

## Moonshine and Sunny Beams: Ruminations on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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"*A Midsummer Night's Dream!*" exclaims one early editor. "Who is the dreamer? The poet, any of the characters of the drama, or the spectators?"

Well carped, critic! Let's go on from there. Not only who is dreaming; who gets dreamed? Surely a dream, or a play, must be "about" someone. In this dream, we find four separate groups of characters derived from different periods of history, far-flung areas of the world, diverse literary and mythological backgrounds, opposed levels of reality. Can we decide which group is central to the play's concern? Mightn't we even ask for a central character?

And is it really too much to ask what the dream means? What most critics tell us about this play would apply to the dreariest hackwork. No one would perform a play that means so little—neither Peter Brook, the Comédie Française, nor Podunk Junior High. Yet all those troupes *have* been performing this airy flummery for 350 years and with almost unmitigated success. What has this play been imparting to so many actors, so many audiences, all these years?

Until Jan Kott came along and said some really interesting things about this play, it seemed almost impossible to give a performance lacking in all interest. Should we not question this play's secret workings, lest some well-meaning director snap up our speculations, turn them into overt and conscious motifs for his production, and ruin the thing once and for all?

### *The Rulers*

Scholars tell us that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was probably first written and produced to celebrate a wedding in the British royal family. If there is little hard evidence for that, it does seem to fit our feeling about the play. Its first scene opens on just such a royal pair, Theseus of Athens and Hippolyta of the amazons, planning their own marriage. And if marriage implies a joining of opposites, Theseus and Hippolyta have assuredly been opposed:

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword  
And won thy love doing thee injuries;  
But I will wed thee in another key  
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

Modern practice, of course, has changed all that. To have the fighting all settled before the wedding must have left them little to look forward to; we'd be bored.

And if that seems old-fashioned, it seems downright quaint for Theseus and Hippolyta, each of whom has quite a past, to forgo sex until after the ceremony. We moderns have reversed that, too. If we fail to stay chaste before the wedding, we frequently make up for that afterward.

Still, in most things, Theseus seems old-fashioned. He governs by right of conquest and by ability to rule. No wonder he seems half-mythical! He even obeys the laws he enforces on his subjects. No sooner has he announced his wedding plans and his determination to restrain his lusts until that time, than in rushes Egeus with his daughter Hermia, to accuse her and her two suitors of a willful desire to break Athens's marriage laws. Most of us sympathize with Hermia, yet we see a justice in Theseus's rule. Suppose we thought he and Hippolyta were slipping off now and then to make out on the sly?

All the better then, if Theseus is upright as well as erect; restraint is valuable, especially when it channels great force:

... but O, methinks how slow  
 This old moon wanes; she lingers my desires  
 Like to a step-dame, or a dowager,  
 Long withering out a young man's revenue

His desires for Hippolyta, then, are strong; yet his telling of them sounds strangely rancorous. Hippolyta's reply seems almost threatening:

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night  
 Four nights will quickly dream away the time;  
 And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
 New bent in heaven, shall behold the night  
 Of our solemnities.

Even lusts so high-strung needn't be imaged as weaponry. Both rulers seem to have slipped back into recollections of that war between them which we had hoped was finished.

Who are these two we have come together to join? Surely, Theseus stands for the model ruler and male, the man of conquest as of conquests, who is yet capable of noble commitment. If his rule is just and central, so is reason's rule in him. When he later comes to the forest, his hounds baying musically, he gives an admirable picture of the animal forces trained and held in harmonious order. The hunter's bow (which elsewhere stood for Diana's chastity or for sexual attack) now is turned to useful sport. Such controlled sport, such harmony, he must induce in himself as in the lovers, those who look to him as their authority.

Hippolyta? She is an amazon. Spenser's Radigund makes her role clear enough: the warrior woman whose single aim is to defeat and enslave the male. As the story goes, all amazons cut off one breast lest it be injured by the bowstring—that is, partly defeminized themselves to better fight the male. Still, we imagine amazons were thoroughly democratic; would as readily subject the male to surgery. So the sexes would be more equal, yet the woman would rule. Hippolyta, seen here in defeat, has none of these fiercer qualities. True, she seems

to get the last word in arguments; yet she is both right and unisistent, an engaging combination. She carries herself with such grace and dignity that we wonder if a woman might be as improved by defeat as some men can.

These two, then, have been fierce enemies; it would be a wonder if no bitterness remained. Their reconciliation, their coming marriage, is indeed a consummation devoutly to be wished. To them, the present moon seems a time of drained resources, of grudging tightfistedness. How shall we reach a new moon of generosity, of free spending and fulfilled desire—how shall we bring this couple to union? How but by airing and expiating, owning and healing those age-old grudges, the wounds of our long war?

Where better to do that than in our dreams—perhaps in just such a dream as this play? *Midsummer Night*, after all, was the night when a girl might dream about her future husband. A *Midsummer Night's* dream, then, tells the truth about our love. Dare we ask it not only to reveal, but also to reconcile us to our love?

### *The Fairies*

- OBERON Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.  
 TITANIA What, jealous Oberon? Fairies, skip hence:  
 I have forsworn his bed and company.  
 OBERON Tarry, rash wanton; am not I thy lord?  
 TITANIA Then I must be thy lady; but I know  
 When thou hast stolen away from fairy land,  
 And in the shape of Corin sat all day,  
 Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love  
 To amorous Phillida.

Now *that* has a good modern sound—nothing restrained about the fairies' rage or their lust. Like Theseus and Hippolyta, they are chaste; theirs, however, is that spiteful abstinence many of us have found in marriage. These fairies fully display and act out those passions which compel all the couples—though Theseus tries to control them, though the lovers try to

disguise them. The fairies could almost be a negative and all the other couples its various positive prints.

The fairies' war echoes another of the problems plaguing Theseus, not only the struggle for dominance between the sexes but also that between parents and children. He has just heard Egeus's claim that his daughter, Hermia, is his property to give in marriage as he wills. The fairies, too, are struggling for ownership of a child—a "little changeling boy" each wants as a page and follower.

Faced by such problems, Theseus defeated his woman in open conflict; Oberon uses subtlety, magic, stealth. It hardly seems cricket (even among lovers) to win the war by putting your woman to bed with the most bestial creature available:

Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,  
 Pard, or boar with bristled hair,  
 In thy eye that shall appear,  
 When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.  
 Wake when something vile is near.

Bottom may not be all *that* vile; most wives would scarcely thank their husbands for so asinine a lover. Yet, the very queen of fairies, once her vision has cleared, does almost thank Oberon. How can her humiliation result, not in a deeper rejection of Oberon, but in acceptance? Can he, like Theseus, win his woman's love doing her injuries? Perhaps the ferocity of his strategy flatters her—he must love her very much to fight so fiercely. Or persuades her to surrender quickly before he does *worse*. More likely it shows her something about her own desires and her rejection of her lord—that she would be willingly embowered only with a man who could be made an ass. Or that her love is a love of the ass.

Anyway, Oberon's strategy works; who is to quarrel with success? The fairies' reconciliation is surely no less desirable than is the rulers'—do we imagine any love can be happy while these fairies rage? These are love's divinities, parental figures who have guided both Theseus and Hippolyta through all their past loves and must now assure their permanent

union. By their own admission, they have caused the world's present coldness and sterility. The seasons are disordered, disease rampant, the rivers rebellious and uncontained; fields are barren, the folds empty, the flocks dying:

And this same progeny of evils comes  
 From our debate, from our dissension;  
 We are their parents and original.

In the normal rounds of his practical business, Theseus encounters most of the other characters of the play. He judges and helps reconcile the lovers; their wedding becomes part of his. The artisans devise their play just to celebrate that same marriage. For all his hard-nosed narrow-mindedness, he seems a splendidly capable ruler; we expect him to be a good husband. Moreover he has had a considerable hand in straightening out the lovers, his subjects. On the one hand, he has made it clear to Hermia that he will maintain the laws of Athens; on the other, he has drawn both Egeus and Demetrius aside for "private schooling" in matters that concern them closely. We have seen that his rule is firm and effective.

Yet Theseus never meets the fairies, those who have guided his past and on whom his future totally depends. How strange that he should not even believe in forces which he has somehow successfully enlisted, and without whose help all his reason and power would be useless.

In act 5, Theseus issues various firm pronouncements on the unreality of love and lovers, plays and players, above all fairies:

I never may believe  
 These antique fables nor these fairy toys,  
 Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.

No sooner has he left the stage, though, taking his bride to bed, than those same nonexistent fairies enter to bless his

marriage and make that bed fruitful. Had their quarrel gone on, not only his bed but his household, his state, his world had been barren and fruitless.

No more than Theseus do we believe in fairies. Yet we see something that he cannot—you had better have them on your side. There is no Oberon. And Titania is his consort.

### *The Lovers*

If you ask the romantic lovers—Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius—they don't want to rule each other, only to serve each other. "I am your spaniel." If you ask the lovers, they wouldn't think of hurting each other. (There's a fact—they do it without a thought.) If you ask the lovers, they want only to marry.

But who believes a lover? They are as full of passion as the fairies, as full of reason as the rulers. But they use reason not to channel passion, rather to disguise and license it. So they remain willfully chaste, willfully sexual. Yet, being so ready to fool themselves, they seldom fool anyone else:

LYSANDER O take the sense, sweet, of my innocence.  
Love takes the meaning in love's conference. . . .  
Then by your side no bed-room me deny,  
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

HERMIA Lysander riddles very prettily; . . .  
But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy  
Lie further off, in human modesty.

At times their speeches have more truth than they yet recognize:

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,  
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.  
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;  
Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste;  
And therefore is Love said to be a child,  
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

The lovers demand to choose love by their own sight, yet they obviously can't see who they are, what they want, or what they are doing. As the play later shows, they are running around lost in a fog. They think they are trying to get married; to us they seem to be doing the exact opposite.

The law will not let Hermia and Lysander marry, so they plan to run away to the home of his widow aunt. (A very moony aunt she seems, "a dowager of great revenue.") No sooner has Hermia joined him in the woods, eager to marry him, than Lysander becomes curiously unable to find that place where marriage will be so easy; within hours he has fallen desperately in love with someone else. Soon, he is plying Helena with all the frantic endearments he once gave Hermia, meantime treating Hermia as hatefully as Demetrius ever did Helena. Throughout the play the truly hurtful things are always said by someone to the person they most love—Titania to Oberon, Lysander to Hermia, Demetrius to Helena. We are told art imitates life.

Where did all these tangles start, these triangles among our four lovers? Apparently when Demetrius, having won Helena, turned from her to Hermia, obtaining her father's permission to marry her. Why did he suddenly desire the scornful Hermia, abandoning the willing Helena? Perhaps just because Helena *was* willing? Lysander certainly turned against Hermia precisely at the point he could marry her.

Consider the advantages for Demetrius in this "unhappy" unfulfilled love. Imagine saying to your true love:

Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, let loose  
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!

and getting this answer:

Why are you grown so rude? What change is this?  
Sweet love . . .

Or better yet, to say:

I do not and I cannot love you

and then get this reply:

And even for that do I love you the more . . .  
 Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,  
 Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,  
 Unworthy as I am to follow you.  
 What worser place can I beg in your love—  
 And yet a place of high respect with me,—  
 Than to be used as you use your dog.

What victory has either Oberon or Theseus compared to that? What has marriage compared to that? Suppose Demetrius won either Hermia or Helena—he would have to live with her. He would have to give up self-pity in being deprived of some imagined love, stop rejecting what love is convenient and available. He would have to become an adult; small wonder both he and Lysander postpone it as long as possible. Meantime, each is deeply indulging himself in injuries to the girl he loves:

LYSANDER What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead?  
 Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.

HERMIA What can you do me greater harm than hate?  
 Hate me? Wherefore? O me, what news, my love?

That is almost motive enough in itself.

But meantime, both girls are just as agile in preserving their "single blessedness." In the first scene, Helena hears that Hermia and Lysander are about to elope—that she will be relieved of her rival. Instead of bidding them a fond good riddance, she tells Demetrius of their plans:

Then to the wood will he tomorrow night  
 Pursue her; and for this intelligence,  
 If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.  
 But herein mean I to enrich my pain,  
 To have his sight thither, and back again.

If she ever was as available as Demetrius thought, she must since have learned the pleasures of rejection and abandonment.

Earlier in this scene, she wished she might be translated into Hermia, who is pursued by both men. In the woods, she gets her wish; under Puck's enchantments both men turn gaga over her. How does she respond? By refusing both, starting a quarrel with Hermia, then running away. What else can you do if events threaten to impoverish your pain?

As to Hermia, when both men courted her, she chose the one forbidden. Listening to Egeus's long speech, we cannot quite make out whether Hermia wants Lysander because her father insists on Demetrius, or whether her father insists on Demetrius because she wants Lysander. Both may be true. It's worth noting, though, that in the companion play (I cannot think of them separately) Juliet fell in love with Romeo only just after her father gave her to Paris. That, surely, is part of the reason she fell in love with someone else, especially with an enemy of her family. In this play, we feel that one of Pyramus's greatest attractions is precisely that he is a family enemy and so forbidden to Thisby. As to Hermia's choice between Lysander and Demetrius, everyone concedes there is no difference between them. How does she tell them apart?—ideally they would be played by identical twins. Lysander has only two discernible advantages: he is not available to Hermia, and he gives her a way to oppose her father.

Only occasionally do we have glimpses of the girls' disdain for their lovers. Hermia gives only a hint:

Before the time I did Lysander see,  
 Seemed Athens as a paradise to me.  
 O then, what graces in my love do dwell  
 That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell!

Helena's slam against Demetrius is much nearer the surface:

. . . as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,  
 So I, admiring of his qualities.

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity.

Except for Hermia's opposition to her father, neither girl shows much desire to directly assault the male. (There will be years and years for that.) On the other hand, before the young men are accepted as husbands, each has proved himself inconstant, trifling, and childish. Perhaps the girls need do nothing to humiliate their lovers; Lysander and Demetrius can be counted on to make asses of themselves.

The rulers then have already fought out their war and wish to be married; the fairies are married and fighting harder than ever. The lovers must keep up the pretense of wanting marriage but are actually doing everything to evade it—at least until they have carried their battle to a point where the final outcome is clearly indicated.

### *The Craftsmen*

Like the lovers, the artisans live in Theseus's world and must seek resolution there; like the lovers, they can reach that only by first withdrawing into Oberon's world. The young lovers now must enter a world of adulthood, marriage, business, reason; in their revulsion, they regress even further into fantasy, childhood, magic. The artisans also go there, apparently sensing that's the place to learn a role, to discover one's part. So develops one of the major structures of the play—the general migration from the sunlit city into the moonlit forest, then back again.

Just as Theseus never had contact with the fairies, the world most comparable to his own, so the lovers have no contact with the artisans, the world that most reflects theirs. True, they watch the craftsmen perform "Pyramus and Thisby." But only after they have married—it is questionable whether they *are* lovers then. In any case that's small contact with a world which sheds such light on theirs.

From the first, "Pyramus and Thisby" has been a mockery of lovers:

FLUTE (as Thisby) My love! thou art my love, I think.  
BOTTOM (as Pyramus) Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace,  
And like Limander am I trusty still.  
FLUTE (as Thisby)  
And I like Helen, till the Fates me kill.

Like the lovers whose names they just echoed (Lysander and Helena), Pyramus and Thisby ran away to meet far from the constraints and divisions of society. There, they found much what the lovers found, much what Romeo and Juliet found—that they are certainly not "trusty still," that they are much more likely to kill themselves than to be killed by Fate. All are like the old joke about the spinster and the hen: "Poor dears, they'd rather die!"

That old sexual pun (among a myriad others) is much in evidence here. The artisans not only rehearse "obscenely and courageously," they perform that way as well. Pyramus picks up Thisby's mantle, bloodied by the lion's mouth, and exclaims:

O wherefore. Nature, didst thou lions frame?  
Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear:  
Which is—no, no, which was—the fairest Dame  
That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer.  
Come tears, confound:  
Out sword, and wound  
The pap of Pyramus:  
Ay, that left pap,  
Where heart doth hop;  
Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.  
  
Now am I dead,  
Now am I fled, . . .  
  
Now die, die, die, die, die.

Demetrius sets out to cap the pun:

No die, but an ace for him; for he is but one.

Then Theseus caps the cap:

With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover, and prove an ass.

We are reminded, of course, of Bottom's earlier transformation. Yet, much as the court mocks the craftsmen's acting, this whole playlet remains a mockery of the hammier performances these lovers just gave with the very substance of their lives.

We are never allowed to forget that the playlet is only a way to pass the time till the lovers may and must bed each other for the first time. By the end of the play, even Hippolyta (who earlier had soothed Theseus's impatience) seems anxious to get on to bed:

I am a-weary of this Moon; would he would change!

THESEUS . . . in courtesy, in all reason, we must stay the time.

The play's purpose is, in part, to make us more eager for marriage and for bed; it does this partly by its mockery of romantic love. At the same time, it helps reveal and expiate our fear of marriage, even of sex itself.

Demetrius calls Snug the Joiner (O sweetly fitting name!):

The very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.

then says of Bottom and Flute:

A mote will turn the balance, which Pyramus, which Thisby is the better, he for a man, God warrant us, she for a woman, God bless us.

Such ready criticism suggests that he is trying to rise to better performance himself but may be none too sure of his abilities. Still we must not be overcritical ourselves—he has had a

courage lacking in Pyramus or Romeo, has come back from the world of fantasy and settled down to live with the woman he loves. No mean feat, that.

Yet it is not only in their playlet that the craftsmen provide an ironic view of love and lovers; they do that far more richly in their forest scenes. There, we watch Puck tangling and untangling the lovers; watch him first transform Bottom into an ass, then, with the same herb that charmed the lovers, put him into the cradle of Titania. Bottom went to the forest when the lovers did, was enchanted by the same magical powers, was released when they were. He of all people has known the quintessential love experience, has been embraced by the queen of love, gone to the very bottom of the world of passion and imagination. And he was an ass. And he is an ass. Watching Titania coo and gurgle over him, we see as nowhere else how

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity.

In some sense, then, all the lovers have proven an ass in the bower of divinity.

Bottom, above all, has had the power (a very passive power it must be) to reenter the world of the child's, even the baby's, sexuality—the world of Mustardseed and Cobweb, of Mother Squash, Father Peascod, and Baby Peaseblossom. There, without the faintest qualm, he replaces the "King of shadows." If he does not actually cuckold that king (we cannot be sure), it is only because he is more interested in eating. The queen has made every amorous advance to him and he has come back safe and sound to tell of it. Well, not perhaps to tell of it:

Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. . . . Methought I was, and methought I had. . . . I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream; it shall be called "Bottom's Dream," because it hath no bottom and I will sing it in the latter end of the play, before the Duke.

He never does but the clear implication is that it is this experience which is not only the basic love experience but also the material which must be translated into the work of art, the experience which makes "Pyramus and Thisby" possible. In the play's last act, the artisans bring back to the city their forest experience; there they wield (however awkwardly) the powers of transformation which they must have gathered from the fairies who had transformed them in the woods.

All along, we have seen that the artisans making their play to further Athenian royal wedding clearly image Shakespeare and his company making *their* play to celebrate an English noble wedding. Who knows better than Shakespeare what goes into the making of a play?

#### *The Firmament*

You could scarcely imagine, unless you had looked into the Furness *Variorum*, what energy critics have spent arguing for the centrality of some one or another of these four worlds. The lovers, the fairies, the rulers—each has its partisans heatedly arguing that their candidate holds the central place while the others only revolve around it, reflecting and illuminating its meaning.

No critic (excepting Dr. Gui, whose penetrating and eccentric analysis appears in the *American Imago*) sees the artisans as central. Yet actors and directors often make them so. We surely remember their scenes most vividly—the enchanted Bottom in Titania's bower; the hilarious "Pyramus and Thisby"—and those scenes are often extracted to play separately.

I certainly don't intend to take sides here. The mere existence of the dispute lends force to my view—that *none* of these worlds is central. As I see it, all four worlds exist only in their balanced relationship to one another. Just as four dancers, or four groups of dancers, might all be part of a larger pattern, each maintaining relation with the others, none more important than the others, our four lovers did, in fact, create

just such a dance pattern in their shifting and alternating triangulations. Or to return to the astronomical figure, the play's firmament holds four worlds, one of which has created its own moon—the play within the play. These four worlds form a circle, as twinned stars might in *our* universe, holding each other in orbit around a center which no one of them may permanently occupy. Each world has close narrative contact with two of the others; each remains apart from a fourth. Each, as it passes through the center, gives and takes illumination from all the others—often most strongly from that fourth world opposite to and separate from itself.

This play was written, after all, at a time when centrality was being broken down in all areas—I take as my authority here Hiram Haydn's *The Counter-Renaissance*. There, we may trace the rise of individualistic philosophies and religions, of capitalist economies, democratic ideas of government; of the child's rights against his parents, the subject's rights against his sovereign, of relativistic views of the world, of reality, of astronomy. Giordano Bruno, that most daringly relativistic of thinkers, had been in England only about ten years before the writing of this play. Haydn quotes Bruno:

Since the horizon forms itself anew around every place occupied by the spectator as its central point, every determination of place must be relative. The universe looks different according to whether we conceive it from the earth, the moon, Venus, the sun, etc. . . .

Why, indeed, may not all the stars be themselves suns, and each new sun appear to itself the center of the universe? Where then are its limits? . . . There must be hundreds of thousands of suns, and about them planets rolling, each one, perhaps, inhabited. . . . Throughout, Nature must be the same, everywhere worlds, everywhere the center, everywhere and nowhere.

From this amazingly modern view, Bruno advances directly to relativity of motion, of time, even of weight.

It is Montaigne, however, who can show us a comparable

relativity of manners, morals, of levels of reality. First he points out that such relativity of place and judgment makes all agreement between men impossible:

Men are in agreement about nothing. I mean even the most gifted and ablest scholars, not even that the sky is over our heads.

Yet even if only one man had ever existed, that one could not truly know reality:

The conception and semblance we form is not the object, but only the impression and the impression and the object are different things. . . .

Now if anyone should want to judge by appearances anyway, to judge by all appearances is impossible, for they clash with one another by their contradictions and discrepancies. . . . Shall some selected appearances rule the others? . . .

Finally, there is no existence that is constant, either of our being or of that of objects. And we, and our judgement and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling ceaselessly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.

Such men as Bruno and Montaigne had moved into a world of limitless change, of rolling and flowing, boundaries shifting and reforming, realities dissolving and illusions becoming real. Shakespeare was a man of his time; not the man least sensitive to forces which were driving others to create and explore new areas of thought and feeling. Most readers would grant that the play implies that all illusions have their reality, all realities their illusion. It is only a step further (though a dangerous one, as Bruno found at the stake) to suggest that no reality is more important, more real, than no one appearance may be selected to rule the others.

One of the peculiar triumphs of Shakespeare's art is to have taken an artistic convention common to his time—the use of subplot—and let it grow until it quite broke down the whole

principle of central plot. What is for lesser writers only a useful device, a way to relieve and vary their central story, is for Shakespeare a way to suggest a whole new view of the world.

Such tendencies must have been very deep in Shakespeare's nature. We see it in every aspect of his work—for instance, his use of imagery. In the sonnet cycle we can watch his technique growing into something that reflects his own psyche, his peculiar vision. In the earlier pieces, imagery tends to be confined to rather low-powered metaphors and similes; we always know what is real and what merely compared to it. As Shakespeare's art grows, the components of an image will be drawn from ever more bafflingly diverse areas of experience, ever more complex structures of reality:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme  
. . . you shall shine more bright in these contents  
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.

Not only is metaphor added to metaphor; the vehicle of the first may be snapped up as the tenor of a second, mounted metaphor:

That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

until we can scarcely say which term is "real" and which only a reflection of it.

In *Rehabilitations*, C. S. Lewis sees a similar urge in Shakespeare's rhetorical practice, contrasting that with Milton's. Milton normally tries to sum up the meaning of his subject in some one description or definitive statement, then lets that stand for better or worse. Shakespeare, on the contrary, tends to come back to his subject again and again—or rather, his characters do. They say things quite as brilliant, as

definitive, as anything in Milton. Yet they say them only in the rush and fumble of trying to grasp a reality that seems always elusive, always too broad for summing up. However wonderful their words may be, they never seem to feel them adequate to experience. Again, we find this same drive toward variousness, toward turbulent diversity, in that violent mixing of genres which so disturbed continental critics: realistic scenes collide with highly fanciful stylized scenes; prose rubs shoulders with blank verse or even with tight rhyme; high wit mixes with buffoonery, high tragedy with melodrama. Shakespeare's plays may not, like the artisans', be "tedious and brief"; they are surely "very tragical mirth... hot ice, and wondrous strange snow." In their despair of imitating this life, they become downright "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral." All conventions are seized on; none is admitted to yield final truth.

And this, of course, is intimately part of what makes Shakespeare so bafflingly great. Stepping into the universe of his plays, we are surrounded with characters, with situations, with meanings, various and far-flung as stars on a summer night. We can no more locate the center of this universe than we can fathom its edges. We cannot define the creator from within his creation. We cannot sum up Shakespeare; we only set up housekeeping there.

### Translations

In the play's first scene, when Hermia is being pursued by both Demetrius and Lysander, Helena says to her:

Sickness is catching; O were favour so,  
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go. . . .  
Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,  
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.

Soon, she gets her wish: she becomes Hermia; both men pursue her. That, of course, is even less satisfying.

In that same process, Hermia is translated into Helena and

finds herself abandoned. Weary from wandering in the forest, she and Lysander had lain down to rest. First, however, she has had to persuade him to lie at a more modest distance. Then, with vows of eternal constancy, they fell asleep. Suddenly Hermia wakes with a nightmare-vision, a dream-within-the-Dream:

Help me, Lysander, help me! do thy best  
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!  
Aye me, for pity! what a dream was here!  
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.  
Methought a serpent eat my heart away,  
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.

Lysander has already abandoned her, chasing after Helena. The dream has shown her her own plight, both in this abandonment where Lysander enjoys her pain, and also in her fear of being preyed upon—a fear which Lysander must have activated by his sly and subtle attempt to seduce her.

Sickness is indeed catching. During the lovers' near-epidemic Lysander, too, suffers a translation: not into what he wished to be, but into what Egeus said he already was. In the opening scene, it was ironic that Egeus should try to take Hermia from the constant Lysander on the grounds that he was inconstant and feigning, giving her instead to Demetrius, whom we know to be faithless. Yet no sooner have the lovers fled to the woods than Lysander becomes all Egeus said he was. He even goes Egeus and the fairies one better: Puck's enchantment may force him to love Helena; to hate and mistreat Hermia is an improvement supplied from his own nature.

Puck's final enchantment, the curing of Demetrius's vision, straightens out all the tangles at once—shows Demetrius that he has always loved Helena and that his pursuit of Hermia was

. . . an idle gaud  
which in my childhood I did dote upon;  
And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,

The object and the pleasure of mine eye,  
 Is only Helena . . .  
 . . . like in sickness did I loathe this food  
 But, as in health, come to my natural taste,  
 Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,  
 And will for evermore be true to it.

This brings the lovers back where they started before the play began. Except that they may be a little more mature after an experience which reveals so much about themselves. Demetrius is shown who his love is; Lysander, what. He, once so ready to call others "spotted and inconstant," is full of inconstancy. Even more, full of hate and venom which he, like Theseus, must recognize and control. The aim of all these translations, then, is to change something so we can see how it always was.

All the lovers are shown lost in a fog where they cannot find, cannot recognize each other or themselves. They declare a deathless love for another person, without whom their lives will be desolate; an hour later, they feel exactly the same thing for someone else. As wild beasts wake famished and devour the first prey at hand, so the lovers wake enchanted and fall in love. It is love-in-idleness that enchants them; being of the leisure class, they can indulge their fantasies, can grieve and blame, can enrich their pain. Hardworking people like Peter Quince may dabble with such loves as they dabble in the arts; they haven't the leftover energy or time to let it control their lives.

I have earlier touched on some of the ways that the enchanted Bottom in Titania's bower reveals the truth about Bottom and about the rebellious Titania as well. Those same scenes also show much about the lovers who undergo a similar enchantment in the same time and place. What happens to Titania and Bottom is obviously related to what happens to the lovers, and not only in the asininity all display.

If the two young men seem almost identical to each other, the two girls are only slightly more differentiated. They cherish, moreover, a vision of their union in infancy:

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,  
 Have with our needles created both one flower  
 Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key;  
 As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds  
 Had been incorporate. So we grew together,  
 Like to a double cherry.

This vision, of which Helena prates so ecstatically, is close kin to that of Bottom in Titania's bower. It is an imagined bower of bliss where, above all, the pains of individuality and separateness are turned to ecstasy in a dream of childish, even babyish, union.

Moving toward maturity and marriage, the lovers must give up the narcissistic dream of being one with those identical to themselves. As individuals they must learn not only to accept what is different, but even what is opposite. They are growing into a world where things are separate and self-willed, yet where union is still possible:

HERMIA Methinks I see these things with parted eye  
 Where everything seems double.  
 HELENA So methinks. And I have found Demetrius like a  
 jewel  
 Mine own and not mine own. . . .  
 DEMETRIUS . . . Do you not think  
 The Duke was here, and bid us follow him? . . .  
 LYSANDER And he did bid us follow to the temple.  
 DEMETRIUS Why then, we are awake.

The lovers, then, are waking from their dream of blissful union (essentially Bottom's dream) and going to the temple and to marriage—a world of differences, of separations, of walls, yet walls that can be penetrated.

The lovers, making this painful change, have the help of the artisans who shared their forest experience. In the last act, the artisans take over from the fairies the power to transform

things so they may be truly seen. Performing "Pyramus and Thisby" they mock their own and the lovers' flight into moonshine and so help them emerge into the raw and difficult light of day. Truly, Bottom and his friends do not "stand upon points," are poor enough actors. Fearing lest the lion terrorize the ladies, or that everyone be shocked by Pyramus's suicide, they seem not to discern what in their art is reality and what illusion. Yet, in effect, they perform very well indeed. Theseus does well to honor them, not because of their supposed good will to him (their *real* aim, of course, is self-advancement), but because their play has a salutary effect on the lovers, helps lead them into reality.

In the play, the lovers leave the world of Bottom's dream to enter the world of marriage. Outside the play, lovers made Bottom's dream the aim of marriage. Alas and alack for us all.

### *The Fundament*

Bottom was translated into an ass. Like all good translators, Puck must have been quick to leap to a pun. And as any good analyst must be quick to hear a pun, Dr. Gui finds Bottom the central character of the play.

Bottom has a strong urge to take over all roles—not just the lover and the lady, but the lion's part as well. He wants to play the tyrant; if there is to be no tyrant, the next best thing is to be the director. While directing the playlet, Peter Quince—whose name echoes Penis Cunt—has continual trouble keeping Bottom in his place.

Bottom himself, almost like a baby, has trouble keeping straight the parts of the body and *their* proper roles:

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.

Playing Pyramus, he says:

I see a voice; now will I to the chink  
To spy an I can hear my Thisby's face.

He does not let many things keep their assigned function:

Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.

He is not just indiscriminating; he seems determined to break down all distinctions. He dissolves the meaning of words, often saying the exact opposite of what he means:

You were best to call them generally, man by man.

There may we rehearse most obscenely and courageously.

I will aggravate my voice so, that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove.

In our world, doves have voices neither grave nor aggravated; they seldom roar and never suck; in Bottom's world, fish, flesh, and fowl are all one.

There is not a more fearful wild fowl than your lion living.

Bottom so longs to equalize everything that when Quince proposes to write a prologue in eight and six syllable verse (the "fourteeners" then so common), Bottom will not hear of it:

No, make it two more; let it be written in eight and eight.

Loving equality, he tends to break down social distinctions, too. He never hesitates to correct Demetrius or even Theseus. Unlike other characters of the play, he addresses everyone he meets with a complete democracy of courtesy. In Titania's bower, he has no sense that he is out of place, addressing Titania's pages with the absurdly patronizing familiarity of le bourgeois gentilhomme. There, in the bower of the fairy queen, he realizes what must be his dearest dream: the blissful union of the asinine with the sublime, the beastly with the ethereal, the great with the small, the ugly with the beautiful.

This is all thoroughly apt, for in the world of the emotions, anality is the direct counterpart of relativism in philosophy. At

bottom, we can scarcely tell male from female; it is the great equalizer which yearns to break down the hierarchies, discredit the phallic or superior. Taking over both male and female roles, it is impatient to assume the world.

Theseus and Bottom, then, stand for diametrically opposed ways of life, not only in their social stance but in the whole bases of their natures. Theseus, the phallic male, always of the elite, holds his position simply because he has more (more anything) than others have. Bottom is the Common Man; he has what we all have.

Theseus takes for granted the artisans' goodwill toward him. To us, he may seem absurdly complacent. Kaiser Wilhelm, after all, was replaced by a saddlemaker; King Alexander by a mill mechanic. Nowadays, Bottom has not only taken over the throne; Theseus could not even get into the legislature—every chair already has an ass. Theseus is no longer Theseus when he seeks the masses' vote; besides, they wouldn't give it to him.

Not believing in fairies, in the overwhelming powers of the unconscious, Theseus could scarcely suspect what powers Bottom has lain beside. Theseus is very much of the past—a past so ancient it may never have existed.

Yet, as far back as the Bronze Age, perhaps we *can* see a bit of Theseus after all—a hunting society demands the direct and powerful rule of one man; bronze weapons could only be owned by an aristocracy. Bottom is of a time when artisans, working in a poorer but commoner metal, iron, would give the farmer tools and so a surplus, letting him turn sedentary, anarchic, indulge himself in dreams, would give the masses weapons and so control of the battlefield and ballot box. Bottom directs the present and the future.

One day, I was talking about all this with a dear old friend, Donald Hall. By now, I don't know which ideas came from him and which from me. Suddenly he burst out laughing: "But how predictive! Where did our modern collective and democratic states come from? From the asshole of society; where else?"

### Poets and Parents

Romantic love, of course, has no very ancient history; it is open to dispute whether even the Romans were romantic. The first time we can isolate and firmly identify this strange virus in the western world is in the courtly love lyrics of the twelfth-century renaissance in Provence. Oddly enough, there, too, it is involved with a historical movement which helped break down centrality of rule.

We are only now beginning to suspect that neither the troubadour's music nor his sentiments were as "pretty" as we had been told. With some justice, we could say that the troubadour song has only two obsessions: let's go crusading and kill Moors, or let's go seducing and lay the boss's wife.

After many centuries of terrifying upheaval, the twelfth century was a time when men could once again afford unhappy love, self-pity, betrayal, envy of authority. After all, the local strong-arm chief, the feudal equivalent of Theseus, was no longer so desperately needed for protection against invaders, had become in fact a considerable threat himself. It has been seriously argued that one real purpose of the crusades was to keep the turbulent and idle aristocracy out of trouble nearer home. Meantime, the lower orders were beginning to envy their power, their freedom, their women.

The courtly love object is always a married woman, usually the wife of the singer's overlord. Most troubadour songs are much less interested in that lady's excellences (which are praised in habitual, desultory fashion) than in the desire to humiliate, annoy, or deceive her husband. Thus, the singer might satisfy two illicit cravings at once: to get a forbidden woman and, at the same time, exercise a good deal of homosexual fascination. Beyond this were the pleasures of a dual betrayal—offering to the lady that loyalty the singer owed her husband and the Christian deities, then using this false "loyalty" to convince her that she, too, should betray her husband, her feudal lord, her religion. Throughout these songs the husband is known as the jealous one, the thief, the liar.

What else can you call a man of whom you are jealous, whose wife you are stealing, to whom you must continually lie?

As prosperity filtered downward during the next two centuries, this tradition spread through the *trouvères* and *minnesänger*, the French *chansons de toile*, and into the folk ballad which apparently began among the French peasantry of the fourteenth century. Throughout this process, the effects of a growing prosperity and security are seen in a growing concern with human wishes and aspirations (not merely actions), with personal psychology, with self-expression, with love.

No doubt the spread of romantic love was hastened by the Albigensian Crusade in which the French obliterated Provence—ostensibly to clean up the vice down there; actually to bring it all back home. One of the chief effects of this crusade, like most earlier ones, was that a little of Arabic high culture rubbed off on the barbarous Franks and Europeans. Likely enough, the Provençals themselves had picked up romantic love (with most of their musical and poetical practices) from brushes with the Moors in earlier crusades. Those who survived the Albigensian Crusade were scattered all across Europe; no doubt this helped disseminate their type of song, their type of love. Yet surely any tradition that offered such lively music, together with so many opportunities for betrayal, was bound to catch on.

By the seventeenth century, the time of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the forces of church and state had managed to change romantic love—it had been, in every sense, housebroken. It had moved from the aristocratic warrior classes of the court (which it had helped undermine) into the households of the triumphant middle class. (We should not be surprised that capitalism, value through scarcity, first expressed itself in love.) It remains essential that the lady be unattainable—what's romantic about a woman you can have? But now the lady is single; the obstacle is not her husband, but her father. The aim is not seduction but marriage against opposition. No doubt it must have seemed to the church and state—the initial targets of romantic love—that this was a less dangerous line of

attack. Indeed, for a time it probably had a salutary effect: it may be argued that the sudden dramatic rise of western culture over its neighbors was very much furthered and fueled by the tensions romantic love fostered between fathers and sons. When this tension could not be directly expressed, one result would be an increase of competition with other males and so a generally higher level of achievement. You can no more write a great play alone than you can run a great mile. You can only have Shakespeare *with* Marlowe and Jonson; Bannister *with* Landy and Chattaway. Such accomplishment usually demands a kind of admiring competition—and so is often more available to those not entirely comfortable with themselves or their loved ones.

In any case, the art form leading this attack against the father as center of authority was no longer the love lyric, but rather the drama. One often feels that half the surviving renaissance plays portray the struggle of two young people to marry against their parents' opposition. If they can defeat, trick, or thwart those parents, it is automatically assumed they will settle down to love each other forever, all their dreams fulfilled. The play ends in confident assurance that this may be called "a happy ending."

This is one of the reasons it is so fitting that Bottom be an actor—consider the loss if the craftsmen had decided to form a chorus and sing for Theseus's wedding! Beyond this, to be an actor, a role player, fits in perfectly with the anality, the antisexuality of his nature. The driving aim of an actor has always been to escape his own definition in a borrowed role, above all to escape sexual definition. Theater was greatest when only men played (renaissance England, ancient Greece); the crowning achievement has always been to play the opposite sex.

This is to say that while actors and dramatists were among the first to demand freedom to control their own sexuality, what they really sought was either the transformation or the obliteration of that sexuality. Thus we can clearly see in them those self-deceptive drives toward freedom which have proved so superbly productive in the hands of the gifted men who

could sublimate them into areas such as the creative arts. We can also see the underlying passivity which would make these drives so destructive in the hands of the mob.

Bottom seems to have known all along where fashions in the arts were running, both in our greatest creative geniuses and in our popular travesties of art. The poem did not stop at eight and eight—it finally lost its erect shape altogether, falling into a soft and pliable (at worst, doughy) shape. Music overthrew the phallic hierarchy of the dominant seventh for the artificial communism, the unisex, of the tone row. The same tendencies could be followed out in any of the arts.

No doubt, most of our greatest artistic creations derive a part of their force from profoundly antisexual drives. The phallic artist whom D. H. Lawrence demanded was, after all, only a figment of his fantasies—above all, fantasies of becoming something diametrically opposed to the artist he was. Who can be sure that if he had become as phallic as he wished, he mightn't have stopped all artistic work? Knowing such achievements as Lawrence's or Whitman's, we can only be grateful for those less phallic forces which fostered them. At the same time, we may be horrified at the results of those drives as acted out directly by ordinary men: modern government and modern marriage, glamour and sexlessness, mediocrity and conformity, drugs and television, the paintings everyone can paint, the songs everyone can write.

Who says poetry makes nothing happen? The artist's open rendering of his emotions may have such unpredictable effects on the public that totalitarians from Plato to Stalin have been willing (with some justice) to muzzle or exterminate these unacknowledged and unconscious legislators. Poets and playwrights helped bequeath us a society where we could choose our own mates and settle down to lives of unmatched wretchedness. A psychoanalyst recently commented that domestic troubles, unhappy love lives, have cost us more misery than all history's wars and famines together. Who can say him nay? It is only one of the ways we are now at the mercy of our pitiless fantasy lives.

Clearly, Egeus is a vengeful old cur, ill-equipped to pick a

mate for Hermia. The only person less well equipped is Hermia. No more than anyone else am I willing to give up the right to pick my mate. No more than any other of the freedoms I habitually demand is this likely to make me happy or (unless I am uncommonly lucky) more creative or useful. My personal experience—and I have had too much—has been the exact opposite. To the best of my knowledge, no sensible person has ever tried to show that we westerners have become either happier or more useful since we started picking our own mates.

Neither do I think renaissance dramatists are responsible for the wretchedness of our families, the uselessness of our women, the emptiness of our men, the loneliness of our children. The artist's only business, after all, is to depict his passions honestly; the citizen must decide what to do about them. Artists, in fact, showed perfectly clearly how self-deceptive and dangerous those passions were; we preferred not to hear. We at least need not go on feeding ourselves the old lie that what is good for the artist is good for the citizen, or that what either one wants (or thinks he wants) is likely to be good for him. Both might recall what the Athenians knew: if the gods really hate you, they give you just what you're asking for.

#### *Weavers and Revolutionaries*

If it is strangely apt that Bottom be an actor, how much more so that he be a weaver. Who can imagine him as anything else—Bottom the Butcher, Bottom the Greengrocer, Bottom the Hostler?

It's not just the name—that a bottom is the spool or base on which weavers wound thread. Not only that it is a sedentary trade, demanding a good deal of *sitzfleisch*, leaving its practitioner time for mooning and fantasizing (even as the lovers were enchanted by "love-in-idleness"). So, as Hazlitt commented, it is right that Bottom be "accordingly represented as conceited, serious and fantastical."

It goes far deeper into our past. Weaving is a craft basal to

our history, ingrained to our oldest thinking; it takes us even into our prehumanity—birds can do it, some with surprising skill. It has come to image some of life's most fundamental processes. We say a man's life is spun or woven by the weaving goddesses until his thread is finally cut. As Pyramus, Bottom rants:

O Fates! come, come;  
Cut thread and thrum,  
Quail, crush, conclude and quell!

In northern mythology, the Norns weave the loom of war, whose threads are weighted by human skulls. A man and a woman, in marriage and in sex, are seen as weaving the fabric of our life; Theseus says:

in the temple, by and by, with us  
These couples shall eternally be knit.

We have long used weaving, or related crafts, to represent the building of the body through digestion, or the building of the mind in its cross-lamination, layer on layer. We image the products of that mind, too, as a woven fabric. The radio announcer who late at night (when no one else would buy the time) read sentimental poems to sentimental music was called, of course, "The Dream Weaver." There is probably no creative art (unless it be weaving) for which we do not use weaving as a habitual metaphor.

If weaving is so involved with our ancient history, it is no less entangled with the building of our peculiar modern society. It was among the artisans, and especially among weavers, that the revolutionary religious ideas of the Albigeni took firmest root. Perhaps no single invention was more crucial in developing our special way of living than was the power loom. In this primeval skill, free craftsmen had to work as only slaves or manual laborers had worked before, not for fulfillment in their work but rather to get the money and free time to buy

other enjoyments outside their work. Work became a burden, an imprisonment; the modern itch for fun was born. How much of good and of ill came there into our world! Throughout Europe, the early inventors of power weaving equipment were drowned, hanged, stoned, driven out—as if men knew what a Pandora's box was opening before them. But no use; modern society was not to be escaped.

One of the first plays involved with the revolutionary history of our modern democratic and communistic states is *The Weavers* by Gerhart Hauptmann, a play even more relativistic than is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It has no central character, no central group of characters, not even a central theme beyond a never-ending complaint: "It ain't fair!"

The most memorable representation of weavers in modern art, however, is rather to be found in the marvelous early drawings of Vincent van Gogh. In those rough, monumental scribbles I find something oddly bisexual: weaving is an art we always associated with the mother who nourishes, shelters, and comforts, yet it is most often practiced by men—and, in Vincent's drawings, men who are specially square-cut and rough-looking. Watching someone weave, I have always been impressed how satisfying the craft seems to its practitioners. Yet I have to be amused, too: it is as if the weaver had his own built-in sex act where he is both male and female; meantime, he rocks soothingly back and forward not only like the rhythm of sex but like the baby rocked by its mother or calmed by the rhythm of her heartbeat.

In van Gogh's drawings, the weaver sits encased in his enormous loom like a man in the stocks, a child in his pet, the baby in the womb. Meantime, his own creation grows before him like an artificial belly or pregnancy. (It is a creation, too, embodying fundamental patterns, but usually centerless.) Like the fat man Auden mentions in *The Dyer's Hand*, he has a built-in image of the mother he would join once more. (In the play, he rejoins her in the body of Titania. In the playlet he does not; he perishes.) The weaver, then, is symbolically self-sufficient; has taken over all roles. He has rid himself

not only of the sex difference but of the size and generation difference—he is not only the contained baby, but also the containing and nourishing mother.

Vincent's weavers seem to me like the devotees of some goddess of fertility and motherhood—say Cybele, whose priests castrated themselves in consecration to her. They sit self-imprisoned in the loom as if in the stocks, totally absorbed in the fabric of their rites. The goddess of their devotion is bodied forth by the almost ever-present lamp hanging over the loom—in his letters, Vincent writes with near ecstasy of finding one of those lamps. We may trace that lamp and its symbolic relatives all through Vincent's work, beginning with the cradle scenes. The lamp (in my mind, it resembles that "lanthorn" Starveling carries into the Duke's chamber as Moon) represents that light which announces to the baby that he will soon be fed and is, ever after, associated in his mind with all that is warm and comforting. It glows over the world of these trapped and shackled weavers just the way the moon glimmers above the world of changeling and Starveling, the enchanted world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

#### *Moonshine*

In almost every overt way, the play gives victory to the male, hands the child to its father. The little changeling boy is awarded to Oberon—presumably to be trained and follow in his image. True, Theseus tempers Egeus's vengeful severity against his daughter, even helps her escape a full confrontation with the law by his "private schooling" of Demetrius. Yet he also makes it clear she cannot flout that law: had Demetrius not relented, she apparently would still have to choose between her father's will and chastity or death. Although neither the father's will nor Athenian law, then, are left as immutable or inescapable forces, both remain operant powers which must at least be successfully evaded. That evasion will probably require help from the Duke, a male ordering authority or father-surrogate.

Yet the male's victory, like so much else here, may well be

illusory. Theseus seems very much in control; he is, in fact, completely dependent on unrecognized forces. Oberon is awarded the child; his triumph never pervades the mind as does the recollection of the imperious Titania, supreme in her bower.

From our vantage in time, it is easy to see that Theseus's and Egeus's days are numbered; Bottom, who has lain beside darker powers, will soon oust both of them. It is astonishing for Shakespeare, so near this culture's first greatness, to render so clearly the drives which first produced that greatness, and now draw us toward decay. He could hardly have imagined that the machine and the bomb would make Theseus, if not obsolete, expendable. He could not imagine a people so luxurious and leisurely they could dispose of Theseus's strength, authority, aggressiveness, ability; that mediocrity *could* drive out superiority. He did see, only too clearly, the complex of emotions which, once this became possible, would make it inevitable. As a tree or animal contains, in the structures of its growth, the principles of its limits and death, cultures seem to hold, in the very form of their successes, the forces which eventually destroy them. To have attacked so successfully the centers of direct and conscious authority seems to have left us at the mercy of unconscious powers whose despotism may be much more far-reaching.

The play's most powerful image—Bottom in Titania's cradle—holds both the constructive and the decadent side of this complex. On the one hand, we usually think of creative work in strongly phallic terms, and without considerable phallic drive, the creative man can scarcely perform. On the other hand, it must also be noted that most of our truly creative men have had very strong mothers and have been deeply attached to them, even directly imitative of them. We have already noted that the experience of Titania's bower may be quintessential to the creative act; we have also noted what incredible energies we have tapped in the boy's desire to replace his father in that bower, or in the opposing desire to lose his own sexuality in becoming his mother. Yet those desires are only valuable so long as they are frustrated, unfulfilled—so long as

the child embodies the unresolved struggle of his parents. Naturally, we all would see that conflict resolved; to resolve it through the evisceration of either power may be to eviscerate the child and perhaps, also, that civilization built partly upon the tensions of that struggle. Detente implies that both opposed powers *remain* powers; for all the dangers of antagonism, we would not lose the enormous energies it has given us.

If the father is successfully castrated or driven out, or if one's own sex is successfully obliterated, then all that tension—the source of energy—is dissipated. How quickly all that phallicism turns anal and passive, all that invention turns sluggish, static, aimless. We fight our way, with what vigor, to the throne, to Titania's bower. Once there, we just can't seem to think of anything to do.

How imperceptibly competition turns to betrayal. Given our special circumstances, the boy's attachment to his mother can be used to enlist him in the general weakening of the male—ultimately, himself. The baby's fear of abandonment has always given the mother immense powers over the imagination. This makes her less subject to our natural compulsion to betray whomever we love. But add to this the industrial revolution which makes the male seem dispensable, romantic love with all its castrative possibilities, individualistic philosophies with all their self-deception; it scarcely bodes well for the male. What can the too successful young man do? He has helped undermine the forces that might have sustained and directed him in this surplus of power. Now there is no one left to betray but himself.

Or he can betray the active ideals he used to reach the seat of power. Why not settle down to be babied, soothed and pampered, lied to, fed, and cajoled?

Be kind and courteous to this gentleman;  
Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes;  
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,  
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;  
The honey-bags steal from the humblebees.

And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs,  
And light them at the firey glow-worm's eyes,  
To have my love to bed and to arise; . . .  
Tie up my love's tongue, bring him silently.

Or, better still, feed him on endless beer and potato chips, plant his ever-widening buttocks before an inextinguishable television set, all channels of which play various episodes from an endless soap opera called "Bottom's Dream." We are not ruled by those who have an idea of what the state should do, nor even of what they want from it. We are ruled by any who can contact and control the dream life of the masses. It is not bread and circuses; it is ice cream and revolutions, equal pay and concentration camps. If I speak of Hitler and Stalin, it is only to avoid mentioning anyone closer home.

Nowhere is the mother's dominion over the unconscious world of the play more evident than in the omnipresence of the moon. No doubt Dr. Gui is right to see it as the symbol of the mother's breast, of that nourishment the child must have or die. Titania, her earthly avatar, echoes that breast in her very name; Hippolyta, so closely kin to her, must lack one teat, thus already suggesting the possibility of starvation. Who is it, after all, that carried the moon's lantern and thornbush?—none but Starveling. The moon, then, is indeed "governess of floods," the tides of liquid in our world. But the moon is also goddess of virginity and of marriage, of barrenness and of birth, of grudging coldness and of warm affection. She shines on the lovers as on the raging, hate-filled fairies. She is patroness of art, of illusion, of dreaming, of lunacy—of all those forces that control the wide-awake, sunlit, reasonable, paternalistic city of Theseus.

Dr. Gui reminds us that if Theseus's first speech is true, then throughout the whole time of the play there is no moon shining at all. The moon, then, the symbol of illusion, may itself be an illusion. Why talk so much about it, if one were sure that it was really there? Why weave so cunning a web as this play, so circular, so delicately filigreed, so glimmering with dew, if one were really able to catch the thing itself?

No one of the worlds of this play can be truly understood or located until we know its relation to the moon. And, after all, in so relativistic a play as this one, all worlds may very well revolve around the moon.

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