MERRY WANDERERS OF THE NIGHT

MERRY WANDERERS OF THE NIGHT: FAIRIES AND FOLKLORE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM AND THE TEMPEST

BY

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ABSTRACT:

Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest abound with supernatural beings of various kinds, which contribute differently to each play's unique, but constant ambivalence towards the potency of art and romantic love. The Introduction to this thesis defines the major characteristics of such supernatural beings, especially fairies, profiles the evolution of fairy belief in the sixteenth century, and finally summarizes their cosmological rank within the Renaissance world view. A brief survey of the sociological function of fairies is also employed in an attempt to delineate at least the more important elements of folkloric tradition, which Shakespeare borrows and modifies for his own ends.

Chapter one focuses on the role of fairies as comic chorus in the Dream. Fairies underpin the work's essentially subversive aspect, because they suggest the transitory and tentative emotional satisfaction that the world of Petrarchan art and romantic love affords. Shakespeare effortlessly consolidates what seems to be insoluble material. The familiar Renaissance confidence in the irrefutable power of art and love is present, even while the play simultaneously insinuates

a concern for the illusion wrought by fairies.

The next chapter introduces the alternative view of intervention by spirits depicted in The Tempest. The analysis turns towards how Ariel inverts Puck's role as a typically disruptive force, and gives special emphasis to the generic differences between these elementals. Ariel serves a far more complicated function as Prospero's often reluctant, but very effective preternatural stage-hand, than Puck does as Oberon's "jester." Ariel is instrumental in conjuring up the "theatrical moment," which the play ultimately calls into question, by virtue of his own metaphorical status as the "moment" itself, seeking escape.

The final chapter marks the contributions made by fairies to Shakespeare's exploration of the capabilities and dynamics of theatre. These plays seem to embody two tangible extremes. The Dream violates the established rules and classical unities of the theatre, by interposing multiple perspectives in an ironic way. Fairies serve as perfect subjects for Shakespeare, then, in his bid to redefine the barriers between the reality and fantasy of the stage. Conversely, The Tempest embraces, celebrates and objectifies theatre at every possible opportunity. Conventional modes such as the masque are used to create a sense of pageantry, while Prospero constantly invokes Ariel to produce spectacular visual displays and special effects.

PREFACE

I have used the Arden editions of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest throughout this study. These editions have been especially useful in facilitating a close textual reading of the plays rather than one in which performance has been emphasized.

First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. Antony Hammond for his help in the preparation of this thesis. His insight into critical issues and perceptive suggestions have been indispensable in helping me to shape this thesis from start to finish. But most important to me has been his enthusiasm for supervising my work, which has, in turn, made my attempt to meet his standards of scholarship a very rewarding experience. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, whose support, patience and encouragement still surprise me. Finally, I would like to thank Mark Perlman for his help in overcoming various technical problems, which I was tempted to blame on fairies. His knowledge of computers held me in good stead, whenever my own failed me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION: FAIRIES AND FOLKLORE

The traditional elusiveness of fairies invariably complicates any formal definition of their ontology. The "Contagious fogs" (MND II.i.90) which occasionally accompany these preternatural beings seem to be as much a metaphysical form of camouflage as they are the result of discord in the fairy world of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The OED definition of the word "fairy" is laconic and touches only on their more easily identifiable characteristics. The definition reads: "One class of supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular belief supposed to possess magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of man" (OED sb.A.4). But critics like C.S. Lewis implicitly maintain less confidence in such concise explanations of fairies. He calls them "marginal, fugitive creatures" and suggests that their ability to evade definition is what served to "soften the classical severity" (122) of Medieval man's Ptolemaic model of the universe. Fairies remained largely an enigmatic species of spirit during the Middle Ages. They served as a kind of open-ended variable that escaped the strictures and imperatives of a devolutionary cosmic scheme. Lewis gives "longaevi" a separate chapter in his book, The Discarded

Image, because the exact nature of their existence is so uncertain and their "place of residence is ambiguous between earth and heaven" (122).

Lewis classifies Medieval fairies with the help of four distinct and rival theories of spiritual genealogy. First, he suggests that they are a third, rational species independent of angels and men (134). Second, they may be a special class of demoted angels, who are banished into the lower and "more turbulent airy regions" for their having accompanied Satan in his rebellion, although they themselves did not take part (135). Third, they may constitute some special classification of the dead (136). This theory derives from the confessions of witches, who claim under duress, to have seen fairies among the deceased (Latham 46). But some critics point out that in the Dream, we never really have a sense that fairies are "the living realities of departed spirits" (Gibson 53). Fourth, that fairies are fallen angels, or better, devils, gains ground especially with the accession of James I, who in his highly influential book, Daemonologie, includes fairies with demons (137). Similarly, two of the most important texts of the age, Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy and Reginald Scot's The Discovery of Witches, also include fairies with terrestrial devils such as Lares, Genii, Fauns and Satyrs.[1]

Keith Thomas also accedes to the elusiveness of

fairies. They conformed to no single set of characteristics beyond the fact that those of the Middle Ages were "neither small nor kindly" (Thomas 724). He proposes that most Medieval fairies fall into one of four categories: trooping fairies, hobgoblins or guardian spirits like Puck, mermaids and water spirits; and giants and monsters (724). Titania's attendant fairies can easily be identified as troop fairies, especially for their propensity to gather delicacies for feasts at a moment's notice, and their conspicuously low threshold for breaking into song and dance. Perhaps a step up in authority, Puck often performed household chores for mortals in folklore and perennially made a nuisance of himself through his attempts to retard the work of others, whether it be in the field, barn, grove or dairy. He carries on this tradition of cleanliness in the Dream, when he is sent "with broom before / To sweep the dust behind the door" (MND V.i.375-376) of Theseus' quarters. Of Celtic origin, the name "Puck" was once applied to a whole race of fairies and not to any one individual sprite (Dyer 6). He was originally conceived of as a generically "evil, malicious, or mischievous sprite or demon of popular superstition" (OED sb.A.1).

Shakespeare introduces Puck into the fairy kingdom as the relatively benign household goblin, Robin Goodfellow, whereas previously he had been considered alienate among the fairies proper (Thomas 726). His language is not the stuff of

classical myth like that used by Oberon and Titania, particularly when he refers to country proverbs, most notably, "Jack shall have Jill, / Nought shall go ill" (MND III.ii.461-462). This rather late innovation may also explain the elaborate ritual of identification between the fairies that opens Act II. Special care is required on the part of Titania's fairy to explain Puck's presence, check his credentials as a prankster, and his status within the echelons of the fairy monarchy.

The mermaid of Oberon's vision (MND II.i.150) may also have been intended as a kind of fairy. Mermaids were considered by some in fact to be one variety of fairy. Oberon's reference to the sea-maid is quite appropriate to his plans for stealing Titania's changeling child, because mermaids, like many other fairies, "have a great desire for human children" (Briggs, Anatomy 191). As a fairy, the mermaid's beauty would be unimpeachable (Latham 80). Although mermaids had reputedly sinister characters, "harmless ones have been known" (Briggs, Anatomy 191). Here, her association with the "fair vestal" (MND II.i.158) may contribute to the appropriateness of the imperial votaress as a figure of encomium for Elizabeth. The resemblance between details of the "Since once I sat upon a promontory" (MND II.i.149) speech and Elizabeth's entertainment at Kenilworth in the summer of 1575 are uncanny. The young Shakespeare may indeed have been

present with his Alderman father, while the Queen passed in view of a water pageant, which displayed Arion riding on the back of a dolphin as part of a royal tribute (Schoenbaum 115):

> My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rest
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
> To hear the sea-maid's music?
> (MND II.i.148-154)

In the last of Thomas' categories, Ariel plays the role of a water spirit, when he transforms himself into a "a nymph o'th'sea" (TMP I.ii.301), and then alternatively, a monster in the form of a harpy (TMP III.iii.83). A harpy is a figure of divine vengeance, which is a composite creature possessing a woman's face and body, but with a bird's wings and claws (Onions 126). All of these types were thought of as roughly adult human size and, for the most part, indistinguishable from the average human being during the Middle Ages (Latham 69). Shakespeare's modifications, however, result in a change from man-sized, often malignant creatures to diminutive, insectal beings with characteristic floral affinities (Nutt 5-6). Fairies not only became the size of insects, but began to take on an insect-like perspective of the natural world with their concern for flowers in particular. Oberon's "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows" (MND II.i.249) speech is perhaps the most effective

treatment of the ubiquitous and narcotic floral presence, which also pervades Ariel's designs to live "Under the blossom that hangs on the bough" (TMP V.i.94).

Many critics hold that "inappropriateness in the rustic fairies of fertility prompted Shakespeare to invent a new world of minuscule fairy spirits" (Hunter 87). And the fairies of the Dream are small. Titania sleeps in the "enamell'd skin" (MND II.i. 255) of a snake, wears the "leathern wings" (MND II.ii.4) of bats for a coat, and must avoid the largely arachnoid population of creatures making up the bestiary that nightly threatens her sleep (MND II.ii.20-21). Her elves are even smaller than herself and sometimes "Creep into acorn-cups" (MND II.i.31) as evasive action when frightened by their rulers' brawls. Elementals do not only shrink in comparison with their folkloric ancestors, but their rulers are "not concerned with mischief as traditionally depicted" (Hunter 98). The "Oberon" in one of the Dream's sources, The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux, for example instills frightful illusions in travellers lost in the woods with unmistakable malice (MND Appendix I, 145).

Fairies did not only gradually lose their power over humans, but ironically were pushed even farther to the cosmological periphery, with the dissemination of popular witch phobias (Lewis 138; Thomas 725). The dark view of fairies gained some support in the sixteenth and early

seventeenth centuries, because it was such a "hag-ridden period" (Lewis 125). Kott maintains that the connection between fairies and devils was alive and well, because Puck has the quintessential demonic ability to multiply himself after the fashion of the "great deceiver," Satan (216). Other critics agree that the Puck of folklore was, at the very least, dangerous and "an Elizabethan audience could not contemplate him or his associates as representatives of the unknown without some apprehension" (Young 28). Certainly, the witches of Macbeth claim some connection with fairies, when Hecate spurs them on to dance around the cauldron, "Like elves and fairies in a ring" (MAC IV.i.42). But by the time Ben Jonson wrote The Devil Is An Ass, Puck's counterpart in that play, Pug, cannot keep up with smooth London sophisticates, who in turn perhaps supplant the power of witches to some degree, by their ability to scheme. Puck seems to corroborate indirectly this loss of power through his reluctant admission that fairies are occasionally left out of causal equations whether they like it or not, when overruled by fate (MND III.ii.92). And, of course, Lysander "bewitches" Hermia without fairy intervention at all.

Although also known by the pseudo-demonic appellation, "king of shadows" (MND III.ii.347), Oberon himself collectively dissociates fairies from "Damn'd spirits" (MND III.ii.382) when he tells Puck: "But we are spirits of another

sort" (MND III.ii.387). Similarly, Ariel's allegiance to either good or evil is for the most part unclear, even though his name appears in the Bible and means God's lion of justice (TMP Appendix B, 142). The closest he comes to revealing any local hints about his moral place in the traditional Christian scheme occurs when Prospero recounts his punishment at the hands of Sycorax. Unfortunately, his punishment is only comparable to, and not indicative of, the torments "lay[ed] upon the damn'd" (TMP I.ii.290), which suggests moral neutrality at best. By the same token, the reason for Ariel's refusal to carry out the grand hests of the foul witch Sycorax is never clearly explained. Presumably this spirit's delicacy, as indicated by his name, suggests also that he is aware of at least the rudiments of morality.

These spirits of another sort do indeed have an elusive presence similar to that of the "lightning in the collied night" (MND I.i.145), which Lysander mentions during his stichomythic lament with Hermia over an equally cagey subject -- the nature of love (MND I.i.136-145). In some ways, we are forced to define fairies in much the same manner as is Theseus, namely, through negative intuitions. No matter how evasive elementals are, we can be sure that they compose the exact opposite of what the Duke asks Hermia to be for the sake of her father, Egeus -- "a form in wax" (MND I.i.49). For this reason fairies do not constitute a "passive" chorus in any

traditional sense.[2] They have the same functional influence tempered by ethereality that Donne explores in his poem "Air And Angels" to "Affect us oft" ("Air and Angels," Songs and Sonnets, line 4) even in the form of nothing more than a "shapeless flame" (line 3). Elementals effortlessly straddle the same ontological fence between the immaterial and the material worlds that viruses do between the animate and the inanimate. The air itself supplies enough tread for Ariel to "run upon the sharp wind of the north" (TMP I.ii.254), while he can just as easily access solidity like a microbe within the "veins o'th' earth" (TMP I.ii.255). At the same time, fairies' combined powers of invisibility and transmutation, coupled with an inexplicable need for privacy, make them even more difficult to catch a glimpse of than lightning. One exception, though, that immediately comes to mind is when Ariel transmogrifies into something akin to a laser beam, which exerts more wattage than "Jove's lightnings" (TMP I.ii.201) to quickly empty Alonso's ship. Ariel's feat is a prime example of how elementals act on other characters to develop the plot and supply an alternative perspective to events as an "active" chorus, in spite of the low ontological profile characteristic of their race.

Puck and Ariel both wield their ability to transmute with formidable power. The former reveals the scope of his morphological repertoire in a burst of excitement, generated

by the prospect of disrupting the meagre, but well-intentioned dramaturgical efforts of Quince's acting company, which is rehearsing in the woods:

> Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
> A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire;
> And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
> Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.
> (MND III.i.103-106)

Puck's aptitude for bestial mimesis finds equivalence with Ariel's easy mastery of all of the elements, as when he offers Prospero his services "to fly, / To swim, to dive into fire, to ride / On curl'd clouds" (TMP I.ii.190-192). But fairies also have the power to transform others. In addition to Bottom's obvious changes, Caliban fears transformation into a barnacle and then an ape (TMP IV.i.48-49), while Falstaff, convinced of the Welsh lineage of his fairy antagonists, fears being changed "to a piece of cheese!" (WIV V.V.83). The Welsh were a reputed cheese-loving race (Oliver, WIV 20).

Part of the problem in terms of defining the character of fairies, as Northrop Frye points out, lies in the fact that their world is only antipodal to ours in so far as it "keeps to its own quite different rhythms," in accordance "with its own laws of time and space" (44). "Fairy time," as Theseus calls it (MND V.i.350), is the period between midnight and the rising of the morning star, which these creatures claim as their own (Onions 97). Puck elicits some concern over the call of the "morning lark" (MND IV.i.93), another perennial signal

for the end of fairy time. Although restricted by diurnation in ways that are not fully explained, Puck is indeed a "nimble spirit" (MND I.i.13) at night. His mysterious mode of propulsion negates great distances and travelling time, as illustrated by an ability to put "a girdle about the earth / In forty minutes" (MND II.i.175). Similarly, Titania and Oberon project back and forth between exotic India and ancient Athens, she to contact votaresses of her order, and he to verse love before shepherdesses in remote pastoral settings. But Titania's troop fairies measure time differently, if that is what they do. They are given to making the smallest of temporal discriminations when they go about their duties for merely "the third part of a minute" (MND II.ii.2) to induce their Queen's slumber. The human rules which govern time and space do not exist for fairies.

Shakespeare's ability to create an engaging alien landscape is what reveals and sustains the mystery of fairy existence, through the compilation of imaginative and often startling details. Nothing could resist translation into our reality more than the idea of seeking dew-drops to "hang in every cowslip's ear" (MND II.i.15). This typical fairy chore in preparation for revelry was also the height of fashion among Elizabethan men and woman, who often wore jewels on the ear (Brooks, MND 27). But the extrapolative transformation from the artificial to the natural appreciation of fashion

complicates the bridge between humans and fairies.

Fairy habitat is equally exotic and not only extends to the "farthest step of India" (MND II.i.69) and presumably beyond, but is generally "supposed to be the most romantic and rural that can be selected" (Dyer 14). Theseus' court is for the most part strangely monochromatic when compared with the fairy world of the senses. In the Dream, elementals haunt dales, greens, fountains, meet in the "starlight spangled sheen" (MND II.i.29) and "trace the forests wild" (MND II.i.25), with neither concern for private property marked by pales, nor royal land protected as game parks (see: MND I.i.4).

In the sixteenth century, the "country" of the fairies was believed to be underground (Latham 105), but its materialized inhabitants might be seen, at least in the imagination, to perform any variety of activities amidst the "hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves" (TMP V.i.33) of the forest at midnight. Fairies' penchants for song and dance, for example, take these alleged subterraneans of the Dream to the "forest or mead" (MND II.i.83), "paved fountain" (MND II.i.84), "rushy brook" (MND II.i.84) and "beached margent of the sea" (MND II.i.85). Here these usually impulsive beings not only submit to the yoke of organised ritual, but joyfully embrace every possible opportunity to dance "ringlets to the whistling wind" (MND II.i.86) and bless the night with a "hymn

or carol" (MND II.i.102).

The so-called "fairy rings" are actually discernable spots of increased growth in a pasture, which result from the year-end release of nitrogen after the decay of a particular mushroom (Dyer 15). Folklore held that any mortal who carelessly stepped inside the ring, intruded with a scythe or fell asleep within its confines, was mercilessly pinched black and blue, carried away to fairyland or stricken dead on the spot (Latham 123). Elves often help in the maintenance of the rings and these creatures are sometimes distinguished from fairies as an inferior or subject species of supernatural being (OED sb.B.1). In The Tempest, they purportedly wait for the "solemn curfew" (TMP V.i.40) in their role as occasional and gnomish husbandmen to make these very same "midnight mushrooms" (TMP V.i.39) responsible for the "green sour ringlets.../ Whereof the ewe not bites" (TMP V.i.37-38).

These ritual ceremonies reflect fairies' collective celebration of natural process. They also serve to establish the fairy contribution to the organicism of the natural woodland beauty. They were believed to be exceedingly beautiful creatures and this seems to be their only real distinguishing trait (Latham 82), beyond the fact that they often appeared with complexions of "...black, gray, green and white" (WIV V.V.38). Titania's retinue, in the figures of Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed, might even

"suggest beauties of Nature personified" (Clark 60). Titania herself is inextricably connected to nature's realm, especially in her speech beginning "Be kind and courteous to this gentleman" (MND III.i.157), in which she inventories only natural technologies, such as butterfly-wing fans, to comfort her lover-ass (Sewell 121).

Activities such as song and dance, also serve to gauge the homeostatic condition of both nature and fairy concord. Oberon's refusal to join Titania's "moonlight revels" (MND II.i.141) and dance in her roundel, breaks the links unifying the fairy world. The symbolic figure of unity, the circle, which is presented in its dynamic form by the dance, gives way to an array of natural disasters, originating from the dissent between the King and Queen. These images of destruction counter other symbols of unity depicted by the sphericity of Titania's "orbs" (MND II.i.9), her cowslip-pensioners' "coats spots" (MND II.i. 11), their "freckles" (MND II.i.13), "pearl[s]" (MND II.i.15), the "big-bellied" votaress (MND II.i.129) and perhaps the "moon" (MND II.i.7). Although the moon is really part of the cold and fruitless existence with which Theseus threatens Hermia to insure her paternal obedience (MND I.i.73), I include it only as a tentative part of Titania's realm, because Phoebe enhances the decorative aspect of the natural world after the fashion of fairies when she decks with "liquid pearl the bladed grass" (MND I.i.211).

But as some have noted, the moon quenches the fiery shafts of love in her "chaste beams" (MND II.i.162) to enforce chastity in accordance with Diana's mythus (Spurgeon 260).

Beyond their role as the entelechies which control weather and seasons, fairies possess the power to cast magic spells. The word "fairy" was itself used in folk belief to denote "a malignant disease of spiritual origin" (Thomas 725). It was thought that fairies could "blast human beings with disease and deformity and to spoil their cattle and blight their crops" (Latham 137). Queen Margaret rails at Richard III: "Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog" (R3 I.iii.227), implying that he has been deformed by malignant fairies at birth (Onions 86). Further, with the onset of distemperature in the Dream, often "rheumatic diseases ...abound" (MND II.i.105), along with an assorted "progeny of evils" (MND II.i.115). "Contagious fogs" (MND II.i.90), "pelting rivers" (MND II.i.91), "drowned field[s]" (MND II.i.96) and sheep-plagued, "murrion flock[s]" (MND II.i.97) transform the countryside from its usual summer opulence into chaos. Here, the natural upheaval may also double as an image of discord in matrimony so as to warn all intending couples (Hunter 98).

Similarly, in The Tempest, elementals are responsible for producing "cramps, / Side-stitches" (TMP I.ii.327-328), pinches "As thick as honeycomb, [with] each pinch more

stinging / Than the bees that made'em" (TMP I.i.330) at Prospero's command. Caliban relates comparable tortures at the hands of elementals manifested as biting "apes" (MND II.ii.9), "hedgehogs" (TMP II.ii.10) that point their quills at the foot and hissing "adders" (TMP II.ii.13). But the rather distanced and elaborate explanation for "rheumatic diseases" (MND II.i.105) in the Dream can be found nowhere in The Tempest. This is particularly evident when Prospero tells Ariel how to instruct his spirit-hounds to punish Caliban and his cronies in the most direct way possible:

> Go charge my goblins that they grind their joints
> With dry convulsions; shorten up their sinews
> With aged cramps; and more pinch-spotted make them
> Than pard or cat o'mountain.
>
> (TMP IV.i. 258-261)

For all their associations with malignant disease, fairies also add immeasurable joy to life (Latham 137). Clark notes that elementals "do not hate, and have no malice in their fun" (54) towards mortals. By the Shakespearean period, fairies become for the most part "a dwarf race of mischievous but fundamentally friendly temperament" (Thomas 726). Some views suggest that fairies are amoral and neither of heaven or hell (Latham 58). Others hold that fairies are not evil per se, but are "more natural" than human beings (Lewis 133). That is, they are more reckless, passionate and far less inhibited, which frees them from things like shame, responsibility and scruples (Lewis 134). Fairyland is not necessarily aligned

with demonic powers then, but is simply set against our sense of morality (Knight 144). It is the fairy concord and renewed amity between Titania and Oberon after all, rather than Theseus' rule, that creates order in and out of the court (Rhoads 54).

In light of this, Caliban's statement to Stephano that all of Prospero's spirits "hate" him (TMP III.i.92) is ironic in its lack of self-reflection. Granted, Caliban's view of spirits is colored by his own negative experience of them, hatred for his master and desire to persuade his company to murder Prospero. But he seems to forget or fails to recognize that his allegiance with elementals on this single point means they only harm mortals at Prospero's behest, and, "hate" no one in particular. Clark's finding is also born out by Ariel's wish simply to flee mortals and become "free / As mountain winds" (TMP I.ii.502).

Even for their ingenious "roguishness and rascality" (Clark 58), these creatures can also bless virtually all human social milestones. Far from causing distemperature, the collection of spirits at the end of The Tempest, led by Ceres, Juno and Iris, bless the procession, celebrating successful harvest and marriage. Similarly, the same "dew-drops" (MND II.i.14), with which fashion-conscious troop fairies adorn "every cowslip's ear" (MND II.i.14), are also used to consecrate the blessing placed on Theseus' nuptial, as a means

to guard against the "blots of Nature's hand" (MND V.i.395), such as "mole[s], hare-lips[s]...[and] scar[s]" (MND V.i.397) so "Despised in nativity" (MND V.i.399).

There is also a long history of "cunning folk," so-called because they were singled out in towns and villages as those whom the fairies helped to cure the sick, tell fortunes and find treasures (Thomas 727). Domestic sprites like Robin Goodfellow were likely candidates to help the "cunning folk" and bring luck and prosperity to the households which they chose to haunt. "Fairy gold," for example, was a well-worn term in folklore referring to the practice of generous fairies, who wished to share their treasure with mortals by anonymously placing gold coins in someone's shoe (Onions 97). This form of currency, however, was highly unstable and prone to crumble away quickly, particularly if the recipient of the windfall revealed its source. When the Shepherd of The Winter's Tale discovers the infant Perdita and her riches, he falls back on his fairy beliefs to make sense of the find, "This is fairy gold, boy, and 'twill prove so" (WT IV.i.123). His intention to do only good deeds with the gold as a solution to divert its disintegration seems logical enough. But ambitious courtiers actually used this well-known fairy practice to give Queen Elizabeth expensive gifts in covert attempts to buy her influence (Latham 143).

Fairies can confer on humanity even more precious

gifts, as Titania illustrates when she professes to Bottom, "I will purge thy mortal grossness so, / That thou shalt like an airy spirit go" (MND III.i.153-154). Her humorously wasted promise of immortality not only offers Bottom clear cut spiritual advancement, but suggests that fairies are themselves immortal. Even though her generosity is enhanced by an illusion of love for the weaver, fairies were thought to take human lovers of both sexes and routinely abduct them to their bowers (Briggs, Tradition 123). When Oberon and Titania exchange charges of mutual infidelity at the beginning of Act II, which intimate his love for Hippolyta and hers for Theseus, we get a sense at least that love between fairies and humans is pretty much business as usual in fairyland.

Jan Kott proposes that Titania entertains an added ramification, namely the prospect of entering the "dark sphere of sex" (228) with the transformed Bottom. Although this presumably latent desire is neither in keeping with her concern for Bottom's "mortal grossness," nor with the idea that Oberon is likely to cuckold himself, Kott's point is well-taken. All of the animals, like lions, wolves, and bulls, which Oberon intends as potential lovers for Titania, are known for their sexual potency (Kott 227). Equally persuasive, however, is the idea that these nightmarish beasts are more a measure of Oberon's "tempestuous jealousy" (Knight 152), rather than of his voyeuristic tendencies, as Kott seems to

suggest. Kott's interpretation of Titania's role immediately brings Apuleius' The Golden Ass to mind,[3] which describes how a wealthy Roman noblewoman almost sexually exhausts a donkey, no doubt to the chagrin and amazement of its trainer.[4] The event Apuleius refers to is most certainly an adjunct to the long tradition of bestiality practiced in ancient Rome's infamous Colosseum.[5] The Games succeeded as entertainment, however, because of their characteristic and graphic ways of exalting literalism, which to my mind would place them at the opposite extreme to that which fairies embody. The humour of Titania's infatuation with Bottom does not stem from the actual possibility of sexual consummation, but arises from the impossibility of sexual congress between mundane and ethereal beings. If anything, their light love affair parodies Titania's rather serious need for human love involving the child "stol'n from an Indian king" (MND II.i.22). Her habit of garnishing both the weaver and the child with a headdress of flowers, suggests that Titania's interest in both is at best vaguely procreative.

More often than not fairies commit their energies and magical talents to less controversial pursuits, such as "Mislead[ing] night wanderers" (MND II.i.39) like an incorporeal someone drawing a "firebrand, [onward] in the dark" (TMP II.ii.6). Puck leads the potential duelists, Lysander and Demetrius, far afield in the largely metaphorical

labyrinth of the forest, after the fashion of Ariel's similar escapade in which he uses tabor music to lure the conspirators of Caliban's plot into a pond of horse-piss. Titania, of course, inverts this practice when she leads Theseus "through the glimmering night / From Perigouna" (MND II.i.77-78), but this seems to be an isolated occurrence.

In keeping with fairies' alternative sense of time and space the physical distance of the detour is the least important aspect of this prank. In the first case, Puck really blankets the lovers' perceptions as "black as Acheron" (MND II.ii. 357), so as to lead them into "death-counterfeiting sleep" (MND III.ii.364) according to Oberon's wishes. In the second, however, dissociation of the senses is somewhat less romantic and takes the most literal form possible, as when Trinculo says, "I do smell all horse-piss; at which my nose is in great indignation" (TMP IV.i.199).

Here, Puck's highly interactive approach to romantic intrigue jives with the well-established tradition of frustrating young lovers. Nevertheless, he can also be counted on to turn things right by the final curtain, but in a way that seems to anticipate modern chaos theory.[6] Puck also seems forever impartial towards whatever love he can disrupt and confound in his role as a kind of antithetical "Cupid." This determination is not entirely fair, in light of the fact that, at some points, The Tempest hints that Miranda and Ferdinand's

love is somehow more secure without the presence of the Venus' "waspish-headed son" (TMP IV.i.99), not to mention the infatuations he instills. In this sense, Prospero is more Cupid's opposite with his qualms about making Ferdinand's prize in the form of his own daughter too light (TMP I.ii.455). Puck, however, only measures a jest in terms of its potential to entertain; and the lighter the better. Whether it be to neigh "in likeness of a filly foal" (MND II.i.46) beguiling the nearest obese horse, or to confute young lovers lost in the woods, or even more absurd, to reroute the Fairy Queen's affections for a changeling child to a lover-ass, the Puck's main characteristic seems to be the absence of any sense of proportion. No stage of love, courtship, nuptial proceeding, or long and eventful marriage is exempt from his meddling and influence. At other times, he is just as happy to mislead "the wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale" (MND II.i.51), particularly when she mistakes him for "a three-foot stool" (MND II.i.52). He unceremoniously slips from her bum when she sits down before a presumably captive audience to spin her modest dramaturgical effects. Here, Robin's transmutive properties are as figurative as they are literal, because he turns two of the "saddest tales" into an occasion for mirth, first the aunt's and then later, the rehearsal of Pyramus and Thisbe.

Fairies' interference was a quick and easy explanation

for negligent servants or maids who spilled milk pans (Thomas 732). Even sexual fatigue could be blamed on a man's somnambulant exploits with none other than the Fairy Queen herself, within his dreams the night before (Thomas 732). But fairies did have an important social role and were indeed "fear'd in field and town" (MND III.ii.398). In the sixteenth century, fairy belief helped to reinforce "some of the standards upon which the effective working of society depended" (Thomas 732). The proverbial assumption that the Fairy Queen hated "sluts and sluttery" (WIV V.V.47), a dirty household, immorality and neglect (Latham 130), helped to keep domestic order among the poorly educated to some degree. In Merry Wives of Windsor, Pistol warns that if fires are left "unrak'd and hearthes unswept" (WIV V.V.45) then maids could expect a pinching until they were "blue as bilberry" (WIV V.V.46). Similarly, Falstaff gets a textbook pinching in the final act in accordance with conventional lore for his moral laxity. He reasons to himself before an advancing front of children dressed as fairies, "he that speaks to them shall die" (WIV V.V.48). Here he attempts to follow the edict that one should never speak directly about or to fairies, which stand as two of the most important folkloric laws of decorum, which govern surprise encounters with elementals. (Latham 128).

Perhaps the most important way that fairies shaped

people's behaviour was in the care of children. When Mercutio says of Queen Mab in Romeo and Juliet, "She is the fairies' midwife" (ROM I.IV.54), he refers to the tradition in which fairies exchange their own infants for human children. The usual motive behind this practice was that fairies wished to preserve and improve their race (Hartland 101). But while this was one way for them to obtain "the milk and fostering care of human mothers for their own offspring" (Hartland 101), the changeling did poorly in the human world only to become ugly, deformed and stupid (Latham 153). A moment's neglect might land a mother or father with an often sick, troublesome "changeling" and this knowledge prompted parents to give special care to their newborns (Thomas 731). Conversely, this folk belief backfired at times and parents occasionally disowned retarded children and blamed the fairies for having stolen their real baby (Thomas 732). But Shakespeare adds a philanthropic dimension to Titania's acquisition of her child. This modification serves to minimize these sometimes unsavory human interests and shifts the audience's empathy and allegiance towards Titania's own loss of "so sweet a changeling" (MND I.i.23).

Even though the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proved the peak dissemination period for information about fairies, this reflects chiefly a growth in literary interest, while general belief remained largely the same (Latham 24).

Fairy belief was not unlike astrology or magic for its closed and "self-confirming character" (Thomas 733) in which every unusual phenomenon had a ready explanation. Latham notes the apparent irony of how Shakespeare's genius to reveal the powers that lie behind the unexplained also hastened the disappearance of fairies as "credible entities" (177). In rendering so thorough a portrayal of fairies as benevolent, diminutive creatures in their private world, he strips them of the power once held by their ancestors. By the Elizabethan Age, fairy lore was "primarily a store of mythology, rather than a corpus of living belief" (Thomas 726).

Endnotes:

1. See C.S. Lewis for commentary on Burton's view (The Discarded Image 138) and Latham's The Elizabethan Fairies (39) for Scot's definition of fairies as devils.

2. Dr. Antony Hammond's helpful suggestion; fairies are certainly more active than the traditional "chorus" implies; they are not reactive, but act on others and supply an alternative perspective in the play through their role as correctives to occasional "misprisions" (Dream, III.ii.90)

3. See Apuleius' The Golden Ass (Tr. Robert Graves; New York: 1950); the Roman noblewoman has roughly vegetative connotations in passages such as "twining her arms tight around my neck" (216); compare this with Titania's phrase: "I will wind thee in my arms" (Dream, IV.i.39).

4. See Northrop Frye, "A Midsummer Night's Dream;" Northrop Frye On Shakespeare (p.38) Shakespeare may have had this episode from Apuleius in mind, although this is doubtful; many critics point out the allegorical connection between Titania and Elizabeth, but as Frye notes, if there were a strong association, Shakespeare's literary career would probably have been over; gone the way of some of his contemporaries like Ben Jonson, who were dragged off to prison for unflattering allegorizations.

5. See Daniel P. Mannix, Those About To Die (New York: Ballantine Books, 1958) for the history of bestiality and sexual perversions practiced in the Roman games.

6. I owe this idea to Dr. Antony Hammond; the pattern of disjointed circumstance enveloping the lovers in the Dream resolves itself only at the behest of Puck, who must embody chaos for his complete indifference towards how the imbroglio will end.

I

THE SUBVERSIVE ASPECT OF FAIRIES

Elementals in A Midsummer Night's Dream make their base of operations the marginal and interstitial region dividing the mundane from the numinous world. Upon entering the mundane, however, they are quickly inculcated in the arbitrariness of romantic love, the temporary suspension of rationality and the power of imagination. Their best attempts at subversion through pranks are meant to render all discriminations between the "real" and the "imaginary" moot. As a result, these previously rival dimensions represented by the Athenian wood and Theseus' court inevitably blend and become co-extensive. Most importantly, fairies' subversion is characterized by their uncanny ability to create "perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon / Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry / Distinguish form" (R2 II.ii.18-20); and elementals excel at manipulating human perspectives in ever-elusive ways.

During the Restoration, Samuel Pepys saw the Dream in 1662 and called it the "the most insipid ridiculous play" that he had ever seen (Pepys, Diary, Vol. III 208). His comment suggests that he could not reconcile the realistic qualities of the production with its antithetical and emblematic

dimensions conveyed by what probably seemed, in his view, to be an endless parade of supernatural beings. But much of the humour of Bottom's character, for example, derives from the ease with which he inverts Pepys's somewhat detached concern that there be at least a semblance of verisimilitude in the proceedings on stage. Bottom's common touch, willingness to suspend disbelief, and characteristic nonchalance over Titania's idolatry, make him a comic figure specifically for the way he reconciles the irreconcilable. The weaver is as much "kidnapped" by fairies in a sense as are the changeling child and the lovers, but takes it in stride so as essentially to be absorbed by this alternative world. Similarly, Hermia is delivered, though with far less acquiescence than Bottom, from one reality as the future prisoner of a "shady cloister" (MND I.i.71), into a fantastic, but inverted "pastoral" adventure. Life is anything but simplified for the lovers when the fantasies of the night and the wood take over. Fairies really only offer Hermia, with their pranks, an indirect recourse from parental authority, and hence time to formulate a response to Theseus' command, "examine well your blood" (MND I.i.68).

In order to see the alternative perspectives which fairies afford as choric figures, imagination is a requisite. Otherwise, fairies work their ways just below the level of conscious human awareness, like Puck transformed into a

crabapple bobbing out of sight in the "gossip's bowl" (MND II.i.47). They also exert their influence, apparently, with an authority that extends beyond the stage to incorporate the audience in order to sway an observer towards incredulity, as in Pepys's case. This almost subliminal aspect of fairy existence finds visual equivalence in the inconspicuous "skull" which occupies the foreground of Hans Holbein's painting, "The Ambassadors" (1533):

Figure 1.

The skull, however, is radically skewed and only apparent when an observer is at a peculiarly acute angle to the work.[1] The male figures depicted in the background are obviously well-attired and rich. Mathematical equipment is present along with

musical instruments and signs of imperialism, such as a Persian rug. These features all serve to reinforce how Europe celebrated an age of optimism, empire building and seemingly limitless expansionism. But the skull says antithetical things about scientific knowledge, wealth and sophistication. An emblem of death, it suggests that the "Great Leveller" awaits, in spite of advances, just outside another visual plane.

What the skull does to challenge human endeavour and indict imperialism is comparable to what fairies do to call into question not only everyday reality, but extraordinary states like love. Instead of inescapable death, of which the skull necessarily reminds us, fairies offer a sense of freedom and escape through the egress of the imagination. But while fairies are traditionally subversive towards the romantic intentions of the young and the innocent, states other than youthfulness and innocence are also subversive towards the existence of elementals. Theseus's court, for example, is the seat of rationality and a place of debate, where imagination is carefully rationed for the most part. Hermia argues her right to maintain the disposition of her "virgin patent" before Theseus, "I would my father look'd but with my eyes" (MND I.i.56), while the Duke proposes converse arguments. What they debate, namely the empathic union between individuals through self-transcendence, ironically requires more imagination than either character is able to liberate.

Theseus' Baconian rationalism and the lovers' conventional Petrarchan approach to love both meet their match, however, in the fairies' slipperiness and curious penchant for disorder. This is not the quasi-legal maneuvering and equivocation that Iago employs to evade detection. The straightforward appreciation of pranks lends to all ranks of preternaturals the ability to divest themselves of responsibility for their subversive acts towards reason and love. But the self-rationalizing rhetoric employed by Othello's nemesis in his attempts to expiate himself, does apply equally well to fairies: "what's he then, that says I play the villain?" (OTH II.iii.327). For example, we are seldom allowed to lose sight of the fact that "A merrier hour was never wasted there" (MND II.i.57) whenever Puck effects a seemingly calculated "misprision" (MND III.ii.90) involving the lovers. Although penitent for his misidentification of Demetrius when carrying out Oberon's orders to apply the love-juice to the eyes of one wearing "Athenian garments" (MND II.i.264), Puck is best pleased by "All those things.../ That befall prepost'rously" (MND III.ii.120-121).

Their love of pranks disqualifies fairies from assuming any kind of typical choric role in the Dream. Elementals cannot be relied upon to express, for example, traditional moral and social attitudes, because they invariably prey upon conventionality. An apt definition of the

unorthodox choric function of the fairies is supplied by Stephano in The Tempest. Shakespeare almost parodies his own blueprint for the kind of subversion which fairies employ to generate often ironic perspectives in the Dream, when Stephano tries to make sense of the "strange bed-fellows" (MND II.ii.41), Trinculo and Caliban, who are huddled together under a gaberdine during the storm, "His forward voice, now, is to speak well of his friend; his backward voice is to utter foul speeches and to detract" (MND II.ii.92-93). That which is espoused as truth in the Dream, whether it be Theseus' conclusions involving the fictive nature of fairy stories, or Helena's equally convincing views on the transforming qualities of love, are eventually undercut by fairies. As an audience, we are never allowed to hold onto any truths for long. For example, although Puck fulfils a basic choric function when he delivers the epilogue to the Dream, his ironic exposition on the audience's unknowing participation in the theme of "life as dream" widens the scope of his role as a simple commentator on character.

The chorus of fairies in the Dream is free, then, to conjure up all kinds of suggestive and metaphorical instances of "enforced chastity" (MND III. ii.193), as well as illusions that play with truths uncomfortably close to the human heart. For example, Hermia has an intuitive glimpse at the impending and disruptive results of fairy intervention in her dream of

the serpent (MND II.ii.145). Although she is, of course, a pre-Christian figure we cannot miss the metaphorical significance of the snake as a symbol of the potential loss of innocence, which awaits her in the adult world of experience. Even though the dream suggests her very real unconscious fears involving Lysander's fidelity, fairies supply a buffer zone in which these adult concerns are reduced to mere shadows of the real thing by virtue of the illusions induced through magic herbs. If Hermia harbours doubts about the viability and integrity of romantic love, her "serpents" are completely symbolic and the product of that part of the mind and imagination that Theseus warns about in his most important speech (MND V.i.2 ff.).

In addition to this, Hermia recognizes neither the dream's vaguely prescient qualities especially in terms of the romantic imbroglios to come, nor its ultimately harmless character. Even though Lysander tells her that he will shake her from him "like a serpent" (MND III.ii. 261) to fulfil the dream's prefigurative dimension, we know the magic herb is responsible for his words. This potentially terrifying aspect of imagination is not at all mitigated, but merely intensified, by the way that Hermia, when frightened by the snake, momentarily fulfils her role as Titania's terrestrial double. Hermia's nightmare inverts the fairy tale quaintness of Titania's sleep scene (MND II.ii.1), because she lacks the

protection of fairies' spells which keep "spotted snakes with double tongue" (MND II.ii.9) from the sleeping Queen. Bordering on adulthood, Hermia will inevitably meet with other fears than just those generated by nightmares, as suggested by the death of Titania's votaress during childbirth (MND II.i.135).

While fairies threaten reality by their capacity to eliminate a single, focused perspective for judging events, romantic love, under ideal circumstances, goes to the opposite extreme as an organizing principle. Helena notes, "Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity" (MND I.i.232-233). Fairies and romantic love, however, do share a common denominator: belief in each involves elements of the irrational. Bottom's point that "reason and love / keep little company together nowadays" (MND III.i.138) suggests that in his view the true organizing principle behind successful relationships, at least in the past but certainly not now, has been the proper mix of reason and love. But at times, Theseus certainly embodies reason, even though he is also a lover, and, Hippolyta exemplifies the stability of mature love in spite of her status as the queen of a man-hating race, the Amazons. What Bottom is unaware of is the knowledge that fairies interpose different levels of awareness so as to refute one tangible reality concerning love. Titania, for example, personifies how love's

irrationality derives from unwarranted attempts to transform the mundane (or even the grotesque, in Bottom's case) into the extraordinary.

Helena's ideal concerning the transmutative power of love, then, is not only parodied by the farcical romantic intrigue between the weaver-ass and Titania, but is also the emotional staple underlying Theseus' very real commitment to marriage which is apparent in his promissory remarks to Hippolyta before the nuptial, "I woo'd thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries; / But I will wed thee in another key" (MND I.i.16-18). That Helena can contemplate such an ideal does not mean, of course, it can be easily realized as she would hope. Kott holds that her soliloquy on love (MND I.i.226-251) is beyond the intellectual scope of her character and really a convenient vehicle for Shakespeare's own comment (223). But this view is not in keeping with how the play explores the nature of idolatry and idealism. For example, just as quickly as she conceives of it, Helena promptly translates this abstract truth involving dignity (MND I.i.233) into practical terms by betraying Hermia's confidence when she decides to tell Demetrius of her friend's flight from Athens (MND I.i.246).

If anything, fairies are the playwright's way of deflating the pretensions of those who embrace simply conventional, and hence, unmerited ideals. When Theseus bids

Philostrate to stir up the young people of Athens and find some entertainment for the court (MND I.i.12), there is no coincidence that Egeus' company should enter even while the Duke offhandedly calls for the "nimble spirit of mirth" -- Puck (MND I.i.13). The impending and characteristically Petrarchan conflict between the lovers is, of course, the real entertainment. Egeus begins by introducing the theme of impressionable imagination through his testimony of Hermia's disobedience. But he uses a rhetorical pattern that anticipates Puck's language. The items with which Lysander allegedly stole the impression of Hermia's fantasies are given in rapid-fire succession by Egeus, "hair, gauds, conceits, / Knacks, trifles, nosegays, [and] sweetmeats" (MND I.i.33-34). Puck supplies an alternative inventory of things which procure disaffection between lovers, at least figuratively, when he breaks up the rehearsal of Pyramus and Thisbe, "And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn, / Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire" (MND III.i.109-111).

To maintain such close linguistic correspondence between characters and yet set the content of their speeches at odds to one another illustrates not only Shakespeare's skill to "develop the artifice which conceals art" (Brennan 126), but the play's ability to question the values of Egeus' paternalism in a very light-handed way. This artifice smooths and subtlely mitigates the jolt an audience experiences when

following the movements between the mundane and the preternatural world, while it gives neither of these worlds any real precedence or sway. Shakespeare thereby attempts to safeguard against alienating theatre-goers like Pepys, while maintaining the distinct existential boundaries that distinguish the court from fairyland. The "otherness" of the fairy world is also made more familiar to us when we as an audience share in the collective fairy response to the lovers' Petrarchanism. Puck's judgement on this feature of courtship is clear. When he engineers the classic Petrarchan situation designed to pit unrequited lovers, in the largely interchangeable figures of Lysander and Demetrius, against an unapproachable lady in Helena, he says, "What fools these mortals be" (MND III.ii.115). The sixteenth century's appreciation of illusionism thrived on paradox, and the unique freshness of the fairy milieu in the Dream is indeed paradoxical when compared to the old routines and well-choreographed roles played out by the lovers. When Hermia is told that she must either marry Demetrius or die according to Athenian law (MND I.i.118), the conceit which follows between herself and Lysander is, from our perspective, an absurd exchange:

> Lys. How now my love? Why is your cheek so pale?
> How chance the roses there do fade so fast?
> Her. Belike for want of rain, which I could well
> Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.
> (MND I.i.128-131)

The passage's comic inappropriateness stems from our sense that the intensity of the moment should somehow demand more than clichéd and traditional love language. Lysander's explanatory comment, "Ay me! For aught that I could ever read, / Could ever hear by tale or history, / The course of true love never did run smooth" (MND I.i.132-134), is meant to validate the authenticity of their potentially tragic situation, but really defeats itself for the way it fictionalizes love. The couple takes the opportunity to act out the romance scenes that they have each read about in books and poetry. Here the humour is one of the formal properties of the verse as Hermia and Lysander employ the common Petrarchan device of fixating upon an unavailable party on which to focus their emotions, but here, of course, they double the effect as each competes with the other by using what they assume is the most persuasive language. These lovers clearly enjoy this highly stylized, emotional and melodramatic exchange in spite of themselves.

Everything that is said about love, however, seems to have invisible quotation marks around it. Even Lysander's metaphor of the river, although probably not a cliché at the time, sounds decidedly proverbial and essentially distances us from the couple with its hint of parody. Conversely, Helena and Demetrius invert this Petrarchan formula of unrequited love made worse by an intransigent lady, as when she pursues

him into a brake and suggests an alternative courtship, "Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase" (MND II.i.231). Part of the humour arises from the fact that none of Helena and Demetrius' obstacles to love even fit into the list of lovers' troubles inventoried by Lysander and Hermia. But even though the situation is reversed, the same erudite reliance on the pre-established conventions of fiction dominates their reluctant colloquy in the form of a Renaissance romance version of Greek myth.

Bottom, in accordance with his name, sets the very limit to which the human and fairy world can interpenetrate one another before the resultant mental astigmatism clears, and they can be seen for what they are -- separate and distinct. How far these worlds overlap before generating a need in Bottom for recourse to conventional explanations for the "unknown" is an implicit test of his mettle. The weaver's "natural" reflex to consult the almanac for moonshine (MND III.i.50), when confronted with the alternative of merely artificial means of lighting for the production of "Pyramus and Thisbe," suggests rather orthodox thinking. At this point, his desire to make the stage set as real as possible is humorous, not only for the way it defeats the purpose of theatre, but in its creative clash with his later incessant demands for strict artificiality. In his quick and easy pursuit of naturalism, he unknowingly does for the production,

in a sense, what Lysander and Demetrius do for romance when they resort to pat language, but in the opposite direction. While the lovers are made comical by their refusal to employ natural speech in order to woo, (perhaps in the way Romeo and Juliet revamp traditional love language),[2] Bottom only finds a real creative hiatus when he turns to imaginative and artificial solutions for bringing the wall, moon and lion on stage. Compared with Bottom's theatrical innovations, Lysander's attempts to consult "love's richest book" (MND II.ii.121) which he finds in Helena's eyes seems an evasion.

Fairies toy with Petrarchan conventions on other levels as well and give substance to the theme of the transience of love by their use of the juice extracted from the flower known as "'love-in-idleness'" (MND II.i.178): "The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid, / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it see" (MND II.i.170-173). The specificity of what the love juice does is contrasted with the random results of its effects. This essentially undercuts, with its sheer simplicity, the carefully contrived mechanicalism of Petrarchan eye contact[3], and then subsequent transfer of visual stimuli to the heart which, in turn, initiates emotional response in the observer. Gone are the narrative passivity and irresolution of passages such as, "Love found me weak, completely without arms, / With the way clear from the eyes to the heart, / For they are doors

of fears and halls of harms" (Petrarch, Sonnets and Songs III). And as Lewis notes, any "model" will "be abandoned if a more ingenious person thinks of a supposal which would 'save' the observed phenomena with still fewer assumptions" (16). For example, Shakespeare's very old folkloric model of love based on herbs stays within the general framework of Renaissance theories of love involving the connection between the eyes and the heart. But it modifies the Petrarchan version first by its directness, and second, for the way the love juice creates a "perspective" on a physical level through changing what the eye perceives.[4]

Shakespeare's model also bumps aside Castiglione's stairway of perceptual ascent in which an observer's physical response to beauty initiates ascent towards an all-encompassing moral and intellectual perception (Castiglione, Courtier, Book IV 1-30B). Even when Titania offers Bottom spiritual existence (MND III.i.153), he is more interested in a good scratch and a sweet "bottle of hay" (MND IV.i.33). Similarly, the best that the lovers can do is glut their speeches with the scavenged bits of Petrarchan clichés:

> That pure congealed white, high Taurus' snow,
> Fann'd with the eastern wind, turns to crow
> When thou holds't up thy hand.
> (MND III.ii.141-143)

Despite Demetrius' circumlocution and "superpraise," he does eventually express his fascination for the whiteness of

Helena's hand. In this sense, he is not as absurd as Flute, the Bellows-mender, playing the role of Thisbe in celebration of the Duke's nuptial. Flute mixes up all of the usual morphological cues which the Petrarchan lover generally uses for emotional direction, while he stands above an almost certainly inebriated Pyramus played by Bottom, "These lily lips, / This cherry nose, / These yellow cowslip cheeks," (MND V.i.317-319) and further on, "His eyes were green as leeks" (MND V.i.322).

The leitmotif of the cherries forms the common Petrarchan thread throughout these scenes. In Demetrius' oration to convince Helena of his love, he supplies the original passage which Flute's character parodies, "Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!" (MND III.ii.140). The image of the "double cherry," (MND III.ii.209) is also the mutual symbol of choice with which Hermia and Helena characterize their now strained childhood friendship. Fairies are at the core, then, of a silent plot to play off Demetrius and Lysander's status as essentially indistinguishable Petrarchan lovers against the violent process of individuation separating Hermia and Helena. The girls' singular "union in partition" (MND III.ii.210) gives way to as many figurative transformations as Puck is capable of actual ones. At different times and from one character's perspective or another, Helena is a "bear" (MND II.i.93), a "spaniel" (MND

II.i.205), a "maypole" (MND III.ii.286) and a "dove" (MND II.ii.112). Hermia exhibits similar breadth in terms of figurative shapes such as a "vixen" (MND III.ii.324), a "raven" (MND II.ii.113), a "cat" (MND III.ii.360) and a "serpent" (MND III.ii.261). Helena feels the effects of this separation acutely as when finally alone and fixed within one identity she laments her own companionship, "Steal me awhile from mine own company" (MND III.ii.436).

The evidence of these shapes is more often than not unflattering to the girls and suggests the fairies' collective refutation of Helena's original ideal that love can transpose vile things to dignified and pleasing forms. Even though Oberon exhibits a degree of concern for the lovers when, through Puck's mistakes, "Some true love turn'd, and not a false turn'd true" (MND III.ii.91), he reverses his position when it comes to Titania. Ironically, even while fairies actively pursue their role as the fickle entities responsible for the instability of love, this pursuit originally stems, albeit indirectly, from Titania's genuine love for the changeling child. Oberon is not so much concerned about "injury" (MND II.i.147) to his chain of command, when Titania refuses to pass the child over to him, as he is threatened by the prospect of her human loyalties. He is only able to maintain a kind of reciprocity in so far as he can balance the Queen's love of Theseus with his own for his "buskin'd

mistress and warrior love" Hippolyta (MND II.i.71). The changeling tips the distribution of power towards Titania.

Bottom is able to function amid this kind of fairy intrigue without the usual "madness" that comes of contacting elementals. He does better in this regard than other characters, because of his rough-and-readiness. He almost invents the concept of "Negative Capability" independently of Keats when he experiences no need to chase after "fact and reason" while in the ethereal presence of Titania and her affections. He can hold out longer than the lovers in terms of their tendency to buckle under to conventionalism, because he lacks social knowledge. His nature is essentially anti-Petrarchan, which is especially evident when he suggests "tongs and the bones" (MND IV.i.29) instead of, say, harps when Titania inquires about his musical tastes. Only when Bottom awakes from his dream does he reach out for conventional sources to help him express what has just transpired in the Queen's bower:

> The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no Bottom;
>
> (MNDIV.i.209-215)

This parody of I Corinthians, ii.9 compares with Flute's portrayal of Thisbe (MND V.i.317), which is also

marked by much confused reference to the senses. Bottom surmises that the Bible is a text which employs language sufficient to capture the sublimity of religious experience. For safe measure, however, he reminds himself to have the whole incident commemorated in ballad form. His failure to follow through on this desire to translate the experience of fairies into poetry seems an implicit indictment of the power of art to capture essential events. What could be more the stuff of poetry than an afternoon with Titania? But when Bottom succumbs to pursuing an external authority in the Bible, the labyrinth of the Athenian wood begins to suggest the inescapable and pre-established conventions governing our waking lives that come down to us through fiction, plays and drama. If Bottom's dream is a momentary escape from this labyrinth then his awakening is unquestionably a false one. He loses his character-trademark, namely unassuming casualness, for the first time upon waking and his immediate response to the dream is not unlike Caliban's wish "to dream again" (TMP III.ii.141) when he is in contact with the pleasures afforded by fairies. This marks a significant victory for elementals. Bottom's "most rare vision" (MND IV.i.203) not only insinuates a concern for the illusion wrought by fairies, but promotes imagination as an alternative principle for organizing experience. This principle compares in power to the genuine love between Theseus and Hippolyta,

everyday reality and, because Bottom does not ultimately need to transform the experience into a poem, art itself.

The lovers are, of course, oblivious to this allegorical dimension of the wood. Lysander and Demetrius think of the territory outside of Athens in terms of its deceptive geographic expanse, particularly when they try to find "plainer ground" (MND III.ii.404) on which to fight. The forest for Helena is just one more place in which Demetrius scandalizes her sex as "in the temple, in the town, the field" (MND II.ii.240). These feelings of persecution and paranoia -- that she is the butt of a cruel joke at the others' expense -- are exacerbated because Helena takes her eloquent reflections on love seriously: "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, / And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind" (MND I.ii.234-235). Hermia is similarly articulate about the role of the senses, but when they are at work under physical rather than emotional or mental circumstances, "Dark night, that from the eye his function takes, / The ear more quick of apprehension makes" (MND III.ii.177-178). But each apparently rational statement is really an example of how language and reason falsely empower the speaker without necessarily shedding light on her true situation; and more importantly, on the supernatural forces which reshape human perception in the wood. Always the opportunist, for example, Oberon merely commandeers the herb from Cupid which is

responsible for evoking love (MND II.i.165). This provides impunity for Venus' son from Helena's charge that he taps unconscious fantasies so as to blind us. For all her eloquence, fairies even strip her of the knowledge that she is in error about the origins of love in this immediate case. Similarly, even though the knowledge that darkness will pay "hearing double recompense" (MND III.ii.180) gives Hermia a momentary sense of orientation in locating Lysander, she cannot know that the "quaint mazes in the wanton green / For lack of tread are indistinguishable" (MND II.i.99-100) as a result of fairy discord. All of the lovers are more lost than they think, because fairies subvert human intentionality in both the phenomenal and noumenal realms. Here, they indirectly erase the metaphorical "map" in the form of forest paths by which the lovers might distinguish the conventionalism of their ways from the unequivocally "new" so as to escape the wood.

Dramaturgical imperatives require that Theseus' court be a sharp contrast to the world that the lovers come to know in the forest. The Duke uses much more stolid and reserved metaphors when talking about love. In considering the nature of desire, he likens the moon as an old "step-dame or a dowager / Long withering out a young man's revenue" (MND I.i.5-6). This reference to spousal intransigence is inverted by Lysander's suggestion to Hermia that they run away to be

married at the house of his "widow aunt, a dowager / Of great revenue" (MND I.i.157-158). Theseus' approach to love is also much more earthy and realistic. He spends no time gazing at the moon like the young lovers might, but wishes it to pass quickly so as to appease his desires. And, of course, Hippolyta harbours no secret sentimentality for the moon either, particularly when she wishes to see it get off the stage as quickly as possible during the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play (MND V.i.341). More importantly, Theseus' speech, beginning "Go Philostrate, / Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments" (MND I.i.11), is, in general, far more naturalistic than anything that the lovers come to say later. His lines are end-stopped, halting and broken in a way that brings to mind how real language is spoken and suggests less the performance voice of an actor.

While we might enter the Athenian wood rather pensively, only to find that the free reign of imagination awaiting us there has always existed in a mostly dormant and oblique perspective of our mental faculties, Theseus experiences the "western valley" (MND IV.i.106) merely as a place to hunt and listen to his musical hounds. The function of the court is to resist anarchy of any kind and imagination is perhaps the purest form of anarchy. The Dream not only constitutes a literary revolt against Theseus' conception of reality, but reflects this schism within the inevitable

misunderstanding between two worlds in which there are spoken different poetic languages. His "More strange than true" (MND V.i.2) speech is perhaps the best example of how language reflects the rational and ordered world of the court, but more importantly, his are not just reasonable sounding arguments, like those proposed by Demetrius and Lysander to convince the girls of their love. Theseus begins in an almost apologetic manner, "I never may believe these antic fables, nor these fairy toys" (MND V.i.1-2). As a line of poetry, this is neatly balanced off giving equal weight to "antic fables" and "fairy toys," but both items register as weightless on Theseus' scale of belief. The use of the word "toys" suggests he regards the role of fairies as one of utter childishness. The speech continues:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> (MND V.i.4-6)

Here, "seething brains" is contrasted with "cool reason" and "apprehend" is counterbalanced against "comprehend" so as to lend a air of equanimity. With the choice of the latter pair of words, Theseus expresses his sense of the difference between how one is passively arrested by a perception as opposed to the active pursuit of understanding. This dichotomy in perception is ironic, of course, in that "seething brains" can take one in the form of imagination where "cool reason"

cannot hope to follow.

The Duke's rationalism is meant to redress and minimize fairies' reputed subversion by relegating them to the imaginary world alone; a realm reserved for "poor fancy's followers" (MND I.i.155). His explanation of fantasy and his passion for order bring him to a profound conclusion, "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact" (MND V.i.7-8). But even for its perspicacity, Theseus' speech is decidedly evasive for the way he attempts to exempt himself from the group. The audience sees easily enough that he is neither a "lunatic" nor a "lovesick fool," but it is less clear how he is not a poet while obviously employing some of the finest language in the play. After all, he not only uses verse in a highly authoritative and insightful manner, but possesses a power of language and depth of thought unmatched by any other character. At the same time, however, his sagacious and astute observations are to imagination what Touchstone's truthful motto, "The fool doth think he is wise" (AYL V.i.30), is to wisdom. The very psychology that Theseus uses to exclude himself from the group cuts both ways making him akin to the "fool," unaware of his foolishness for having inadvertently revealed the atrophy of his own imagination. The Duke's explanation of why his imagination cannot reach farther than to "amend" the performance of the mechanicals (MND V.i.209) is made through

indirect reference to the symbols of fantasy in the play, fairies:

> Such tricks hath strong imagination,
> That if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy:
> Or, in the night, imagining some fear,
> How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!
> (MND V.i.18-22)

The repetitive use of the words "apprehend" (MND V.i.5)/(MND V.i.19) and "comprehends" (MND V.i.6)/(MND V.i.20) serves as a logical introduction and subsequent conclusion to his persuasive address on what he considers to be the lovers' fictive account of fairies. This does not mean, however, that Theseus disbelieves the existence of fairies. Oberon hints about a relationship between Titania and Theseus in which she made Theseus "break his faith, / With Ariadne and Antiopa" (MND II.i.79-80). Further, Theseus' suggestion of the sublime in how "imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown" (MND V.i.14-15) echoes Sir Philip Sidney's comparable sentiment that whatsoever poets write "proceeds of a divine fury" ("The Defence of Poesy," line 9B, The Renaissance In England 624).[5] But even while the playwright endows Theseus with language that is more than capable of projecting the well-known Renaissance confidence in art, Shakespeare undercuts this sense of security by also giving him as limited a perspective on events as that occupied by any other character.

In defence of Theseus, equally much depends on our ability to see him as more than a representational sceptic. To misuse the hindsight that the play affords us, to condemn a character who misses the point of the very play he takes part in, is an absurdity that even Bottom could not reconcile. Rather, Theseus' uniqueness as a character depends on the audience's capacity to discern his poetic "voice" from other 'voices' on stage. His persuasiveness as a character is what serves in part to affirm the very things that he denies through his negative intuitions, namely, the tricks of strong imagination. By the same token, however, even though the Dream affirms imagination and makes us laugh at lost opportunities to enjoy it, Theseus' truths concerning the imaginary realm are no less true. For Shakespeare to show that the Duke is aware of using poetry, or better, the language of the imagination, in order to affront the imaginary, would be to punch through to our reality too early. This final irony is reserved for Puck (MND V.i.411).

In accordance with his desire for exclusion from the group whose members are distinguished by their unbridled fantasies (MND V.i.7), Theseus resists definition in his own way as much as do elementals. As a figure of Greek legend, he is somewhat larger than life, but also shares the same status of "outsider" that Jaques maintains through his melancholy in As You Like It. His weakness for melancholy disqualifies him

from the celebration of "man and wife as friends" in the same way that Theseus' captive imagination limits his participation in the fantastic. Theseus does accept the fantasy of the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play, but draws the line at the lovers' account of fairies. Further, Jaques' exposition on the seven stages of man (AYL II.vii.139) parallels Theseus' array of negative intuitions denying the fiction of the lovers' fairy stories. But both speeches serve to undercut precisely what each respective character holds to be true. Just as the latter uses poetry stealthily to actually expose the "poet" in himself, the former has the substance of his most important speech undercut by the entrance of Adam in the very next scene. Adam is, of course, not "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste" (AYL II.vii.166) as he is about to sit down to a meal that we assume he fully intends to enjoy.

Theseus belongs to the Dream in an organic way that accommodates his inclusion to part of the implicit "celebration" of imagination carried out by fairies, but only through means hidden to him. Dramatic irony itself serves the apparent prime directive of elementals, to subvert the rational, through a capacity to dissolve the barriers between imagination and reality. The audience inevitably comes to question its monopoly on the experience of theatre vis-a-vis the fantasy played out on stage. As Theseus finishes his discourse which reduces the effects of imagination to a neat

causal equation, he is witness to the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play performed by the mechanicals. He is a character within a play watching a fiction about love, and enjoys ironies at the expense of the players. But we are also witness, as an audience within a theatre, to a fiction about love within a play about love as fiction. With the addition of the extra play, Theseus and his retinue join us, in a sense, within the audience. If they are not to "displace" us from our seats, as it were, we must either remain rigidly aware of being now twice removed from the stage through irony, or we change our perspective on theatre and are drawn further into the fantasy of the Dream. For example, only an emblem of "airy nothing" (MND V.i.16) itself in the figure of Puck could break-up the rehearsal of "Hard-handed men" (MND V.i.72), who unknowingly force both us and Theseus to "amend" their performance because of the profound shortcomings of their gross theatrical inventions in the form of the wall, lion and moon.[6] If these elaborate and humorously overstated theatrical devices, invented by Quince's acting company, supply a fulcrum on which to balance our responses against those generated within Theseus' court, then fairies are the next challenge for the imagination to ensure our fullest participation in the play.

Endnotes:

1. I owe this idea to Dr. C. Belsey; her lecture, "Medieval Versus 19th Century Perspectives in Art and Painting" (McMaster University, Sept. 11, 1986), dealt with "The Ambassadors" as England's first illusionistic painting and its applications for the Dream as a visual equivalent to Shakespeare's depiction of rival perspectives.

2. Juliet diverts Romeo's Petrarchan preoccupation and interest in Rosaline with refreshing and straightforward language that gets to the point: "Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny / What I have spoke. But farewell, compliment. / Dost thou love me?" (ROM II.ii.88-90).

3. Dr. Antony Hammond's suggestion; the herb disrupts the visual end of the Petrarchan model for love because it inordinately intensifies the visual messages going to the heart; but the herb explanation of love wins hands down for its simplicity when compared with the rather complex and essentially hydraulic Petrarchan version;

4. Dr. Hammond suggests that the Petrarchan model of love is extra-physical; normal perceptions generated in the eyes eventually translate into spiritual responses, but Oberon's herbs change the physical aspect of the eye to modify the perception enroute to the heart.

5. Professor Hammond suggests that Shakespeare may have read The Defence of Poesy because of the Lucianic way in which Theseus' speech promotes as much as it condemns imagination.

6. See Dr. Antony Hammond; "'It must be your imagination then': the Prologue and the Plural Text in Henry V and Elsewhere;" "Fanned and Winnowed Opinions". Ed. John W. Mahon, Thomas A. Pendleton. New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1987. 133.

II

CAPTURING THE "THEATRICAL MOMENT"

In The Tempest, Ariel utilizes his powers as an elemental in diverse ways. He performs an essentially dual role as Prospero's preternatural stage-hand. First, he physically manages Ferdinand's courtship of Miranda when he disperses the King's party about the isle, and second, plays various parts as an occasional "actor" such as a "nymph o'th'sea" (TMP I.ii. 301), Ceres (TMP IV.i.166) and a Harpy (TMP III.iii.83). In this sense, Ariel realizes, in action, Puck's unfulfilled wish to be "an actor too perhaps" (MND III.i.76). Ariel also effectively balances the romance between the young, shipwrecked lovers with Prospero's more serious desire for revenge on his enemies -- Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio. In his attempt to fulfil his debt to Prospero, for having procured his release and "made gape / The pine" (TMP I.ii.292-293), Ariel accepts the duty of service as his "familiar" towards the learned Prospero. In turn, Ariel must carry out Prospero's orders if he is to secure his freedom to evade human contact and chase "After summer merrily" (TMP V.i.92). Unlike the Dream, then, it is this unity between Ariel and Prospero which not only makes the worlds of spirit and human harmonious on the isle, but The Tempest, as a text,

anything but "subversive" towards the central themes of love and marriage. Furthermore, the distinguishing qualities and usual characteristics of English fairies, which meet full-blown in Puck, are not as paramount to the action of The Tempest as they are to the proceedings of the Dream.

Although Latham rightly argues that Shakespeare had already broken from tradition in many ways with his innovations concerning fairies in the Dream, the playwright further modified those elements, which he first made popular in this play, when he wrote The Tempest. For example, Bottom is released after his abduction by elementals with only temporary disorientation to show for it, whereas if he had stumbled on their precursors in folklore, he would have been permanently deprived of reason thereafter (Latham 184). Prospero is specific, however, in questioning Ariel about the mental status of the King's crew and company after the attack on the ship. He asks, "Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil / Would not infect his reason" (TMP I.ii.207-208) when Ariel discloses the details of his pyrotechnical feats. Ariel reassures him that the boundaries between human "reality" and lunacy remain securely taut and that no man went insane, "But all felt a fever of the mad" (TMP I.ii.209). Similarly, according to traditional lore, Titania's private concerns and motherly care for the changeling child are not in keeping with the usually violent practice of abducting children among

fairies (Latham 183). But Miranda is not at risk from abduction by elementals like the Indian boy of the Dream (MND II.i.22). Shakespeare turns from this aspect of fairy lore, first to the political intrigue germane to Prospero's loss of his dukedom, and second, his impending "sea-sorrow" (TMP I.ii.170). Prospero also ensures that elementals and human vulnerability during sleep remain exclusive of one another, as when he lulls Miranda into a "good dulness" (TMP I.ii.185) before calling on Ariel to materialize. Here, it is Prospero who is in control of her sleep, which contrasts with the way that the fairies in the Dream control the sleep of the lovers. At the same time, however, Ariel does possess all the typical fairy "tricks" that induce sleep, which is evident when he reveals to Prospero, "The mariners all under hatches stow'd; / Who, with a charm join'd to there suffer'd labour, I have left asleep" (TMP I.ii.230-232).

Though Ariel divides up the King's company "In troops... 'bout the isle" (TMP I.ii.220) and leads members of Stephano's lascivious band astray, according to the fairies' traditional hatred of the unchaste (Latham 130), his actions are always endowed with a sense of higher purpose than any of those carried out by elementals in the Dream. For example, the unmistakable resemblance between aspects associated with the instability of romantic love and the ontology of fairies makes these things largely interchangeable in the Dream. Both love

and fairies are "momentary as a sound / Swift as a shadow, short as any dream / And brief as the lightning in the collied night" (MND I.i.143-145). What Ariel brings to this elusive spontaneity is a "sense of proportion" derived from simultaneous awareness of everything that goes on in the isle. Whereas Oberon is devoid of foreknowledge and seemingly unsure of the simplest of things, such as "if Titania be awak'd" (MND III.ii.1) or not, Ariel makes "no mistakings" (TMP I.ii.248) during his duties, because of his ubiquitous knowledge of events. When Ariel recounts to Prospero how he generated "flam'd amazement" (TMP I.ii.198) among the ship's crew, his language is imbued with a clarity of purpose which not only ironically anticipates Prospero's "renunciation" speech (TMP V.i.33), but conveys a sense of almost Old Testament justice, rather than the prankish response of elementals found in the Dream:

> Jove's lightnings, the precursors
> O'th' dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
> And sight-outrunning were not: the fire and cracks
> Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
> Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,
> Yea, his dread trident shake
>
> (TMPI.ii.201-206)

The fairies of the Dream firmly ground their theurgic activities in the "fantastic" to subvert human intentionality, emotional discrimination and self-conscious awareness. This tripartite subversion arises from the fairies' capacity to tinge all human proceedings which take place in the Athenian

wood with the unreality of dreams. Whereas the pervasive and "Contagious fogs" (MND II.i.90) in the Dream visually signal the suspension of rationality, Prospero and Ariel work closely to uncloud human perception in The Tempest. When Prospero commissions Ariel to deliver Alonso's company from the purgatorial "line-grove" (TMP V.i.10), he remarks, "Melting to darkness, so their rising senses / Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle / Their clearer reason" (TMP V.i.66-68). Here, the metaphor of dissipating fog recalls and perhaps counteracts the perennial assortment of optically-based delusions which underpin much of the fairies' subversion in the Dream. It also seems appropriate that "ignorant fumes" (TMP V.i.67) should give way to clear air, of which we know Ariel is composed not only thanks to his name, but as Prospero observes when commenting on Ariel's concerns for the king's entourage, "Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling / Of their afflictions" (TMP V.i.21-22).

This fundamental discrepancy between the role of elementals in the two plays suggests these are distinct generic differences between Puck and Ariel. For example, Caliban is the only one who directly refers to Ariel as a "fairy." After Ariel leads the conspirators into the "filthy-mantled pool" (TMP IV.i.182), however, Trinculo castigates Caliban for his seeming misidentification of this elemental, "Monster, your fairy, which you say is a harmless fairy, has

done little better than played the Jack with us" (TMP IV.i.196-197). Whether Caliban is privy to knowledge concerning Ariel's nature, or just wishes to minimize the extent of Ariel's influence by calling him a "fairy" for the purpose of spurring his conspirators on to action, is not known. But, judging from Caliban's unmistakably fearful reaction to Trinculo (whom he takes, incidentally, for a "spirit" (TMP II.ii.15) and not a "fairy" during their surprise encounter on an island path), would seem to confirm the latter possibility. More importantly, although Prospero commands the gamut of elementals in The Tempest, which includes "elves" (TMP V.i.33), "demi-puppets" (TMP V.i.36), "meaner ministers" (TMP III.iii.87) and "sleepers" (i.e ghosts) (TMP V.i.49), he never refers to Ariel as a "fairy." Instead, Prospero uses vague terms of endearment such as, "my brave spirit" (TMP I.ii.206), "my tricksy spirit" (TMP V.i.226) and "Spirit, fine spirit" (TMP I.ii.421), but avoids more telling appellations that might help to specify Ariel's category among preternaturals.

Ferdinand, for example, does not have time to plumb the mystery surrounding Ariel's status as an undefined elemental when he leaps from the burning wreck, "'Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here'" (TMP I.ii.214). He naturally assumes that a decidedly cryptic event is occurring and that devils are responsible. More importantly, the scope

of Ariel's influence over the physical element, fire, prompts Ferdinand to conclude that the supernatural attack on the vessel must be carried out by more than one "devil." Kott's argument that Puck's ability to multiply himself suggests a strong connection between elementals and devilry (216) applies equally well to Ariel's capacity to "burn in many places" at once (TMP I.ii.199). Stephano independently concurs with Ferdinand about Ariel's "demonic" potential when he acknowledges the presence of an invisible entity responsible for alluring, but disembodied pipe and tabor music, "if thou beest a devil, tak't as thou list" (TMP III.ii.128). But Ariel's torment and imprisonment within "a cloven pine' (TMP I.ii.277) not only gives him a capacity to empathize with human pain, but endows him with a rudimentary conscience, which counterbalances his ties to "black" magic as a former agent of the witch, Sycorax. The way in which his "groans / Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts / Of ever-angry bears" (MND I.ii.287-289) adds an emotional dimension to Ariel's suffering that remains clearly outside the realm of experience of which the fairies in the Dream reveal. Understandably, Lewis notes that Ariel is "a figure incomparably more serious than any in the Dream" (134), and Sylvia Plath uses the episode of Ariel's entrapment within the pine as the basis for her study of solipsism and isolation in the poem, "Ariel" (Ariel 36).

The ambiguity concerning Ariel's essential nature serves dramaturgically to prevent the audience from drawing conclusions about elementals too quickly, perhaps in the way that Ferdinand and Stephano are forced to do out of sheer desperation. In plays like Ben Jonson's Volpone or The Fox, we are clearly meant to judge the character of the "magnifico" from the very first scene by the decidedly bizarre company he keeps in Nano (i.e. a dwarf), Castrone (i.e. a eunuch), and Androgyno (i.e. a hermaphrodite). But Ariel's abstruseness inevitably complicates our efforts to disentangle Prospero's motives for revenge from his growing desires to reform his enemies -- Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio. As a psychological extension of Prospero, Ariel's elusiveness and power to incorporate elements of "black" and "white" magic are effective vehicles with which Shakespeare suggests the magician's rival motivations. For example, Briggs notes that malignant fairies were thought to solicit the allegiance of particularly susceptible people in order to obtain human help for their theurgical pursuits, and thereby turn them in the process to exponents of "black" magic as either witches or magicians (Briggs, Anatomy 100). The punishment for refusing to lend aid to an evil fairy bent on disrupting the human world was bodily paralysis (Briggs, Anatomy 100). Both Ariel and Prospero extensively appropriate this theurgical technique to induce one form of "immobility" or another in almost

everyone that they come in contact with, while Prospero decides between revenge or reform. For example, the way in which Prospero employs Ariel to choreograph the meeting between Miranda and Ferdinand, so the young lovers are "in either's power" (TMP I.ii.453), is obviously derived from the tenets of "white" magic. But Prospero's means of immobilizing Ferdinand (TMP I.ii.467), in order to take him prisoner as a "traitor" (TMP I.ii.463), have a folkloric basis in the "black" magic of fairies. Even as Prospero simultaneously initiates the courtship between the young lovers, he also appropriates this form of magic to induce paralysis for the purpose of delaying the development of their relationship "lest too light winning / Make the prize light" (TMP I.ii. 243-244). Similarly, Ariel disarms Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio through the same generic spell by which Prospero inhibits Ferdinand. The king's men brandish their swords as if prepared to strike, but Ariel augments the subjective sensation of gravity so the weapons become "too massy" (TMP III.iii.67) for their strengths. This form of "physical" magic, whereby the recipient of the spell experiences changes in bodily function (i.e. "nerves are in their infancy again" (TMP I.ii.488)), corresponds in some ways to the effects on the eye which are induced by the love-juice in the Dream. The main difference lies in the fact that while the fairies of the Dream use magic to supplant rationality, Prospero's magic

invariably insures a "captive" audience through physical immobility that allows him, in turn, to appeal to the rational side of his enemies. During his disarmament of the "three men of sin" (TMP III.iii.53) and subsequent tirade against them, Ariel is a kind of psychic projection of his master's intent to reform, as Prospero indirectly attempts to reactivate a sense of humanity and conscience in his enemies.

As a "spirit," Ariel easily masters the wide variety of supernatural skills that fairies reputedly possess. He is capable, like the rulers of fairyland in the Dream, of creating atmospheric disturbances and of controlling the weather. Although he most likely would not say, after the fashion of Titania, "The summer still doth tend upon my state" (MND III.i.148), he can manipulate the immediate operations of nature and perform "to point the tempest" (TMP I.ii.194), which metaphorically signals the breakdown of corrupt "society" on the King's ship. He can alter his position in time and space as quickly as can Puck. Oberon's command to his accomplice, in their plot to deceive Titania, "Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again / Ere the leviathan can swim a league" (MND II.i.173-174), matches Ariel's promissory remark to Prospero, especially for its emphasis on alacrity, "I drink the air before me, and return / Ere your pulse twice beat" (TMP V.i.102-103). Ariel is capable of invisibility and of transmuting himself into animate and inanimate objects. He

carries out typical fairy chores required in the preparation of magical spells, "Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew / From the still-vex'd Bermoothes" (TMP I.ii.228-229). Ariel's sense for music clearly corresponds with the choral function of the Dream's fairies. In both plays, fairy music is often performed in sharp contrast to discord in the human world. In The Tempest, Ferdinand's comment, "This music crept by me upon the waters, / Allying both their fury and my passion" (TMP I.ii.394-395), recalls the violence of the tempest even while mollifying it. Similarly, the fairies' music in the Dream tends to induce sleep, while the "music" of Theseus' horns and hounds awake sleepers. Most importantly, Ariel is also inextricably bound up in the maintenance of true love according to conventional fairy-lore, much like the fairies of the Dream. Although he does not employ magic herbs, we know that he is instrumental in overseeing the logistics involved with the developing romance between Miranda and Ferdinand, which is apparent from Prospero's recurrent praise, "It goes on, I see, / As my soul prompts it. Spirit, fine spirit! I'll free thee / Within two days for this" (TMP I.ii.422-423). Ariel does, however, differ from fairies in a great many ways. While the fairies of the Dream sleep, procreate and make for their staple sustenance the milk and cream traditionally offered by conscientious householders, Ariel is completely free of the need for any of these things.

When Miranda misidentifies her future husband as a "spirit" (TMP I.ii.413), Prospero quickly corrects her by revealing that Ferdinand "eats and sleeps and hath such senses / As we have" (TMP I.ii.415). This not only suggests that Prospero's enclave of elementals do not partake in human pleasures as do the fairies of the Dream, but that Ariel's ontology is radically different from Puck's. Briggs holds that Ariel is more likely a "sylph" rather than a fairy (Briggs, Anatomy 179). A sylph is defined as "One of a race of beings or spirits supposed to inhabit the air" (OED sb.1.a) that was originally considered to be soulless and mortal in the system of Paracelsus. This view would seem to fit Ariel's description, except for the fact that he is "invulnerable" (TMP III.iii.66) to Alonso and Sebastian's sword attack, which lends credibility to his apparent immortality. Similarly, if Sycorax had possessed the power to destroy Ariel, she probably would have done so when in her "unmitigable rage" (TMP I.ii.276) over his disobedience. But the limit of her power was to cast a spell of physical captivity on him, which she herself "Could not again undo" (TMP I.ii.291).

Although alien to humanity as a "spirit," Ariel does, however, experience human-like emotion -- love for Prospero. But this is a qualitatively different kind of "love" than that which, say, Titania bears for Theseus. For example, Titania undergoes temporary changes because of the herb, most notably

her character-shift from cold rationality towards Oberon to overwhelming sentimentality for Bottom. But she remains her consistent, "poetical" self throughout the ordeal. The basic character-substrate of the Queen's personality does not change, even while under the duress and emotional distortions of the love-juice's effect. We know that her affections for Oberon remain intact just under the surface layers of her artificial infatuation for the weaver-ass.

Ariel's character, however, is much less stable than that of any of his fairy counterparts in the Dream. His changeableness is not the result of magic herbs, but a need for ethereal freedom and self-protection. In this sense, he does not "love" his human master all of the time, as Prospero notes when he calls him "moody" (TMP I.ii.244). At times, Ariel shares Puck's exuberance over the opportunity to please his master. This is particularly evident through the verbal equivalence between Ariel's enthusiasm, "What shall I do? say what; what shall I do?" (TMP I.ii.300) and Puck's almost childlike pursuit of Oberon's approbation, "I go, I go, look how I go!" (MND III.ii.100). But Shakespeare added a dimension of self-conscious awareness to Ariel's character in his role as a "spirit," which is different from the portrayal that we get in the Dream of an essentially unfeeling Puck. For example, according to the OED, a "spirit" is defined as "A supernatural, incorporeal, rational being or personality,

usually regarded as imperceptible at ordinary times to the human senses, but capable of becoming visible at pleasure" (sb.I.3). Though Puck is a "rational" being in a strict technical sense, he is also representative of the irrational, particularly for the way he embodies the power of the imagination. Bottom's "dream" of Titania, the prank involving the "ass's nole" (MND III.ii.17) and the suggestion that the audience has also "but slumbered here, / While these visions did appear (MND V.i.411-412), seem to constitute Puck's peculiar form of reparation for the way rationalism marginalizes the "imaginary" in the Dream.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Ariel and Puck lies in their respective approaches to authority. In his role as Oberon's "jester," Puck has as much freedom to move within the monarchical hierarchy of fairyland as Ariel has restraints and imperatives placed on him by his master. Puck shares the privilege of immunity that many of Shakespeare's "fools" do from their own masters, but perhaps to a lesser degree. Puck light-heartedly gossips about "jealous Oberon" (MND II.i.24) to one of Titania's reconnaissance fairies, but probably doesn't have the leeway that Lear affords his fool to make riddles with key words like "nothing" (LR I.iv.129), which remind the king that he has mistaken Cordelia's sense of duty for familial ingratitude (LR I.i.86). Puck also has a ready supply of excuses when Oberon's

instructions to anoint Demetrius' eyes are incorrectly followed, "Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth, / A million fail, confounding oath on oath" (MND III.ii.92-93). Oberon is characteristically lenient with Puck and his "misprision" (MND III.ii.90) when he misidentifies Lysander for Demetrius while dispensing the love-juice. Though this mistake parodies Egeus' litigious pursuit of justice by its arbitrariness, it also threatens the purpose of the fairies' visit to Athens -- to bless Theseus' nuptial so as to bring peace and prosperity to the court. It is only by pure chance and the random process of elimination that Puck manages to reunite the lovers in a congenial way that, in turn, allows Theseus to suspend his sentence of death on Hermia. But Puck's irresistible appeal is his imagination for initiating pranks that, by Oberon's own admission, fall out better than he himself could devise (MND III.ii.35). In this special sense, Puck cannot be commanded to do anything.

Conversely, Prospero's magic or, as he puts it, "secret studies" (TMP I.ii.76) in the "liberal Arts" (TMP I.ii.73), demands precision in terms of its execution. This explains the plethora of technical questions with which Prospero plies Ariel, "But was not this nigh shore?" (TMP I.ii.215) / "What is the time o'th'day?" (TMP I.ii. 238) / "Where was she born?" (TMP I.ii. 260). Though Prospero's fortune and opportunity to insure the efficacy of his magic

both depend on "A most auspicious star" (TMP I.ii.182), he really gauges the effectiveness of his theurgical endeavors by Ariel's performance. In this regard, Ariel is much more than a "slave" or a "jester" as Prospero often acknowledges with glowing terms such as "my industrious servant" (TMP IV.i.33). Ariel is the "intelligence" resource behind, what might be called today, his master's extra-sensory perception. He continually updates Prospero on the progress of Antonio's plot to murder Alonso (TMP II.ii.321) as well as Caliban's conspiracy (TMP III.ii.85). Though Caliban's bumbling plot to murder Prospero burlesques the gravity with which Antonio pursues his comparable intentions, Ariel treats both threats with equal care. Such successful reconnaissance derives from his status as a supernatural being, whose essence is "organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce" (Blake, "A Descriptive Catalogue" 576). It is this refinement in Ariel that Prospero harnesses for his own needs, but maintains through whatever means are required. For example, as a multi-dimensional being, unrestricted by the rules of time and space which usually govern nature and human "reality," Ariel can be threatened with banishment to the "knotty entrails" (TMP I.ii.295) of an oak. Prospero extorts Ariel's aid by skilfully balancing threats to reinstate his previous punishment at the hands of Sycorax with carefully controlled circumstances in which the

elemental is free to use his extensive powers. Elementals of The Tempest, then, never carry out pranks for their own sake after the fashion of Puck.

In his capacity as a preternatural stagehand, Ariel inverts Puck's role as a typically disruptive force. The main difference between these elementals is that while Puck contributes to the celebration of fiction, Ariel helps to celebrate Prospero's love of theatre. For Puck, the celebration of fiction is a dynamic, (fashioned on stage and held together by poetry), that can move between the mundane and the numinous realms with great fluidity. Love can be pure nonsense or the stuff of life-long commitments in marriage. Similarly, fairies can rule chance, but only if they are allowed first to exist not only in the minds of the lovers, but in the collective imagination of the audience. In the Dream we see, for example, how fantasy touches our lives, but only through largely inferential and allegorical means. Bottom's reluctance towards his first impulse to "go about to expound this dream" (MND IV.i.205) is meant to express, through comic parallelism, the potential "fool" in Theseus for his refusal to believe the lovers' fairy story. But up until the final scene, the audience is really only involved in the play to the extent that we put a cap on the humorous and multifarious layerings of irony through our anonymous and detached observations. But Puck refuses to let us off this

easily. His poetic "voice" has been a sharp contrast throughout to the kind of language used by Theseus at court. He actively promotes anarchy and chaos, and his language never reflects his role more than in his final speech:

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumbered here
> While these visions did appear.
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding than a dream
> (MND V.i.409-414)

Here, Puck reveals to us that we too have been living Bottom's "dream" and this ironic prank, played on him, is just as "bottomless" as when it is played on us. We experience flashes of infinite regression through the shared irony that we have also dreamt about fairies, while Bottom's indictment that "man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had" (MND IV.i.208-209) puts us in a double-bind. On one hand, there is Puck's jest to make amends for, as it would not come as such a shock if we were, in general, more imaginative people, and on the other, of course, Bottom's warning. Shakespeare leaves his audience no other choice than to be buoyed up on the wave of fantasy emanating from the stage that is sure to resound as far beyond us as imagination can reach. Puck's celebration of fiction implies group response, yet in this sense, it could not be defined by the sole designation "group," because the play affirms and promotes imagination by making life and "reality" ultimately ironic. This process, by

which imagination will not be denied, begins first with Theseus in his doubt about fairy stories, consumes next the lovers, who are unconsciously attuned to the fairies' intervention; then the mechanicals, all of whom are no doubt conscious of the existence of fairies but mystified by the behaviour of these elementals; and finally, ends far beyond us, the audience, making the "group" limitless. The theme of "life as dream" propagates from the stage in a wave that ends where the Dream has been amplified and multiplied by irony to the nth degree through us as merely the latest generation of Shakespeare's audiences.

Conversely, Ariel is preeminent in Prospero's attempts to embrace the opposite extreme from that which the Dream embodies, namely, freezing the "moment" in a celebration of theatre. Prospero's "magic" is really an acquired skill to organize theatrical events, and the scope of these events span from the most rudimentary to the ultra-sophisticated. He seeks to realize in a tangible way theatre's potential to sustain a particular essence or intensity of form, perhaps as a means to resist dissolution and thoughts of the grave (TMP V.i.311). When Prospero finally breaks his staff and drowns his book, time, of course, begins again. But while operative, his magic holds fast the unique moment when Miranda and Ferdinand are revealed behind the curtain of the cell playing chess (TMP V.i.171) -- a moment which epitomizes the fruits of all of

Prospero's theurgical effort towards curbing political disorder and Ariel's emotional variance. With the "drama" of the many plots and conspiracies passed, this moment stands second only to the masque of Act IV, performed by the spirits of harvest (TMP IV.i.60), as a triumph of theatre. Ariel contributes to this and other events, not only through his grudging resolve to be "correspondent to command" (TMP I.ii. 297), but through his own innate sense of celebration and pageantry, as Coleridge notes, "all his colours and properties seem to have been obtained from the rainbow and the skies" (279). At the same time, however, Ariel has discernible allegorical ties with this elusive theatrical "moment" itself, by virtue of his incessant need for escape from the covert director of the play -- Prospero. This explains the inordinate amount of time which Prospero takes to transform theatre's capacity to freeze moments into an instrument of control over his environs and circumstance. He bodily immobilizes first, Alonso's crew on board ship (TMP I.ii.231), then Ferdinand, to test his intentions towards Miranda (TMP I.ii.468) and finally, the "king and's followers" (TMP V.i.6) in the grove weather-break which surrounds the cell. All of these instances of stasis are really extensions of how theatre can stop time and temporarily suspend action. Stephano is unconsciously aware that the island lies outside time, when he remarks, offhandedly, "I was the man i' th' moon when time was" (TMP

II.ii.139). But more importantly, Prospero threatens Ariel with the prospect of stopping time for twelve more years of captivity within the oak. He threatens his spirit-servant not only in the hopes of insuring his ethereal alliance, but as a means to prevent the escape of an essential dramaturgical element which his presence affords -- illusionism. Prospero also approximates, at least in gross metaphorical terms, theatre's ability to capture and restrain even the embodiment of literalism - Caliban: "and here you sty me / In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me / The rest o' th' island" (TMP I.ii.344-345).

In The Tempest, then, Ariel is, in some ways, as subversive towards theatre as Puck is towards romantic love. Although Puck also disrupts "theatre" by reducing Quince's rehearsal of "Pyramus and Thisbe" to chaos, his main preoccupation is more with the idea of symbolically breaking up the actor-lovers. This is apparent from the way Bottom enters transformed on the line, "If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine" (MND III.i.98). Unlike the Dream, however, Ariel's indirect subversion of his master's wish to promote theatre presents, relatively, more problems for Prospero than it does for us as part of the audience. The magician must turn the negative energy released by Caliban's "earth-bound" avarice, which is evident in his dream of "riches / Ready to drop" (TMP III.ii.140) upon him into the moment where "two

most rare affections" (TMP III.i.75) warrant divine sanction, so the "Heavens rain grace / On that which breeds between'em" (TMP III.ii.75). Though Caliban employs some of the finest language of The Tempest, his perennial lack of self-awareness acts as an authorial disclaimer that excludes him from participating in Prospero's appreciation of self-conscious theatricality. Caliban does not know that there can be more profit in learning language than just for the sake of knowing "how to curse" (TMP I.ii.367). Prospero goes to the opposite extreme in his "Our revels now are ended" speech (TMP IV.i.148) in which he acknowledges how theatre performance and language create fantastic illusions such as "cloud-capp'd towers" (TMP IV.i.152), "gorgeous palaces" (TMP IV.i.152) and "solemn temples" (TMP IV.i.153). When Miranda announces that "nothing ill could dwell in such a temple" (TMP I.ii.460) in reference to Ferdinand, her argument cannot be applied, by analogy, to defend Caliban's often startlingly beautiful language. This demand for an awareness of creativity on Prospero's part forms the irreconcilable break between himself and Caliban. Like Theseus and his poetical denunciation of fiction, Prospero is capable of reconciling the fragile artificiality "of this vision" (TMP IV.i.150) with the power of art to create over and above what nature can produce. In this sense, we come full-circle as Prospero's aesthetic of art differs little from Bottom's attempt to capture his own "most

rare vision" (MND IV.i.203) in ballad form.

III

THE THEATRICALITY OF FAIRIES

The fairies of A Midsummer Night's Dream are unique among Shakespeare's supernatural beings. They present a different kind of challenge to a theatre audience, by virtue of their "diminutive" size, from the array of human-sized ghosts, witches, and figures of classical mythology found elsewhere in the canon. The ghost of Hamlet's father, for example, appears largely unchanged from the mortal figure he once was, in his characteristic "fair and warlike form" (HAM I.i.47). Although the ghost "stands on a different footing from that of Shakespeare's other apparitions" (Moorman 196), because it is "objective," there remains within this opening scene, as in the rest of the "supernatural" plays, direct correspondence between that which characters experience, the audience observes on stage, and the text conveys. Here the word, "objective," refers to any being outside the natural whose existence can be verified by more than one character.

In the Dream, however, Titania is small enough to sleep inside the enamelled skin of a snake, which is only "Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in" (MND II.ii.256). But she is also large enough to cradle Bottom within her arms, as does "the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle / Gently entwist" (MND

IV.i.41-42). Here, agreement breaks down between what the text says of Titania's miniature size, and what the audience obviously sees on stage. We are indirectly encouraged, though, to share Bottom's unconcern for verisimilitude, because Titania's embrace is as much an essentially symbolic depiction of the emotional entanglements of the young lovers, as it is physical comedy based on incongruity.

Shakespeare sacrificed in Hamlet, then, not only the ghost's power to generate mystery as a purely "subjective" being, but also our capacity to imaginatively interact, to a certain degree, with this "objectified" ghost -- by so firmly establishing its tangibility as a supernatural entity on stage. Perhaps ironically, less is inevitably left to the imagination somehow (at least in theatrical terms) when we know that a supernatural is "objective," than when its status remains ambiguous or unqualified. Marcellus, Barnardo and, most importantly, Horatio all bear witness to the ghost and are, therefore, able to supply objective verification of its presence for Hamlet. Here, the playwright chose to redirect the audience's attention from issues concerning the ghost's ontology per se, to Hamlet's existential angst generated by the moral ambiguity of this supernatural. Shakespeare traded at least a margin of the audience's participation in the "ghost" story (i.e. by making the "unknown" less unknown), for the sake of introducing the "detective" story. An "objective"

ghost is simply a more reliable witness to murder than a "subjective" one, in spite of Hamlet's qualms that "the [div'l] hath power / T' assume a pleasing shape" (HAM II.ii.599-600). And the playwright clearly sought to reengage the audience's collective imagination through the reference to untold secrets of the ghost's "prison-house" (HAM I.v.14).

Similarly, this irony also extends to the "Weird Sisters" (MAC I.iii.32) in Macbeth, whose existence Banquo and Macbeth together confirm (MAC I.ii.39). Although Macbeth concludes that "what seem'd corporeal, / Melted as breath into the wind" (MAC I.iii.81-82), when the witches disappear, we know they are as "objective" as the ghost of Hamlet's father. For this reason, what first appears to us as the witches' hideous culinary "orgy" around the cauldron in Act I scene iii, later seems more like a "Tupper-ware" party gone wrong, when compared to the truly horrific moment in which Macbeth is overtaken by his evil ambitions in the "subjective" shape of a levitating dagger (MAC II.i.33).

Opposing Shakespeare's portrayal of "objective" supernaturals is the bevy of ghosts that qualify as figments of the imagination. When the ghost of Banquo shakes his "gory locks" (MAC III.iv.50) and steals the last chair at the feast, Macbeth has clearly lost the power that he once had, in his "Is this a dagger" speech (MAC II.i.33), to question whether or not the figure before him is "a false creation, /

Proceeding from the heat-oppress'd brain" (MAC II.i.39). Brutus also experiences pangs of conscience when the ghost of Caesar enters his tent to tell him that they will meet again at Philippi (JC IV.iii.282). These ghosts generate dramatic irony in a way that we fully expect them to by virtue of our knowledge of their "subjective" nature.

The fairies of the Dream, however, lie somewhere between Shakespeare's dichotomous portrayal of "objective" and "subjective" supernatural beings. It is precisely this "unqualified" status of elementals in the Dream which serves to invoke our imagination the most. First, we are never entirely sure, like Bottom, if the fairies exist at all, particularly when Puck subverts the audience's confidence in theatrical illusion in his epilogue, and second, there are no credible human witnesses, as in Hamlet or Macbeth, to verify for us the instances of intervention by elementals. Bottom is the only character to experience first hand the complexities of fairyland, but he eliminates himself as a reliable attestant, when he concludes that one would be an ass if he were to attempt to express that which is "past the wit of man" (MND IV.i.204). Similarly, though hints abound that Theseus has had, at one time, some kind of relationship with Titania, the details are sketchy and qualify more as rumours than facts.

Shakespeare exploits the fairies' cosmological

ambiguity in combination with the character of Bottom to invert the usual meaning of "dramatic irony." Our awareness of irony is most acute when we are confident that a character on stage is equally capable of perceiving, if given the chance, that which we in the audience appreciate at his expense. Put another way, Bottom's inability to grasp what we can better see from our vantage point, is not "ironic" in a strict sense of this word, because he really stands little chance of ever realizing the numinous world to which the fairies belong. Bottom is a "clown," then, not for his failure to assimilate and make sense of his experience of elementals per se, but for the way he frustrates our expectations as to how dramatic irony develops. For example, if Hamlet were to be kidnapped by Titania out of love, his deep and abiding philosophical interest in ontological problems would immediately prompt him to determine, once and for all, if she is a "subjective" or "objective" being. More importantly, only when Titania had no doubt humorously swept aside Hamlet's questions in her pursuit of love, would this denial of information concerning her true nature, qualify as the most potent form of "dramatic irony?" In this special case, Hamlet would share the same status as a reliable witness to the existence of fairies that we might, if abducted. The humour of the abduction scene in the Dream, therefore, derives from the fact that we could really do no better, in terms of

plumbing the mysteries of fairy ontology, than could a completely "straw man" -- Bottom.

The Dream is replete with passages in which it is impossible to know with confidence whether the fairies magically accommodate themselves to the physical proportions of the human world, or conversely, human beings shrink in accordance with the microscopic dimensions of the fairy one. The members of Titania's retinue are small enough to "Creep into acorn-cups" (MND II.i.31), while Oberon sometimes assumes what seems to be adult human identity "in the shape of Corin," a shepherd (MND II.i.66). Animals also complicate our sense of this duality in terms of physical size. We assume that Titania's potential lovers, namely, the lion, bear, wolf and bull (MND II.i.180) are chosen by Oberon because they are all large and threatening beasts. But Titania is also threatened by the smallest of creatures, such as worms, beetles and snails (MND II.i.21-22). At the same time, Puck seems oblivious to this duality when he exhibits no confusion whatsoever about relative proportions in his metaphor of the panicked "mechanicals" "As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye" (MND III.ii.20). The humour of this simile, of course, depends on Puck's knowledge of the size and morphological differences that separate men from geese.

More complex, though, is the fact that we receive no indication that Bottom has sustained physical changes beyond

his acquisition of the ass's head. But he considers the honey-bag, from a "red-hipped humble bee" (MND IV.i.11), to be an adequate first course for his meal of "dried peas" (MND IV.i.36), or at least, enough to tide him over until normal horse-sized portions of "sweet hay" (MND IV.i.33) can be obtained through the efforts of Cobweb, Peaseblossom, Mustardseed and Moth. Further, Bottom does not seem shrunken at all from an ordinary human size as the "musk-roses" (MND IV.i.3), plucked by Titania from her flowery bed, are never portrayed as ridiculously large against his "sleek smooth head" (MND IV.i.3) -- this distortion is reserved for his ears. But the surrounding flora, as well as this single bee requisitioned to supply honey, must both be large indeed in order to support such a thriving apiary industry. These apparent size differences are further complicated by the fact that the flowers and lone insect must also be prodigious enough to satisfy Bottom's growing appetite in his new animal form -- an appetite he attempts to manage, incidentally, as delicately as he can, while somewhat committed to playing the role of a "tender ass" (MND IV.i.25) in the presence of regality.

This duality, whereby disproportionate theatrical elements intersect in harmonious ways, runs throughout the Dream and not only constitutes one part of a larger pattern in which Shakespeare tests the capabilities of the stage, but

disrupts the conventional rules governing theatre. For example, one of the more apparent ironies concerning Bottom's character arises from his nonchalance towards Titania's ethereality, which is not in keeping with his pursuit of strict artificiality as he prepares props for the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play. Underpinning this irony is the fact that Shakespeare does away entirely with sixteenth century theatre's rule concerning the "unity of place," which is apparent from the way the centre of action focuses on the Athenian wood in Act III, only to shift later back to Theseus' court in Act V. While in the forest, Bottom is acutely aware, perhaps more so than any of the other "mechanicals," of the need to reveal the mechanisms by which the Lion, Wall and Moonshine might be presented to the Duke's company -- if the players are to avoid frightening the ladies of the court. This need for artificiality stems, of course, from his comical underestimation of the court members' dramaturgical knowledge. But more importantly, Bottom's immediate, and undoubtedly subconscious inclination, is to affirm the human element behind creativity. He does not, however, see his way through to realize that this affirmation minimizes, by implication, the "fantastic" of which the fairies and theatre itself are ironically a part. And, in his capacity as the artistic director of the tragedy, Bottom could not be more specific about his prescriptions for artificiality, "half his face must

be seen through the lion's neck" (MND III.i.35), and later in the scene, "Some man or other must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some roughcast about him, to signify wall" (MND III.i.63-65). Why the weaver is not interested in eliciting from Titania what "strings" she uses to account for her presence and actions on stage, is a problem that Shakespeare leaves his audience to resolve solely through the amending power of the imagination.

Imagination is highly synonymous, then, with a suspension of disbelief so that we might better interact with proceedings on stage to smooth the "seams," such as Bottom's momentary loss of discrimination, which invariably show when these respective representatives from the human and numinous realms meet in the Dream. In this sense, the audience's imagination is the synthesizing agent which binds the action on stage with sometimes wholly antithetical messages supplied by the text. But, in addition to this, Bottom's previous intentions (i.e. to safeguard against how the "creatureliness" of the Lion might otherwise eclipse the humanness of the actor in the animal suit), make highly ironic, of course, his apparent ignorance about his own "transformed scalp" (MND IV.i.63).

The playwright reorganizes our response to elementals as much around metatextual cues as textual ones, in order to supplant the traditional "triple unities" of theatre. For example, Shakespeare clearly anticipated, particularly in the

epilogue, his audience's resistance to accept the quick changes of venue, (or in Puck's terms, "visions" (MND V.i.412)), as well as the assorted ironies generated by scenes interposed one upon another. Puck employs the conditional tense extensively in the epilogue as a basis for the "inadequacy" topos running through the speech, "If we shadows have offended..." (MND V.i.409-410), "If you pardon..." (MND V.i.416) and "If we have unearned luck..." (MND V.i.418). His apology for "this weak and idle theme" (MND V.i.413) implies his claim of "authorship" to proceedings which are "No more yielding than a dream" (MND V.i. 414). But, by the play's skilful parallel development, the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" at court has not only remained outside the direct influence of elementals, but has been such a success, in its "failure," that Theseus prompts the players to forego taking any credit whatsoever for their blundered roles, as "there need none to be blamed" (MND V.i.343). Here, Shakespeare clearly violates a long standing theatrical convention. The litmus test of Aristotle's rule of the "unity of action" is based on the supposition that if one scene were removed from a "properly" written play, then the whole play would become disrupted (Poetics, VIII. 4-IX, 5). Shakespeare, however, seems more interested in exploring the tension between the extent to which scenes can be written as self-contained theatrical units, and yet, remain interrelated not by a "unity of action," but a "disunity of action." His penetrating

imagination as a playwright allows him to isolate scenes with such vividness, that the loss of any one scene, in specific cases, would mean nothing to the rest, which contravenes Aristotle's rule. For example, the formal device which connects Puck's apology -- for what he considers to be the fairies' inadequate directorship of the Dream -- to Theseus' commandment -- that the "mechanicals" disclaim responsibility for their poor acting skills -- is the irony that fairyland is invariably more "real" than the often overwhelming artificiality of the human world. This is born out time and again by the way that it is difficult to discern whether the supposedly "real life" romantic imbroglio of the lovers is the subject of parody by the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play, or just the converse. Yet, the "mechanicals'" production, regardless of its status as satire or the object of parody, could conceivably stand on its own as comedy of the first order, even if it appeared in some other play or were completely unrelated to the double plot involving the lovers. Shakespeare suspends the rules advocating the unities of action, place, and, most obviously time, then subtly asks his audience to reserve judgement in terms of any conventional valuation of theatre. In the Dream, the fairies are the means by which the playwright secures his bid to redefine the barriers between the reality and fantasy of the stage.

Conversely, The Tempest embraces, celebrates and objectifies theatre at every possible opportunity, especially

with the help of Ariel. This elemental is a model of efficiency as Prospero's prop manager and preternatural stagehand. He attends to peripheral details so that "Safely in harbour / Is the King's ship; in the deep nook" (TMP I.ii.226-227). The King's men are, in a sense, not only the "actors" of Prospero's private play, but are strategically placed, by Ariel, at various "marks" about the isle in order to ensure the desired dramatic effects when they are called on, each in his turn, to perform his scene. Wardrobes are furnished anew so that in spite of their ordeal by fire and water, there is "On their sustaining garments not a blemish" (TMP I.ii.218). The way in which Ariel creates the optical illusion "for the rest o'th' fleet" (TMP I.ii. 232), that the "King's ship wrack'd" (TMP I.ii.236), loosely approximates a production cut. Ariel is fully versed, of course, on the account of his master's "sea-sorrow" (TMP I.ii.170), which sounds exactly like a script, in order to complement Prospero's role as a drama coach, when he gives Miranda some background to her "role" as his daughter. Here, Ariel's extensive knowledge of the escape of Miranda and Prospero from Milan, evident in his "You are three men of sin" speech (TMP III.iii.53), sharply contrasts with his apparent memory lapse concerning his previous master, Sycorax (TMP I.ii.263). This lapse serves as more than a convenient opportunity for Shakespeare to give us what could be construed as simply more background information. Ariel knows full well the specifics

of his duties under the tyrannous Sycorax, but Prospero has to remind him of them "Once in a month" (TMP I.ii.262), because the servant-spirit occasionally refuses to play his part in the unfolding drama on the island. When Prospero invokes Ariel to "Go make thyself like a nymph o'th' sea / Be subject to / No sight but thine and mine; invisible / To every eyeball else" (TMP I.ii.301-304), it is clear that the theurgist goes far out of his way to generate new roles for Ariel just to keep him performance sharp -- even if no one sees him perform.

Caliban also refuses to take part in Prospero's attempts to conjure "theatre," but the magician has much less patience with him than he does for Ariel. For this reason, Caliban is really a figure of pathos because, though he has tried, he cannot grasp what Prospero is up to:

> Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't; and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less
> That burn by day and night: and then I lov'd thee,
> (TMP I.ii.335-338)

Rather sadly, the most that Caliban can offer to further Prospero's theatrical endeavors is his delicate, but uncultivated appreciation of naturalism:

> And show'd thee all the qualities o'th' isle,
> The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile:
> Curs'd be I that did so!
> (TMP I.ii.339-341)

Here, Caliban's recollection of his joy at having contributed something to Prospero's "play" is cut short; his all-too-

natural stage props, in the form of springs, brine pits, rocks and vegetation, simply do not conform to the magician's more ambitious plans to explore and promote the artificial nature of theatre. Prospero's intention is to realize what Hamlet calls the ability of art "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (HAM III.ii.21-22), while Caliban mistakenly preoccupies himself, not with the "mirror," but the material world itself. When Miranda tells Ferdinand, "I do not know / One of my sex; no woman's face remember, / Save, from my glass, mine own" (TMP III.i.48-48), we are tempted to wonder if she is not, by her actions and Prosperian sensibilities, the physical embodiment of Hamlet's definition of theatre.

Caliban's inherent reliance on naturalism, as an approach to theatre, recalls Bottom's rather orthodox solution of lighting the production of "Pyramus and Thisbe." Although the weaver abandons his plan to "leave a casement of the great chamber window...open" (MND III.i.52-53), for much more inventive and artificial methods, Caliban shows no comparable advancement. Where Bottom's technical innovations suggest at least the framework of an emerging artistic aesthetic, the "moon-calf" (TMP II.ii.207) is left an "Abhorred slave" (TMP I.ii. 354) on "whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (TMP IV.i.189).

Prospero is also at odds with Caliban's conspirators for many of the same reasons that he is with Caliban himself. Trinculo's concept of theatre, for example, is revealed

subliminally through his desire to exploit Caliban as a mere spectacle or side-show attraction, once back in England (TMP II.ii.28). Shakespeare intimates strongly that Trinculo is a bit of a "Judas" towards Prospero's artistic and theatrical refinements, when this jester anticipates payment by the highest bidder for his prize "monster" in terms of "a piece of silver" (TMP II.ii.30).

Whereas Puck acts, in a serendipitous way, as an agent by whom double-plots are activated and then compounded one on top of another, Ariel acts in Prospero's behalf to eradicate the development of all "unauthorized" asides and sub-plots such as Trinculo's. For example, just before Antonio and Sebastian attempt the murder of the sleeping Alonso, Prospero sends Ariel to awaken the King, "For else his project dies" (TMP II.i.294). When denied of their ability to act and, in effect, stripped of their "script," the potential murderers appear, all of a sudden, like two figures from Pirandello's Six Characters In Search of an Author. Antonio struggles to manufacture impromptu dialogue that sounds vaguely post-modernist in its self-conscious non sequiturs concerning a whole herd of lions (TMP II.ii.311), especially when compared to the power and control of Prospero's language. Ariel effects the same kind of intervention to thwart Caliban's plot to murder Prospero as part of the covert war over who will author the play -- Prospero or his enemies. Here, Ariel has as much power, in his role as a spirit, to turn human beings into

animal forms as Puck does, as a fairy, but in a figurative way that is apparent when he leads Caliban's band astray:

> Then I beat my tabor;
> At which, like unback'd colts, they prick'd their ears,
> Advanc'd their eyelids, lifted up their noses
> As they smelt music: so I charm'd their ears,
> (TMP IV.i.175-178)

Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio must be diverted from their private concerns, however, by something other than tabor music -- "A living drollery" (TMP III. iii.21). This banquet, put on by elementals, serves to qualify them as "objective" supernatural beings, which belong to the same existential camp as does the ghost of Hamlet's father. Prospero presents his cast of preternaturals in a way that their existence can be objectively verified with ease for two primary reasons. First the display, directed by Ariel, not only creates the sense of pageantry that Prospero so enjoys, but captivates its audience with a dance of wispy spirits and actions of salutation as part of the stage direction. Second, the evidence for the existence of elementals must be strong, unlike in the Dream, because Prospero works towards shattering the established belief systems of his enemies. Their belief in things beyond themselves, such as "unicorns" (TMP III.iii.22), the "phoenix" (TMP III.iii.24) and islanders "of monstrous shape" (TMP III.iii.31) is an intermediary step by which Prospero will eventually open their minds to an appreciation of his own hard-to-believe story as "The wronged Duke of Milan" (TMP V.i.107).

Ariel's presentation of a Harpy is the next threshold that Prospero makes the "three men of sin" (TMP III.iii.53) cross so their new belief in the supernatural will be sustained. Amid the thunder and lightning, and dressed in colourful plumes, Ariel merely claps his wings in order to dematerialize the contents of the banquet. In full regalia and ready for confrontation, he is certainly not the stuff of travellers' well-worn and distanced stories of "mountaineers / Dew-lapp'd like bulls" (TMP III.ii.44-45) or "men / Whose heads stood in their breasts" (TMP III.iii.46-47). But Ariel is as much a theatrical being as he is a preternatural one, and his motions to disperse the banquet are a prelude to Prospero's much amplified version of how theatre is, by its nature, perishable -- where moments "shall dissolve, / And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, / Leave not a rack behind" (TMP IV.i. 154-156).

The nuptial masque of Act IV is Prospero's most elaborate tribute to theatre. Though he tells Ariel that he intends to "Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple / Some vanity" of his art (TMP IV.i.40-41), he clearly uses the masque as an opportunity to reinforce his commandment to Ferdinand not to break Miranda's "virgin-knot before / All sanctimonious ceremonies may / With full and holy rite be minister'd" (TMP IV.i.15-17). Prospero's tendency towards formulism, in both his approach to initiating Miranda's courtship and sustaining the "theatrical moment" of the chess

game, is offset by his sense of the fragility of human relationships and art. This is apparent from the instability of the purely fictive "majestic vision" (TMP IV.i.118) of spirits in their procession, which is subject to dissolution at the mere sound of human voices, as Prospero relates, "hush, and be mute, / Or our spell is marr'd" (TMP IV.i. 126-127). Iris' speech reiterates the magician's concerns that "no bed-right shall be paid / Till Hymen's torch be lighted" (TMP IV.i.96-97), as a means to curb any latent cupidity in Ferdinand. But beyond its function as a spectacular visual display, which Ariel directly partakes in as the figure of "Ceres," the consecutive speeches recapitulate the familiar stages of romantic love, of which traditional homage to Hymen is only a part. Iris begins with the "dismissed bachelor" (TMP IV.i.67); Ceres introduces the prospect of new infatuation with the mention of the "blind boy's scandal'd company" (TMP IV.i.90); Iris then reproves Cupid for his influence in favour of Hymen's vows (TMP IV.i.96); Juno blesses marriage and fruitfulness; and finally, Nymphs and Reapers dance perhaps to give visual expression to this elaborate pattern of courtship.

Prospero's motivation for embarking on this theatrical exercise in masque form is more easily understood when his immediate circumstances are taken into account. Caliban is clearly a threat towards any pattern of meaningful human interaction, particulary for his amorality. He seems to occupy

the role of Ferdinand's alter-ego in his eagerness "to violate the honour" (TMP I.ii.349-350) of Miranda and unwillingness to bear logs with the socially redeeming knowledge that "some kinds of baseness / Are nobly undergone" (TMP III.i.2-3). Caliban will never arrive at even the first stage of courtship mentioned by elementals in the masque, namely, that of "Being lass-lorn" (TMP IV.i.68); a stage through which we assume Ferdinand has already past. Instead of shadowy "broom-groves" (TMP IV.i.66), in which young men rework ineffectual strategies of love, we find Caliban "I'th' filthy-mantled pool" (TMP IV.i.182) beyond Prospero's cell. Similarly, in place of the spirits' metaphorical dance celebrating marriage and harvest, we hear of the account in which Caliban's band are "dancing up to th' chins, that the foul lake / O'erstunk their feet" (TMP IV.i.183-184).

Prospero prefers the company of Ariel to Caliban's, because the magician takes heed of the existential continuity between preternaturals and human beings. Unlike in the Dream, elementals and people share common characteristics on a number of levels. Prospero's conclusion, that "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on" (TMP IV.i.156-157), translates human life from the substantive to the ethereal realm. Though the Dream also promotes the theme of "life as dream," it does so by means of contrasting the unreality of dreams with the rationalism of Theseus' court. Prospero's existential investigations, through theatre, involve something much more

fundamental. For him, theatre is a model of human reality, whereby dream-like moments of profound clarity can occur, that are snatched away just as quickly as they present themselves. Shakespeare makes Caliban the most unlikely of arbiters to experience these moments in order to give this model the widest possible scope, and hence, affirmation. In this sense, we differ little from the elves that "on the sands with printless foot / Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him / When he comes back" (TMP V.i.34-36).

Throughout The Tempest, Prospero seldom performs magic independently of Ariel, and their complicity is never more sharply delineated than in Prospero's "renunciation" speech:

> Ye elves of hills...that rejoice
> To hear the solemn curfew; by whose aid --
> Weak masters though ye be --I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
> Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar: graves at my command
> Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let'em forth
> By my so potent Art.
> (TMP V.i.33-50)

Here, acknowledgement is given to the special effects capabilities of elementals. Prospero's theurgic communion with these spirits makes his relinquishment of magic that much more difficult to bear. The inventory of accomplishments indexes the history of synergistic magic performed by Prospero and his preternaturals. These beings fulfil all his necessary and immediate dramaturgical imperatives, or as he puts it, "My

present fancies" (TMP IV.i.121). The spectacular nature of these effects is only matched by their utility. Prospero's power to eclipse the sun with a tempest is what brings Alonso's ship to the island. The war between the "green sea" (TMP V.i.43) and the "azur'd vault" (TMP V.i.43) serves, in part, metaphorically to "impeach" Antonio from office, when Alonso's ship gets caught in the cross-fire of the elements. Through Ariel's ability to transform energy, the magician gives fire to the "rattling thunder" (TMP V.i.44) and selectively burns just enough of the King's ship to empty it of specific people. Prospero, no doubt, once used this same bolt when he "rifted Jove's stout oak" (TMP V.i.45) to free Ariel from the pine. And finally, the magician's necromantic facility to open graves and let forth "their sleepers" (TMP V.i.49) is also suggested in the masque, when he tells us that he has released the spirit-performers "from their confines" (TMP IV.i.121). It is this open theatricality of elementals in The Tempest, then, which sets them apart most from the very elusive fairies of the Dream. Although both casts of preternaturals share a choric function in their respective plays, they contribute differently to each play's unique, but constant ambivalence towards the potency of art and romantic love.

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