exploring other facets of *Dream* through its performance history.

Susan Baker's essay for this volume discusses *Dream*'s structure as a dialogue between Bakhtinian chronotopes, which are variously attached to genres, characters, and motifs and are a function of their distinguishing historical moment. Chronotopes define genre broadly as a way of viewing and portraying society. They map how, within each genre, where and when the characters live affect their scope of action: "Any interpretation of a text, then, will set into dialogue the chronotope(s) of its original moment, the chronotopes embedded in its generic participation, and the chronotope(s) dominant in the time-space of its interpreter." Because, as Baker points out, chronotopes are inevitably ideological, our perceptions of time and space being inseparable from our values, "chronotopes offer a (reasonably) systematic approach to observing the interanimations of form, historicity, and ideology." Her essay includes a discussion of the golden world and the green world, of the intersection of chronotopic sites that Theseus occupies, and of repressions necessary to assure the ascendance of the comic chronotope.

What all these studies have in common is that, either explicitly or implicitly, whatever their focus, all reach a similar conclusion: *Dream*'s apparent unity reveals Shakespeare's mastery of structural technique.

### **Language and Style**

Harley Granville-Barker (1924), whose experience as playwright, director, and critic attests to his comprehensive perspective, urges that the poetry of *Dream* take precedence over stage effects. Although he discusses ways of presenting the non-realistic elements to an audience accustomed to realistic theater, he observes that meter and tone shifts are largely responsible for characterization. Mark Van Doren (1939), whose chapter on *Dream* is reprinted in this volume, provides an appealing introduction to the play's imagery. He concentrates on the unsurpassed music and on "[m]oon, water, and wet flowers," which

“conspire to extend the world of ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ until it is as large as all imaginable life” (81).

In contrast to Brandes, Chesterton, and G. Wilson Knight, among others, Thomas Marc Parrott (1949) sees only charm in the play: “It is in his use of language, as in so much else in this play, that Shakespeare shows himself the master” (131). Bottom’s prose, the lovers’ romantic rhyme, the interlude’s parody of early rhyming plays, the fluid musicality of Oberon and Titania’s blank verse all contribute to the audience’s sense of the play as “lyric romantic comedy” devoid of the “shadow of death or danger” (133). The variety of styles in *Dream*, which the eighteenth-century commentator Francis Gentleman lamented, is commendable in the twentieth century. Milton Crane (1951), in his analysis of Shakespeare’s prose, is particularly impressed by the way Shakespeare blends prose with the several verse forms of *Dream*. Similarly, recalling Chesterton—and perhaps Leavis—B. Ifor Evans (1952) remarks on the Englishness of *Dream*. Evans sees unity in Shakespeare’s fusion of the lovers’ sonnet imagery, the mechanicals’ realistic prose, and the fairies’ lyricism into something rustic and very English. Shakespeare’s poetry “is gathered up into the dominant mood of the *Dream*, where myth and romance and the gentle English scene are at one, and where all is easily intelligible, lyrical in mood and gentle” (76).

David Young’s study (1966) is a major contribution to *Dream* criticism. Focusing on style and structure in the second part of his three-part book, Young calls attention to the melding of popular and aristocratic elements and to the orchestration of particular responses from the spectators. He notes that the fairies’ versification and use of song are largely distinctive, Shakespeare having given Puck a sometimes light-hearted, sometimes incantatory trochaic tetrameter, while Oberon and Titania alternate between tetrameter, blank verse, and pentameter couplets; the particularity of the fairies’ speech intimates “more abstract sets of opposites like illusion and reality. . .” (67). The other character groups also speak in their own styles, but without endangering the unity of the play achieved through iterative imagery, which Young calls “picturization” (75)—not a glimpse but a complete picture—panoramas providing “perspective and distance, both in the geographic and aesthetic senses of those words” (80), and a profusion of lists, which “like the reiterated images . . . serve to create a fully realized world” (83).

Many studies address a single aspect of *Dream*'s language. In the third chapter of his valuable monograph on *Dream*, Stephen Fender (1968) examines in some detail how the language of the lovers changes to reflect new experiences and new awareness: "they enter the wood speaking in a highly organised, witty, complicated manner, and leave it speaking much more simply" (36). Brian Vickers (1968) devotes himself to a rhetorical analysis of the mechanicals' speech, focusing on Bottom; Vickers demonstrates how syntax and repetition create Bottom's characterization. Thomas Clayton (1971), in an amusing essay on the wall scene, finds textual support for Wall spreading his legs (the chink) as well as his fingers, business that "would make effective dramatic and poetical sense" (101). Somewhat more—or less—broadly, René Girard (1979) attends to the animal imagery, violence, and ambiguous language, discovering a surface text (Theseus's) and a subtext (Hippolyta's). He concludes that in *Dream*, as in Shakespeare's other plays, the "basic Shakespearean relationship" is "conflictual undifferentiation" (203) and that *Dream* is informed by "a common structure of mythical meaning" (211). Wolfgang Franke (1979) notes the bawdy double meanings of the mechanicals' names and language, bawdry of which the speakers are unconscious. Their speech would not have disturbed the nobility, who accepted the physical elements of romantic love.

G.J. Finch (1981) studies Shakespearean metaphor. He points out that the very language Theseus uses contradicts his low opinion of the poet. Rather, the play is an apologia for imagination and dreaming, a celebration of the poet's ability to reveal new ways of seeing. Joan Stansbury (1982) analyzes the language of the lovers, especially their use of imagery and modes of address, observing numerous differences that account for their individuation. Deborah Baker Wyrick (1982) traces the traditions behind the figurative and punning uses of the word "ass" and their links to the play's thematic explorations of love, transformation, and imagination. Being part man, part beast, both "an animated metaphor and . . . a malapropian character" (447), Bottom figures the Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic (Theseus versus Oberon) that she claims structures *Dream*. Jay L. Halio (1990) argues that the seeming *concors* is challenged by the metaphoric language, a thesis exemplifying the skeptical interrogations of recent criticism.

Christy Desmet's 1997 essay, "Disfiguring Women with Masculine Tropes: A Rhetorical Reading of *A Midsummer Night's*

*Dream*,” includes an extended discussion of hypallage in its study of the play’s language. Unlike earlier rhetorical analyses of *Dream* designed to establish chronology or locate themes, Desmet’s more broadly contextualized inquiry proposes that the rich anthology of poetic styles Shakespeare assembles in *Dream* results from the play’s exploration of humanist rhetoric as a contested site. While training in copious speech promotes friendship within a political community of men, rhetoricians recognize that humanist rhetoric depends on an art of verbal ornament traditionally associated with femininity. In courtly rhetoric, while woman and verbal ornament work together to civilize male culture, they remain capable of disrupting masculine discourse. Thus, Woman is the missing figure in the social economy of the verbal arts. On all levels of the play, a struggle exists between the patriarchal word and an intrusive feminine voice that corrects, completes, and supplements masculine discourse with her alternative ethics and poetics. Structurally, *Dream* operates according to the logic of hypallage. Within the play’s action, however, an alternative feminine rhetoric operates to produce concord. While Theseus confirms the father’s right to “disfigure” his daughter at will, the women of *Dream* disfigure masculine discourse by resisting their own erasure in the public sphere. Hermia and Helena reduce to nonsense the male rhetoric of erotic combat by usurping the language of the love sonnet. More profoundly, Titania rewrites Ovidian myth to celebrate women’s friendship and sexuality, and Hippolyta articulates a feminine aesthetic that gives meaning to the lovers’ dream of mutual “transfiguration.” Finally, the interlude demonstrates comedically the folly of masculine attempts to control and contain the feminine figures of humanist rhetoric.

### **Theme: Dream, Love, Imagination, and the Supernatural**

Love and imagination, the latter figured as dream and the supernatural, are the major subjects of the play and are often treated as inseparable (i.e., is love based on reality or an act of passionate imagining?). Critics may bring a favored approach or explicit ideology to the play or may unself-consciously reflect their times. E.K. Chambers (1905), an example of the latter, distances himself from early nineteenth-century Romanticism and looks to *fin de siècle* Symbolism. He grants that Coleridge’s notion is tenable and suggests that “taking perhaps a hint

from Lyly, Shakespeare invites us to consider the whole thing as a dream" (83). However, since the supernatural changes nothing in *Dream*, Chambers, like Brandes, feels that in this play magic represents "symbolically the familiar workings of actual love in idleness in the human heart" (84). The pansy is Chambers's *fleur de mal*, love in the comic view being characterized by caprice, infidelity, irrationality, lawlessness, and passion. This youthful aberration in humans is standard behavior for fairies.

The changes that Shakespeare did or did not ring on the folklore conception of fairies has long been the subject of one branch of *Dream* research and criticism. In 1908 Frank Sidgwick wrote on the physical nature of the fairies; by miniaturizing them, Shakespeare reshaped the popular beliefs he had initially drawn upon. Sidgwick's work was later qualified by Katherine M. Briggs (1959), who cited folklore examples of diminutive fairies. In an extensive study of Renaissance folklore and the supernatural, Minor White Latham (1930), who devotes a chapter of her study to Robin Goodfellow, credited Shakespeare with having been the first writer to portray fairies as virtuous and non-threatening. In "The Moon and the Fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (1955), one of two articles on *Dream* by Ernest Schanzer, the ways in which the fairies differed from each other and from the mortal characters are catalogued: Puck is malevolent; Peaseblossom, Mustardseed, and their ilk are tiny and absorbed in their duties; Oberon and Titania, paralleling Theseus and Hippolyta, are of adult human stature, and Titania is also partly informed by associations with the moon. The following year George A. Bonnard (1956) challenged Latham's reading of *Dream*'s fairies as decent creatures; rather, as bringers of dreams, they lack "all sense of responsibility, all moral impulse" (271) as we do in dreams. Stephen Fender, refined the argument by demonstrating that the fairies are capable of both vicious and virtuous action.

For H.B. Charlton (1933), as for such nineteenth-century German critics as Ulrici and Gervinus, *Dream* is a message play unified by its depiction of Titania and Oberon as irresponsible spouses, whose actions point up the beneficence of marriage as a human institution and the importance of a common-sense approach to life—which for Charlton is English country life given universal dimensions. Not surprisingly, Charlton believes that Theseus speaks for Shakespeare on the role of imagination. Basing his argument on adjectives applied to

Titania, Donald C. Miller (1940) anticipates sexualized readings in his contention that, as an inverted incarnation of Diana, she “is in love with the changeling” (69). E.C. Pettet (1949) takes a more moderate view than either Charlton or Miller, discovering in *Dream* “a correction [rather] than a criticism of romantic love,” a “shaping attitude” rather than a “moral.” (113). For Pettet, romantic love overlooks self-absorption and infidelity and has to do with courtship feelings rather than married fellowship.

In “The Central Theme of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (1951), Ernest Schanzer rejects Pettet’s interpretation that blurs obsession with romance. Schanzer locates the theme in a parody of “love-madness,” the form of love to which Demetrius has initially fallen victim and which is concretized by love-in-idleness. Love-madness, “as opposed to romantic love, is entirely divorced from both reason and the evidence of the senses,” engendered by the imagination alone, thus bonding the lover to the lunatic and the poet. *Pyramus and Thisbe* is connected to this theme only in that, as Welsford had suggested, it provides the anti-masque to the masque of the fairies and lovers. Harold C. Goddard (1951) takes a more comprehensive view: the play self-referentially illustrates a *discordia concors* theme: the imagination bringing harmony out of its chaos of “incongruities, anachronisms, contradictions, and impossible juxtapositions...” (76). Bottom’s awakening from materiality to spirituality—to imagination—is *Dream*’s finest moment.

Goddard’s engagement with larger philosophical, aesthetic, and social subjects—binarisms that now invite deconstruction such as the relationship between reality and imagination, reason and passion, the material and the spiritual, husband and wife—was shared by many ’50s critics. Like Edward Dowden in the nineteenth century, the American Poet Laureate and critic Howard Nemerov (1956) rejects the identification of Theseus’s sentiments with those of Shakespeare. (Theseus’s sentiments are perhaps Platonic in origin, i.e., suspicious of art.) For Theseus, the lovers’ stories are fantasy; either they are liars or have been fooled; Hippolyta’s view of art as transfiguring and admirable comes closer to Shakespeare’s than Theseus’s, which erases any distinction between good and bad art and tolerates art (if it respects authority) because entertainment promotes political stability. Ultimately, Nemerov believes that Shakespeare occupies a middle

ground between Hippolyta and Theseus, though perhaps closer to the former.

Unlike Nemerov's essay, Bonnard's seems unusually dated. Bonnard celebrates the union of Theseus and Hippolyta, not for the light it casts on the nature of art but rather for its depiction of ideal love, "shorn of any romantic nonsense" (269). Theirs is "a wholly sane view of life" (270), not least because Hippolyta "will know how to keep her place, as her silence proves when he [Theseus] discusses Hermia's marriage with Egeus and the young lovers" (269-70). Theseus does not devalue imagination as long as it, too, knows its subordinate place. The amoral fairies represent imagination (for Bonnard, sensuality qualified only by taste and beauty) given full rein. Ignoring Oberon's cruelty, which might support his point, Bonnard instead offers Titania as an example of reprehensible behavior. In contrast to Hippolyta, Titania is the bad wife: "on awaking from her delusion, she feels no regret, no shame; and there is no scene of reconciliation with her husband: her resentment makes her forsake him, and they make it up in a dance; there is no trace of a real feeling in her" (271).

Paul A. Olson (1957) also reads the play conservatively, though with greater erudition. In the Renaissance, Theseus would have represented reason and right rule; his victory over Hippolyta and the Amazons is a victory for hierarchy, marriage, and love based on reason rather than passion. Titania is depicted as a wanton aspect of Diana, Oberon as a "prince of grace" (111). Olson's analysis, based on classical and Renaissance literary history, retains some prominence. Peter F. Fisher (1957) views each character group as a world with its own language, the fairies' language being song; their world of fantasy and imagination is subordinated to the court's world of reason. The lovers' world represents irrational passion; the mechanicals' world, the prosaic. The play assigns these worlds an order of precedence.

In the tradition of Pettet, John Russell Brown (1957) presents a defense of romantic love. On its surface *Dream* offers Bottom as the most reasonable character, for Bottom is not in love. Notwithstanding, "the play suggests that lovers, like lunatics, poets and actors, have their own 'truth' which is established as they see the beauty of the beloved, and . . . although it seems the 'silliest stuff' to an outsider, to them it is quite reasonable. . . ." Brown argues that our imaginative acceptance of a play as "real" is a "flesh-and-blood image of the acceptance which is

appropriate to the strange and private ‘truth’ of those who enact the play of love” (90).

C.L. Barber’s *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (1959) remains an essential study of the grounding of the romantic comedies in early modern holiday customs that afford a kind of Saturnalian catharsis from frustration over social constraints. In *Dream* “[t]he whole night’s action is presented as a release of shaping fantasy which brings clarification about the tricks of strong imagination.” Also clarified through humor is the experience of “eros in men and women and trees and flowers” and “the tendency to take fantasy literally, whether in love, in superstition, or in Bottom’s mechanical dramatics” (124). Barber sees *Dream* as occasioned by a wedding, with Theseus and Hippolyta as “stand-ins for the noble couple” (125). May games “bringing in summer to the bridal” (119), with Titania as “a Summer Lady” and Oberon as the May King, fuse various aspects of holiday, pageantry, magic, and recreational competitions. Hermia and Helena, encountering eros as they mature, change their loyalties from each other to men. Similarly, in an unconsciously masculinist reading, Titania must give up the child, now ready for “the man’s world of Oberon” (137) because “nature will have its way” (131). The portrayal of the fairies, “tutelary spirits of fertility” (137), inhabiting love’s wood where metamorphosis is the rule, draws on Christian as well as folk traditions. In origin largely “creatures of pastoral” which Shakespeare “varied by adapting folk superstitions” (145), they are not literal but symbolic; they “embody the passionate mind’s sense of its own omnipotence” (132-33) and are imagination personified. The play’s title should awaken skepticism about their reality. Discussing the ways love changes understanding, Barber examines Ovidian allusions and Shakespeare’s imitative myth-making of the fairies’ quarrel and the pansy’s power. He suggests that “[t]he action of metaphor is itself a process of transposing, a kind of metamorphosis” (135). *Dream* is no “dream throughout,” as Coleridge held but rather very much a play, parodied in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, whose prologues derive from the mummers’ plays and whose ludicrousness teaches that neither playacting nor imagining can create reality. In Barber’s words, “The confident assumption dominant in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that substance and shadow can be kept separate, determines the peculiarly unshadowed gaiety of the fun it makes with fancy” (161).

Elizabeth Sewell's discussion (1961) is unique. Treating *Dream* as part of a larger study of the relationship between art and nature, and of "the point at which forms—in nature, mind, and language—interact and interpret one another" (127), she sets Bacon's *Novum Organum* against *Dream*, arguing that Shakespeare enlarges the category of the rational by including the imaginative, with love intimating fertility and the fairies intimating myth. Sewell reads Bottom metadramatically. Shakespeare aligns himself with Bottom and the artisans, whose task of producing a wedding entertainment is also his. Their names, linked to nature as well as to their crafts, "imply the great unity of natural history, plants and trees, animals, man as body and mind, the arts" (130). Through them, Shakespeare shows the dynamic status of language, indeed, the transformative movement of all things. In no pejorative sense, she concludes that "Bottom is the human condition, the newly thinking mind subjected to natural forms and trying to make forms of its own by which to understand them" (141).

In part because of its philosophical content, Frank Kermode (1961) considers *Dream* the best of Shakespeare's comedies. Though more concerned with theme than sources, he discusses the play's debt to Macrobius, Apuleius, and Bruno, as Shakespeare explores fantasy, blind love, and—through Bottom's allusion to I Corinthians 2:9—divine love. Kermode especially commends Olson's essay.

R.W. Dent (1964), whose article is reprinted in this volume, is concerned with imagination in love and art, taking issue with such critics as Charlton, Pettet, Schanzer, and Bonnard, whose model of exemplary, because rational, love is Theseus and Hippolyta. In *Dream*, Dent argues, love is inexplicable, the offspring of imagination; it is not based on reason and need not be, as long as imagination is "controlled" (128) and love avoids "dotage" (116), Shakespearean shorthand for persisting in unrequited love (Demetrius dotes on Hermia) or loving an unworthy object (Titania dotes on Bottom). Theseus's speech opening act 5 broadens the discussion from imagination in love to imagination in art. Pointing out that Theseus is "[h]imself a creation from 'antique fable' unconsciously involved in 'fairy toy,'" (124), Dent, like Nemerov, urges the wrongheadedness of Theseus's judgment, for Theseus makes no distinction between the interlude, hobbled by the mechanicals' mistrust of their audience, whose response they fear will be either excessive or inadequate, and a masterpiece like *Dream*—

“Shakespeare’s closest approximation to a ‘Defense of Dramatic Poesy’ in general” (129).

Among the most important, and most controversial, works on *Dream* is Jan Kott’s chapter from *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964), reprinted here. Kott, a Polish drama critic and professor of literature, addresses aspects of the play noted earlier by such commentators as Chesterton, Cumberland Clark, and G. Wilson Knight, but constructs a distinctive interpretation. He insists, often feverishly, on the overwhelming importance of violence and un-repressed animalistic sexuality. Lysander and Demetrius are verbally brutal, “[t]he lovers are exchangeable” (219) and objectified, the changeling is a sexual toy for Oberon, the aristocrats—mortal and immortal—are promiscuous: “The lovers are ashamed of that night and do not want to talk about it, just as one does not want to talk of bad dreams. But that night liberated them from themselves. They were their real selves in their dreams” (235).

David Young ignores Kott, while examining the play’s various themes in the final section of *Something of Great Constancy* (1966), especially Shakespeare’s perspective on art. But for John A. Allen (1967) Bottom symbolizes the animalistic aspect of humanity, redeemed only by Titania’s maternal tenderness, which allows him to understand the love and self-sacrifice of Pyramus and Thisbe. Michael MacOwan (1968), whose preference is for John Vyvyan’s Neoplatonist readings (see below), strenuously disagrees with Kott:

Kott relies on bald, repetitive assertion rather than logical reasoning; he ignores or distorts opinions opposite to his own; he constantly manipulates facts to suit theories and colours his whole book with a pervasive, gloating salacity sometimes on the edge of hysteria (31).

Why? “Kott does not seem to be able to *hear* Shakespeare—how good is his English, I wonder?” (32).

Stephen Fender’s view lies between Kott’s and the traditionalists. Fender emphasizes the terrifying power of the fairies; they, not Theseus, control events. In fact, the characters, emblematic rather than realistic, are ethically ambivalent. In the wood, the lovers adapt their speech to their new situation, temporarily simplifying courtly complexities, and thus suggesting their new insights. But complexity is maintained as Theseus, Hippolyta, and Bottom offer contradictory yet

in part valid reactions to the events of the midsummer night, metatheatrically implying that “[t]he real meaning of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is that no one ‘meaning’ can be extracted from the puzzles with which a fiction presents its audience” (61).

Division between darker and lighter readings of the play marked the end of the decade. Philip Edwards (1968), like Dent, questions Theseus’s limited view of imagination, although Theseus’s sentiments are supported by *Pyramus and Thisbe* and Puck’s final speech. Yet despite its ironies, *Dream* is itself a celebration of art and imagination. Michael Taylor (1969) urges recognition of the fairies’ less pleasant aspects as well as their appeal and of Demetrius’ nastiness before his enchantment. Taylor claims that John Russell Brown, who preceded Kott, paints too cheerful a picture. Love is painful as well as joyous, people (and fairies) often petty. *Dream* anticipates *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*. Herbert S. Weil (1969) shares Taylor’s sense of discomfort if not of final concord. He compares *Dream* to works by Albee and Genet, particularly with regard to its open-endedness and suggests that whether or not we accept Kott’s views, we be receptive to plural readings.

Despite Kott’s remarkable influence, many critics of the ’70s continued to favor traditional readings. R.A. Zimbardo (1970) defends imagination as the only lens through which ultimate reality can be perceived. “[P]ermanence in mutability” symbolized by the moon, and “discordia concors” (36) are basic to the play’s theme of reconciliation. Since the characters are symbolic—e.g., Theseus and Hippolyta represent marriage and “a reconciliation of the seasons of nature, or the phases of time” (37) or whatever only seems separate—Hippolyta must subordinate herself to Theseus and become a matron; similarly, Titania must pass from “her motherly obsession with the changeling boy through a kind of death . . . once more to be wooed and won by Oberon” (39). Just as Zimbardo, untouched by the social interrogations of the ’60s, takes female subordination within obligatory marriage for granted, so, too, he accepts a totalizing view of art, that “imitates the great discordia concors, resolving in itself the conflict of what in experience appear to be opposites” (48).

James Calderwood’s 1971 metadramatic treatment of *Dream* claims centrality for the exploration of dramatic illusion by blurring the boundaries between the natural and supernatural, and by depicting Oberon as “specializing in the arts of illusion as befits an illusion”

(124). Oberon is “a kind of interior dramatist,” (130) responsible for Theseus overruling Egeus and bringing harmony out of discord. The lovers’ identities, blurred and lost in the forest, recall actors’ unstable identities; indeed, the artisans’ play fails because the artisans cannot “lose their identities even imaginatively in fictional roles” (132). For Calderwood, imagination and rationality are not oppositional but exist on different levels; the play explores how art functions in our lives.

Andrew D. Weiner (1971) addresses imagination and the mysteries of marriage as testimony of God’s love. Weiner states that whereas the poet’s imagination creates unity by giving diverse elements form, the spectator’s imagination creates unity by perceiving that form. Unity or “uniformity” alludes to eternal truths, whether perceived as Platonic or Christian. Writing in the same year, Hugh M. Richmond (1971), unlike Calderwood and Weiner, finds a warning in what he sees as the self-destructive inflections of passion that pass for love in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “No significant character in the play is wholly exempt from this sadomasochistic type of sexuality—unless indeed it be Bottom, who has the comparative good fortune to be chiefly devoted to himself. . .” (106). Richmond explains “the lovers’ delight in an emotion heightened by conflict” (111) as part of the western tradition which, according to Denis de Rougemont, protects each lover from genuine communication and consequent disenchantment with the other. Noting the parallels between *Pyramus and Thisbe* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Richmond asks that while we “sympathize with Romeo and thus learn vicariously from his incompleteness, we might well positively admire Bottom’s diverseness and emulate his poise, while laughing at his egotism” (122).

Throughout the 1970s, imagination remained a favored critical subject. Ralph Berry (1972) analyzed imagery (moon, dream, and eye) and plot elements because of their importance to *Dream’s* exploration of illusion in love and art. For Berry, Shakespeare’s chief concern is epistemological: “The lovers declare illusion to be reality; the actors declare reality to be illusion” (106). Ultimately reconciling these views, *Dream* vindicates imagination. Thomas McFarland (1972), who regards Kott as the victim of an overactive imagination, entitles his discussion “And All Things Shall Be Peace: The Happiness of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” because he considers this one of the happiest literary creations of all time. The mood, established at once by the poetry, is so lovely that we cannot fear for the characters. The orgiastic

eroticism Kott makes so much of provides the most minimal of subtexts.

Marjorie B. Garber (1974) sees metamorphosis as both the major subject of the play and the model for its structuring. Entering the woods is like dreaming in that the characters—and the audience—perceive differently and gain new imaginative ways of seeing. Dreams, “truer than the reality they seek to interpret and transform” (87), take priority over reason. Alexander Leggatt (1974), in a thoughtful reading, asserts that *Dream*’s grimmer elements are held at bay by the audience’s sympathy for the young lovers. He singles out the fairies as the most sophisticated and unconstrained of the four character groups and proposes that the interactions between those groups are marked by contrasts that develop the comic perspective as imaginative involvement metamorphoses the playwright’s experience. Ronald F. Miller (1975) advanced a philosophic, quasi-religious view of *Dream* “as a study in the epistemology of the imagination” (254) by focusing on

the *mystery* of the fairies—the very aura of evanescence and ambiguity surrounding their life on stage—that points to a mysteriousness in our own existence, and specifically in such ambivalent earthly matters as love, luck, imagination, and even faith (255).

In Bottom’s Pauline awakening speech, writes Miller, Shakespeare teases his audience with hints of an otherworldly vision.

David Bevington’s essay (1975) offers one of the most appealing readings of *Dream*. Bevington finds Kott “helpful . . . though he has surely gone too far” (86). For example, while it is possible that Oberon is bisexual and desires the changeling sexually, the evidence is slight and “seems deliberately ambiguous. . . . the fairies’ ideas concerning love are ultimately unknowable and incomprehensible” (90). Rather, “[t]he conflict between sexual desire and rational restraint is, then, an essential tension throughout the play reflected in the images of dark and light. This same tension exists in the nature of the fairies and of the forest” (88). The achievement of the play is its reconciliation of the tensions between the dark and the benevolent sides of love. M.E. Lamb (1979) whose essay follows David Ormerod’s by a year (see Neoplatonism, below), like Ormerod compares the woods to the minotaur’s

labyrinth, for Elizabethans often an allegory of sexual sin. The lovers conquer irrational passion and find their way back. Bottom is both a comic version of the minotaur and the “skein of thread” (480) that guides the lovers, the myth’s comic inversion holding in check *Dream*’s repressed tragic possibilities. Theseus as bridegroom has conquered passion and is no longer promiscuous. The names of the artisans also recall Daedalus, the craftsman (read playwright) who built the labyrinth. Theseus’s best-known speech intimates that the poet, if he is to create art, must confront the irrationality he shares with the lunatic and the lover, must accept the risks of the labyrinth. At the end of the decade, Harold F. Brooks, reviewing the criticism for his introduction to the Arden edition, finds desire and its culmination in marriage at the heart of *Dream*, with other subjects—imagination, appearance and reality—of lesser importance.

A new approach ushered in the new decade. Florence Falk (1980) looked to the work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner for an interpretation of *Dream* in which traditional rites of passage trigger development within the individual and the society. Theseus, detached from myth (imagination), rules harshly. The lovers flee from his *structure* to the *communitas* of the woods: a “spontaneous, immediate, transitory condition”; “the abode of dream”; and “the temporary aggregate of persons whose asocial desires require some kind of accommodation to preserve the health of the society” (267). Here, through a rite of passage, the asocial can be contained. Identifying *communitas* with the unconscious or the dream space, with “creative disorder,” (268), Falk argues that the lovers experience release into self-knowledge and return to a renewed Athens, albeit temporarily so. This is *societas*, “the resolution of the dialectic between the dualism of *communitas* and *structure*” (272).

Christian critic R. Chris Hassel, Jr. (1980), Germaine Greer, and A.P. Riemer, on the other hand, return to established themes. Hassel probes the play’s Pauline allusions and references to Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*. The experience of the lovers and of Bottom, as recounted in his awakening soliloquy, teach them “a new humility, a healthy sense of folly which urges that there are things that are true that can neither be seen nor understood” (67). This lesson, says Hassel, analogizes faith and romance. In the same vein, Theseus’s speech on the lunatic, the lover, and the poet applauds imagination but “laughs at futile attempts to perceive, categorize, or express it” (74). According to Germaine

Greer (1980) *Dream* presents a solution to the conflict between social order and sexual passion; marriages based on respect for others (embodied in Quince's company) and raising children (suggested by the epithalamion). A.P. Riemer's focus on metamorphosis (1980) is important to later critics. The play is about transformation, the characters' metamorphoses analogizing the poet's transformative power. As opposed to comedy that holds a mirror up to folly, *Dream* presents "the essential nature of the world created by art" (207).

J. Dennis Huston (1981), like Calderwood, explores *Dream* metadramatically, maintaining that Shakespeare was "playing with the art of playwriting" (97), witness the inclusion of multiple parodies. Huston regards Bottom as a parody of Petruchio, designed to celebrate the power of the playwright over the actor. But however deflated, Bottom's awakening soliloquy tells us that "[a]rt as dream is simultaneously both illusion and revealed truth" (102). That Oberon, the most effective of Shakespeare's surrogate playwrights in *Dream*, cannot control all contingencies, draws attention to Shakespeare's own powers in this, his "most exuberantly self-reflexive comedy of play" (121).

Barry Weller (1985) also studies the interaction between imagination and the theatrical experience. Theater succeeds with an audience attuned to the difference between reality and play; e.g., *Dream*'s characters are more figurative than real, with the fairies a metaphor or "explanatory trope" (77) for both the disruption of nature and the irrationality of love. Bottom, who cannot distinguish between reality and play, is unchanged by his encounter with the supernatural, so he and the other characters "dis-figure" meaning by "undoing its figural or fictive character" (77). The play realizes itself not in the eyes of the spectators but in their imaginations. William C. Carroll, like Florence Falk, looks to Victor Turner's theories, particularly the association between liminality and the monstrous, to argue that metamorphosis—the "comic detoxification" (163) of sexuality, violence, and death, i.e., of the monstrous—is necessary before the lovers are ready for marriage, and that "the deepest metamorphic rhythms of human nature require man's yielding to a dream" (177).

One of the most innovative discussions is Terry Eagleton's deconstructive neo-Marxist reading (1986), describing the polarity between *Dream*'s erotic discourse and physical desire. Whereas the ritualistic language of love presents the would-be lover with a limited

number of roles, all of which express desire in economic terms, real physical desire subverts this linguistic ritual order. Eagleton likens the capriciousness of physical desire to the irresistible flow of change in the order of signs, suggesting that Shakespeare calls attention to the “homogenizing effect” (20) of nature’s initially chaotic influence. Marriage, embodying the ritual maintenance of erotic desire, is constantly mocked, the play’s couplings being subject to radical reversals. The interference of the fairies demonstrates the social construction of desire (and of identity itself), ironically perceived as “natural” (22). In actuality, love consists of mutual romantic illusions, of “imaginary identification” (23). Yet Bottom’s performance as himself, ass, and Pyramus suggests that the individual as a linguistic construct cannot exist outside of social exchange even when what we take for reality is grounded in fantasy and illusion.

Two years after Eagleton’s *Shakespeare* appeared, William W.E. Slights (1988) proposed that the changeling, neither wholly human nor fairy and therefore indeterminate, analogizes *Dream*’s lovers. The changeling is a vehicle for an emancipating excursion to an anarchic borderland. For Peter Holland (1995) the thematic concept of dreams provides the structuring principle for an extensive and enjoyable overview of the play in his introduction to the Oxford edition.

Thelma Greenfield challenges Freudian dream theory as a key to the play in her essay written for this volume, “Our Nightly Madness: Shakespeare’s *Dream* Without *The Interpretation of Dreams*.” Because critics and directors have satisfied their need to ferret out the secret meanings of the dreams in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by turning to Freudian dream psychology, what is seen on stage becomes predominantly a censoring metaphor or facade for a buried reality of sexual drives and anxieties or for Bottom’s “hidden” nature.

From another perspective, rather than serving as censoring and disguising devices, dreams are valid verbal, visual, and emotional constructs—autonomous, experiential, in and of themselves—possessed of their own significance. Dreams are generated by sleep’s peculiar information processes, which are unlike those operating during waking periods and which thus produce curious-seeming results. In Shakespeare’s dream play, this perspective grants the audience access to the integrity of the stage image, for example, the purely metaphoric denomination of Bottom as “ass” becomes tangibly real in his wearing a visible, literal asshead. Bottom’s “dream,” like dreams in general,

yields an extended range of experience not apt to be met with in everyday life. By respecting the autonomy of dream, we can see in this play the often-remarked connection between dream and drama, a kinship Shakespeare and his contemporaries grasped. We see Shakespeare comically exploiting the illogicality of dream experience by attaching it to the behaviors of stage figures ostensibly awake. In the play proper and in the play-within-the-play, we see his alertness to the creative role of the audience that, like the dreamer, creates, participates, and watches all at once, transcending the unbelievable illogicalities of stage illusion. Greenfield points out that, through strong images of female worlds, *Dream* opens up, at an almost mythic level, divisions between male and female that go well beyond sexual anxieties and frustrations. Only with loss, she writes, can the experiential mode of *Dream*'s dream-infused creations be sacrificed to searching out the play as a congregation of Freudian symbols.

### **Neoplatonism**

Following Ulrici, who held that within the comic vision of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare was presenting a Platonic dream world, a shadow world out of which would grow a Christian future life, so too John Vyvyan (1961) regards the play as informed by Neoplatonism. He cites instances throughout, including the disorder in nature caused by the quarrel between Oberon and Titania: "it fits in with Shakespeare's wider contention—that the soul-state of his characters is objectified in their world, and that love and hate, however personal their expression, are forces that have repercussions on a cosmic scale" (80). Theseus and Hippolyta, who have turned "a war into a wedding" and "out of chaos" brought "a birth of beauty" (7) are the ideal that the other couples must attain. Order is begotten through love, when soul-mates recognize each other's divine nature, and "every betrayal of love is a movement towards disintegration" (78). As for Bottom, when Titania, under the "influence, perceives a kind of divinity in him, I fancy that she is nearer, in Shakespeare's judgement, to a true vision of him than when she sees him only as an ass" (85).

According to Peter G. Phialas's Platonic interpretation (1966), Shakespeare started with an idea, Cupid's blindness, "the inexplicable caprice of choice," then fleshed it out. The fairies are integral: