

ARTEMIS' FLIGHT AND "NEWTONS SLEEP"  
A COUNTER-READING OF PATTERN AND INTERFERENCE IN A *MIDSUMMER*  
*NIGHT'S DREAM*

By

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To Don and to Sid,  
for texts and dreams that need  
not be explained here  
—and to Norm Cook, for praising me

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	6
ABSTRACT.....	7
CHAPTER	
1 ARTEMIS FLIGHT: THE HOLOGRAPH(EM)IC <i>DREAM</i> .....	9
Approaching Shakespeare through Blake.....	9
The Critical Issue.....	9
The Case for “Newton”.....	12
Play and Text.....	18
From Text to Play.....	20
(Em) and Name.....	22
Inter-ference, -spersion, and -connection.....	25
2 “NEWTONS SLEEP” : COUNTER-READINGS OF TEXTUAL FORCES AND COMPLEXES.....	32
Lunar and <i>Ludic</i> Interference.....	32
Helen(a)’s Strife.....	40
Meta-theatricality, Instability, and Meta-stability.....	48
Embedded (Play) Transformation.....	55
Anarchy’s Stalking-horse.....	64
The Epilogue: “End of the Dream”.....	77
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	84

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Dream</i>	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> ; William Shakespeare's play in its representational iteration
<i>Pyramus</i>	The representation of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in Act V of the <i>Dream</i>
FF	First Folio printing of Shakespeare's complete works, published in 1623
Q1	First Quarto printing of the <i>Dream</i> , published in 1600
Q2	Second Quarto printing of the <i>Dream</i> , published in 1619
(#.:#:#)	Theatrical citation: (Act.Scene:Line-s). Roman numerals designate acts; Arabic, scenes and lines, differentiated by punctuation
(:#)	Consecutive subsequent references to the same scene cite line numbers preceded by a colon

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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This study directly addresses literary criticism and theory that seeks to establish intertextual consistency rather than approaching texts as unique objects. Instead of imposing a pre-existing framework or interpretation onto a text, it is an exercise in interpretation based on the details of the text. It adapts Donald Ault's critical approach to William Blake's *The Four Zoas*, emphasizing close reading and attention to overt discrepancy and hidden similarity as a means of penetrating the text's potentially deceptive surface features.

Taking up Ault's idea of an implicit textual dialectic between Newtonian and anti-Newtonian impulses, as well as the notion of textual singularities which condense textual forces into conspicuous self-reflexive forms, this study interrogates the textuality of theatrical representation. In concentrating underlying textual impulses, singularities grant access to the hidden undercurrents and deep structures whose unique processes characterize individual texts. Shakespeare makes these more conspicuous by directly treating these textual impulses and narrative structures through self-reflexive meta-theatricality.

Ault's theory of textuality is translated from the printed page into theatrical applicability, additionally drawing on Johan Huizinga's theory of play and culture, Elizabethan cultural research, and holographic theory. Such an approach radically departs from traditional Shakespeare criticism by finding meaning in apparent contradiction, disrupting self-consistent critical trends, and externalizing the textual interactions between order and interruption. This interpretative approach is adapted specifically for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which both directly addresses and immediately extends this apparent opposition beyond its representational boundaries in the interests of disseminating its disruption and instability.

CHAPTER 1  
ARTEMIS' FLIGHT : THE HOLOGRAPH(EM)IC DREAM

**Approaching Shakespeare through Blake**

**The critical issue**

Northrop Frye begins *Fearful Symmetry*, his landmark study of William Blake's poetry, with "The Case Against Locke". Generally averse to empirical thought, Blake holds Locke, and the closely-associated Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon, responsible for the materialist, reductive world-view dominating Western civilization. Just as Frye begins his book with Locke, Donald Ault began his professional career with *Visionary Physics*, an explication of Blake's response to Newton's thought and texts. This anti-Newtonian theme runs through Ault's criticism; *Narrative Unbound*, his close reading of Blake's *The Four Zoas*, analyzes the anti-Newtonian agenda of a notoriously confounding text. Fred Dortort's *The Dialectic of Vision* seizes this notion, adapting Ault's ideas to expose the subversive double-textuality of Blake's *Jerusalem* and interrogate the subversive counter-text written into the overt narrative.

Frye's critical mode fixates on the reductive, Newtonian reading; carried on by Harold Bloom and other critics accepting *Fearful Symmetry's* authority, this view seeks to establish a comprehensive, totalized interpretation that exhaustively exposes textual workings and poetic meaning. The same can be said of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*; in his prefatory notes, Frye acknowledges his goal of generalizing his critical tactics and methods toward the end of orienting literary study on scientific (rational-empirical) knowledge. His archetypes act as a general framework useful for interpreting any work of Western literature, but this general applicability comes at the price of homogeneity; at best, it subordinates a specific text's uniqueness, and at worst ignores individual

qualities entirely (though Frye acknowledges that these details relate internally to one another, rather than universally).

This study is a response to Frye's mythos of Spring, his comedic cycle based on Menander's New Comedy; in providing a counter-reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's most popular comedy, it deploys anti-Newtonian reading tactics against archetypal (and generally homogenous) formulations of the play's characters and narrative. The Newtonian tendencies of Frye's criticism (present mainly in adherents who take Frye's word as gospel) aim at establishing an absolute authority, and consequently a text's ultimate meaning, which forecloses on certain avenues of imaginative interpretation. Behind such dominant readings, however, reflexive textual undercurrents flow against rational interpretive strategies, complicating superficial appearances and the conclusions drawn from conventional examinations.

Critical studies of Shakespeare generally and implicitly focus on the plays' printed text; this study does the same, with certain caveats arising from the *Dream's* complicated and unstable printed nature. Differences between copies recall Blake's variant textual arrangements, but unlike Blake's books, Shakespeare's printed work survives only in editorial editions, creating discrepant versions of the *Dream* and precluding any true master text.

These problems arise when a text becomes written rather than spoken, and they persist throughout its existence. For example, the editors of *The Oxford Shakespeare* identify signs of heavy emendation in Q1, at the start of V, and reconstruct a version of the text as Shakespeare might have supplied it to the printer, in the form of his "foul papers". Foul papers would have consisted of authorial annotations written on a script;

printers integrated these marginal notes with the copy text to produce a version for mass production—either a small run of scripts for a company, or a large run meant for sale. The process of compiling Q1 resulted in certain errors that were corrected for Q2, which in turn produced more typographical errors and mistakes. FF’s editors take Q2 as their base text, supplemented with an original script used in one of Shakespeare’s productions of the *Dream*.

These three early major printings of the *Dream* each claim different authority—original, authorially revised, meticulously edited—and differ from one another, raising uncertainty as to the original and intended form of the play. Subsequent editors continue to grapple with this issue, choosing which details to include and which alternate iterations and details to suppress. At worst, editors efface them entirely, and at best displace them to marginalia and notes. This process and composition produce the illusion of a stable, normative text—a necessary fiction when dealing with Shakespeare as literature and performance, but one destabilized by the multiplicity emergent as a side-effect of early mass printing.

This situation recalls the matters at stake in the *Dream* itself. Concerned with play at a textual level in conjunction with language as theatrical play’s ordering element, suppression and assertion (resembling editorial activity) occur throughout the *Dream*. Shakespeare’s disinterest in printing is apparent in the immediate lack of stage directions, and in the resultant emphasis on the spoken word as the basis of accompanying stage action (differentiating performance from simple oration). The playwright focuses on performance, immediate representation, rather than publishing as mediated preservation; it is unlikely that Shakespeare intentionally addresses publishing

issues in the *Dream* (or perhaps through this apparent indifference, does). Rather, the text's subversive instability results from the destabilizing forces at work in, and directly treated by, the *Dream* as a textual object.

### **The case for “Newton”**

In this study, “Newtonian” is, by and large, replaceable by “Thesian”, after Theseus, who demonstrates the same tendencies toward suppression and absolute order—most importantly, he rejects the lovers' inexplicable experience in the forest as pure fantasy, the product of irrational imagination, despite the consistency amongst the four accounts. Any Newtonianism that Shakespeare exhibits is a product of his cultural situation; this study retains “Newtonian” as a term despite the inherent anachronism, partially due to the term's ironic self-indulgence and appropriately self-reflexive intrusion, and because of the rhetorical weight Newton carries in his pretention toward truth and closure.

This study presumes a Newtonian—standardized or dominant—analytic perspective, a broadly deployed reading method that takes itself and the conclusions it generates as absolute truth. This impulse toward establishing true meaning and interpretive closure echoes Newton's practices and ideals; thus, when the Newtonian impulse is referred to in regard to Shakespeare, the suggestion is not that Newton influenced Shakespeare (an historic impossibility), but that Newton and his practices culminate and concentrate certain textual tendencies and practices. (Characterizing Newton as such—the pinnacle of the textual strategies and tendencies he demonstrates and deploys—suggests an ultimate point and inherent unity, which are Newtonian suppositions in themselves.)

In *Narrative Unbound*, Ault examines Blake's manipulation of his poetic medium as a reaction against Newtonian textual tendencies and ideals that foreclose on the reader's interpretation, instead insisting on its own (the text's, and its implicit narrator's) authority. Newton, in his natural philosophy and Biblical exegesis, maintains the presupposition that "if [a] demonstration be good, there needs no further examination of the thing...and seeing I [Newton] am well assured of the truth and exactness of my own observations, I shall be unwilling to be diverted by any other experiment" (qtd. in Ault "Incommensurability" 280). Newton's faith in his own interpretation and explanation extends to his texts through the unassailability he/they claim: any contention is invalid unless it first "show[s] wherein what I have done may be mended" (qtd. "Incommensurability" 294). In lieu of making such emendations, the reader is expected to submit entirely to the authority the text establishes for itself; Ault characterizes this as a sort of perceptual grid the text creates and encourages (even mandates) the reader to retain and employ as a veridical hermeneutic.

Blake, as read by Ault, demonstrates the bankruptcy of these Newtonian ideals. This reading's cornerstone is Paul Feyerabend's formulation of incommensurability, detailed in *Against Method*. The anarchist character of Feyerabend and his thought will achieve greater significance in the ensuing discussion of the *Dream*; in itself, the theory is anarchistic in its desire to overturn dominant scientific modes of thought, and (unconfessedly) Marxian in its insistence on pushing systems to their breaking points. Feyerabend seizes on empiricism's *lacunae*, the anomalies and inexplicabilities that occur in any theory, which science willfully suppresses and distorts in its pursuit of totalized understanding and holistic knowledge. This requires the suppression of

certain data about, and aspects of, an object of study; excluded at the outset, they may be worked into a system later (*ad hoc*), but if explanation or incorporation proves impossible or contradictory, the anomalies are entirely suppressed and excluded. The problem (at least for Feyerabend and Blake) arises when these fictions ossify into absolute certainty or 'truth'. In *Milton*, Blake calls science (etymologically, 'knowing', here interpreted as 'objective' truth) "architecture", one of the four arts in Eternity (Erdman 125; 27:56). In characterizing science as an imaginative architecture of existence, Blake emphasizes science's validity as a human pursuit and its potential for significance and even beauty. The danger emerges, however, in closing all the doors and windows, suppressing everything outside Enlightenment science's material-rational-empirical bounds, and assuming the construct is all-encompassing, recalling Hamlet's infinite space bound in a nutshell.

Such an assumption succumbs to the Newtonian impulse toward holistic order, unity, and closure even as the suppressive activity undermines these possibilities. Newton's ray theory of light suppresses light's wave-like characteristics, instead granting ontological primacy to its particle characteristics. Newton works out his particle theory of light and accounts for the wave characteristics through *ad hoc* additions. Conversely, Huygen's wave theory, a competitor to Newton's formulation, takes its eponymous characteristic as fundamental and only later works in the particle aspects as secondary features. The theories are incommensurable, each taking the other's suppressed material as their respective starting points, but both also accurately describe light's behavior. To Newton, such a situation (Feyerabend's Swiss cheese

model) is unacceptable; one theory (specifically, his own) must be true, and the other (*all* others) false.

Newton's fixation on truth through totalization and stability springs from his commitment to reconstituting the *prisca sapientia*, a unified system of natural philosophy and religion he believed to have been initially recorded by Hebraic writers but long since lost to humankind. In the pursuit of the single, underlying, consistent truth and nature of reality through his theological, natural-philosophical, and alchemical research, Newton sought to reconstruct this pre-existing, comprehensive system and bring an end to the narrative of fallen human knowledge, thus returning it to its stable starting point. This unified system would banish all *lacunae* by eliminating all inferior theories and ideas, producing a totalized perspective grid encompassing science, spirituality, and everything. His published philosophical and mathematical works are keystones in the history of modern Western culture, and the sciences' tendency to concretize knowledge, as well as a certain cultural investment in technological utopianism through material empiricism, evidence the influence of his textual tactics and tendencies.

This shows just how close Newton came to deploying his totalized perspective, but also witnesses his failure stemming from strict adherence to his textual and epistemological tactics. Newton is faithful to himself above all others, refusing to compromise his existing work's integrity through modification, and so preventing himself from reconciling the sexual characteristics of natural processes (discussed in his private papers) with the careful asexuality of his published writing. This failure to realize a reconstructed *prisca* arises precisely from the truth-value Newton's own work places on

itself, and from the tendency to suppress incommensurability and reject information outright rather than trying to strike some sort of balance.

The biological sexuality that Newton suppresses seems intimately tied to the anti-/Newtonian dialectic. From the outset, Shakespeare's *Dream* depicts masculinity's attempts to subordinate the feminine and suppress undesirable textual characteristics; but these suppressed traits persistently return to complicate the imposed/imposing order. This subversion-in-suppression relates directly to the image of the moon, which is intimately tied to Artemis, the Greek goddess of nature and chastity, thoroughly resistant to masculine order/civilization. (Though set in Greece, the characters refer to the Roman Diana—a predilection common to Shakespeare's work. This imposition recalls the imposition of the non-Hellenic fairies, discussed later.) In this study of the *Dream*, "Artemisian" designates the impulse complicating and contrary to the Newtonian drive that Theseus embodies. Artemis' conflicting domains, virginity and nature (biological reproductive process), recall Newton's similar conflict with sexual and asexual explication, and his attempts to both suppress and subsume femininity and sexuality. Theseus, as the *Dream's* primary ordering agent—a position established by his narrative primacy and precedence—likewise suppresses the goddess's name throughout the performance.

Sexual division similarly figures into Ault's reading of Blake's *Zoas* in *Narrative Unbound*. Interrogating the dialectical textuality Blake mobilizes in the anti-Newtonian poem, Ault begins with Tharmas and Enion as figures of textual patterning and flight. Tharmas, departure from Newtonian unity and cohesion, takes flight from Enion, his sexual counterpart, whose weaving figures the textual impulse toward overt consistency

and continuity inherent in any pattern; this metaphor for division serves as the poem's primal event, the constitutive conflict that spurs the narrative into motion. Flight manifests textually as disruption and disparity; a strongly anti-Newtonian text appears (to the Newtonian perspective) incoherent and incomprehensible, or passes into non-connectivity and becomes an arbitrary aggregate. Pattern, on the other hand, manifests as a diagrammatic quality; David P. Young devotes a fair amount of attention the *Dream's* patterns in his geometric and schematic analysis of reversal and perspective/consciousness. The Newtonian patterning impulse implicitly suppresses flight in the interests of narrative cohesion and unity (often taken as characteristics vital to successful and ideal narrativity). Blake grants ontological priority to his poetic medium, and as such, the flight and pattern are directly visible on the printed page in addition to being metaphorically figured in the narrative itself, granting narrative and physical text an intimate connection which Newtonianism denies in its assumptions that the text draws upon and expresses a pre-existing, stable, underlying reality.

Like Blake, Shakespeare grants language an ontological function, acting as its own referent rather than signifying an underlying story. Unlike Blake, though, the bard of Avon wrote his poetry specifically for live audiences rather than private readers, and so focuses on the spoken word, aurally perceived, rather than the visual written word. Language, mediated and preserved in writing, provides an absolute schema for a traditional theatrical play: the stage action must accord to the dialogue's suggestions, or else lapse into confusion—or if Shakespeare is taken at his (lack of) printed word, inactivity due to minimal stage direction.

The *Dream's* self-reflexivity—theatre's focus on theatre—establishes spoken language as the implicit ordering principle of play, both narratively and theatrically. Thanks to the meta-focus, certain characters are aware of their realm's mutability and assert their agency by manipulating narrative, through language, toward their own ends. Theseus uses language to establish his rulership as Duke and control the play's diegesis, but this attempt at totalized control evokes a response from the textual impulse toward complication and flight. In translation from print to the representation, script to text, pattern and flight become the interfering impulses toward order and play.

### **Play and Text**

In *homo ludens*, Johan Huizinga examines play and its cultural manifestations, defining play's general characteristics and tracing them through various cultural iterations. The seven major characteristics he derives encompass children's games as well as the "higher" forms of competition (like sports or debate) and representation (ritual and theatre). Participants must freely enter into these activities, and in doing so they accept the specific order governing the particular play-field. Play affords freedom through mutual exclusion: play shrugs off outside influence, and expects no external or material gains or returns—though these may be on offer, play's true value is in the fun it generates.

Players often use costume or disguise to emphasize this exclusion/seclusion, and to foster secrecy and otherness. No matter how frivolous or silly the rules and procedures seem to the outsider or non-player, who measures play by standards other than its (play's) own, the play-field and its order are taken seriously by participants and invested audiences. Play's social value stems from the parallax it provides, but this limits play's presence; it exists only momentarily, otherwise it becomes the norm and

ceases to be play—after all, routine is rarely fun. Thus, play limits itself temporally and spatially, creating a tension or uncertainty that players seek to resolve within these literal bounds as well as the the bounds of the rules; when the uncertainty resolves, play ends and dissolves.

In identifying autonomy, exclusive alterity, costume/disguise, serious rules, spatio-temporal limits, and tension/uncertainty as necessary elements, Huizinga crystallizes them into unique, exclusive categories. While highly functional, Huizinga's theoretical schema overlooks the underlying currents that shape play and constitute play's textuality. The interference between order (pattern) and flight (from order, into freedom) actualizes play; the intersecting forces produce vectors of activity whose relation defines a play-field.

Play's freedom is a momentary one, not a sustained condition; it begins in abandoning the current order for a new one. The player freely accepts a new rule, discards dominant outside rules to make room for new play-rules. This effects isolation, distances play from the outside order, and forms an inherent limit rather than an explicit, arbitrary boundary. Costume and disguise also remove players from the outside order while solidifying their own order that self-organizes around play activities and values. Similarly, rules divide play activity from normal activity by setting conditions for participation. The spatio-temporal limits spring from the necessity of order while resisting it through the potential for alocality in each dimension. (A scavenger hunt, for example, may be limited to a certain area within a certain time limit, or might continue and expand indefinitely until all items are found.) As play develops, tendencies and actions solidify into rules which restrict individual action and characterize a particular

instance or form of play as representation or competition. (These more developed forms are fundamentally incommensurable, but can accommodate one another as *ad hoc* additions: competition can be represented, and representation can be competitive.) These activities' inherent tension allows and encourages freedom to experiment and master activity within the rules of performance, directing this exploration toward a goal or end.

### **From text to play**

The interference between flight and order that constitute typographical fields (texts) and play-fields (representation) resemble the interference and patterning that produce visual holographic fields. Described by Ken Wilbur in *The Holographic Paradigm*, the science of holography depends on the interference of light beams; when two lasers reflect off an object and cross, the interference produced at the intersection can be recorded. As static recordings, the interference pattern bears no resemblance to the object, but when properly illuminated, it produces a three-dimensional image of the entire object.

At times, holographic theory's terminology overlaps *Narrative Unbound's*, the latter detailing the *Zoas'* drive to achieve radical heterogeneity through self-interference. This produces a physically discordant text that, lacking a reader and imaginative interpretation, fails to bring the *Zoas* narrative into existence; the poetic imagination produces a text (comprising varying degrees of pattern and interference) that requires imaginative readers (in the theatre, both performers and audience) to actualize the true narrative. Ault's "Holograp(em)ic Singularities" article directly addresses the similarities of text and holographic field, positing that a text's underlying forces (like flight and pattern) can be graphically figured as anomalous surface features. This study expands

these holographic/textual similarities to Shakespeare's theatrical text as performance (the play-field produced by the interfering impulses toward play/flight and pattern/order) through examining the impulses' explicit and subtle iterations and manifestations.

As noted, Shakespeare intended the *Dream* to be seen and heard (by audiences) as representation, not read as a script that collapses representation's spoken language. Theatre's primary modes are sight and sound, stage spectacle and spoken lines; the former takes its cues from the latter, spoken language influencing visual representation to achieve traditional theatrical unity and/or interpretive meaning. The true text—the narrative as representation—actualizes only when the imaginative cast and crew engage the script and bring it to the stage, where the audience in a sense consummates the spectacle, fills a necessary role in representation by investing in the narrative and its interpretive tension (suspending the dominant order, along with the actors' identities and the audience's disbelief and past experience).

Representation-as-text (performance as textual object) presents a critical challenge: no two representations are precisely the same (theatrical production distinct from filmic re-production), whether one night or centuries apart, either by the same cast or part of a completely separate production. Neither the printed nor performance texts of the *Dream* find absolute accord, and any study that examines discrepancies in and amongst them could fill volumes with analysis of scripts, presentations, and the relations between the two. The present study takes as its object a revised and conflated version of the text as presented in *The Norton Shakespeare*—an ostensibly mastered text that potently showcases the Newtonian impulse. When the *Dream* experiences holographic

actualization (in representation), the narrative itself undermines the very stability that static printed text suggests.

The *Dream* expresses this subversive nature in particular details like conspicuous terms and imagery. These are woven into each and every statement, and therefore a full understanding of the forces at work in the *Dream* requires line-by-line close reading—impractical here, not to mention ironically Newtonian. Instead, this study focuses on the singularities that embody discordant textual impulses and cause narrative conflict, complicating the unique play-field—and ultimately the very idea of the *Dream*, extending their influence beyond the narrative to culture and the idea of play itself.

### **(em) and name**

Before this study can productively employ Ault's concept, the idea of holograph(em)ic textuality requires some modification. In the *Dream*, characters use “translation”— carrying certain linguistic connotations—to indicate some sort of transformation. This study uses the term similarly, indicating a transformation that occurs as part of crossing and transgressing boundaries. Here, holograph(em)ic singularities must be translated from the printed page to theatrical representation.

“Holograph(em)ic” recalls and simultaneously invokes “hologram” (visual projection), “em” space (a unit of typographical measurement regarding the size of a letter and the point-size of the font), “grapheme” (any mark involved in written language), and “holograph” (hand-written text). Holograph(em)ic singularities occur when the printed text visually expresses the forces underlying its ontological textuality. In referring to holograms rather than holographs, “holographic” conflates the terms and suppresses printed signification in favor of visual representation (evidenced in the

common synonymy of “holograph” and “hologram” to indicate the latter). “(em)” intrudes into the term, suggesting “graphemic” and recalling “hologram”, complicating and exposing the totalization effected in the term “holographic”. “Holograph(em)ic” exhibits the very tendency it names: in punning on “grapheme”, “(em)” recalls “em” space, a spatial measurement that is implicitly present but essentially unspoken or invisible on the printed page; and the parentheses emphasize the effects of verbal speech’s translation into printed words and punctuation: the collapse of representation’s verbal aspect into additional visual signification.

Theatrical characters share a similar fate in translation; as identities designated by names and assumed by actors, they are constituted and defined as the words they speak, and as visual figures against the ground of the stage. Print reduces theatrical character to the very words he or she speaks and subordinates them to a coordinating name—character as it is spoken, rather than as it speaks. Physical, visible representation is reduced to print’s visual signification through typographical characters, alphanumeric figures. The characters of the play are essentially collapsed into the characters on the page.

Both character (identity) and visual representation are homogenized with the verbal dialogue while simultaneously differentiated as exterior and supplementary to the dialogue. Character names, indicating voice, are usually marginalized—literally, reflecting representation’s marginalization and subordination to spoken language in printed composition. Stage directions are demarcated by their punctuation (changes in case and/or font, enclosure in brackets, etc.). Shakespeare’s dearth of stage directions emphasizes the spoken word as theatre’s ordering element, which translates to a focus

on printed language, rather spoken language in conjunction with physical presence.

The very textuality of the script supports the notion that printed text and theatrical representation are radically different media meant to be experienced in different ways.

Both stage and page foreground language, and the page devoid of stage directions figures Shakespeare's work experienced as representation (historically, at the Globe): characters, immediately represented by costume and imaginatively characterized through language, populated a bare stage, a blank ground that also required characterization through language. This translation of language from print back into representation leaves the printed page (and thus empty space and punctuation ["(em)"] behind) the graphics of signification giving way to more sophisticated representation. As a result, punctuation and empty space—visible side-effects of reducing theatrical representation to purely visual signification—experience anti-representation: visual spaces and some punctuation become silences, the ground of spoken speech (similar to the page on which the text is printed); others enfold into language itself, becoming inflections and other subjective characteristics that defy translation and, if included in a transcription, result in further signification as description through stage direction.

This consistent ascendancy of representation's verbal aspect emphasizes language as the ordering element of theatre. Singularities, concentrations of ontological forces, can thus manifest as characters and as spoken words; both concentrate textual forces, and both result from organization by language, and from play's rejection of static stability in favor of dynamic multiplicity. This is figured in the dynamic between visuality

and aurality that produces representation, and the representations' resistance to ever occurring precisely the same way twice (reproduction).

In the *Dream*, characters (as they are constituted in representation) are less akin to pre-existing, realistic identities that Newtonian reading presupposes. Instead, they demonstrate and actualize forces and impulses at work in text, civilization, and play. In this, singularities exist as microcosmic transformations of the larger (con)text and its underlying impulses. This parallels the regenerative property which holographic projection demonstrates when data, encoded as interference pattern, is lost through damage to the physical storage medium (the data disc): the remaining data can fill in the gaps and produce a complete image. The more data lost, or the smaller the fragment, the more indistinct the image becomes; thus, singularities (isolated fragments) manifest, non-identically and on a surface narrative level, the processes underlying and constituting the text.

### **Inter-fence, -spersion, and -connection**

The larger play-text, representation, shares another similarity with visual holographic fields: interspersion. Ethereal and immaterial, both play and hologram overlay and intermingle with an existing space. Play precedes civilization, but does not end when civilization begins; rather, play continues to occur interspersed within, but distinct from, dominant social order. Festival and revelry manifest this quality of play; Elizabethans expected theatrical comedy to evoke a sense of holiday revelry, just as Theseus, in the *Dream's* opening moments, calls for revelry; the "rude mechanicals" (the Puck's term for the Quince's theatre troupe) answer his call with *Pyramus and Thisbe*, theatrical play celebrating marriage. (Q1, Q2, and FF refer to the mechanicals collectively as "clowns", emphasizing their comedic role.) This stems from the obviously

playful nature of theatre and festival, which Elizabethan revelry also expresses and C.L. Barber details in his anthropological-critical study, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*.

Much as Elizabethan theatre grew from traditions begun in the medieval church, Elizabethan revelry readily shows its ties to medieval festivity. Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* approaches its titular author through examining cultural play in medieval Europe as festivity and carnival, and pursuing the relationship of these phenomena to political power structures. Of these, the church is particularly noteworthy: its stranglehold on subjectivity recalls Newtonian perceptual dominance, and Blake's poetic response finds an analogue in medieval folk carnival. "Carnival" itself etymologically descends from *carnivale*, "farewell to meat"—one such festive celebration is *Mardi gras*, a preliminary reaction to the ensuing rigor of Lent. In this guise, play acts as a potent counterpoint to, and release from, orderly everyday life; it was characterized by general equality brought about through the intermingling of governors and governed, and an exchange of playfully abusive language (directly, and through performances, songs, etc.). The escape into play created a sense of renewal, similar to ritual representation like primitive mystery rites performed to ensure the continuity of the season-cycle.

Elizabethan England experienced a similar impulse toward order in reaction to the social and cultural changes occurring in major urban centers, and Puritan condemnation of play compounded the governmental predisposition toward stability and order. Whereas the medieval church displaced play's renewal from the individual, claiming instead that folk revelry re-energized the dominant order, the Elizabethan church and government suppressed play outright. When the Elizabethan court engaged in misrule,

it was strictly and politely ordered; and folk misrule was harshly punished by those it parodied or offended, though rural government (distant from the higher political echelon and grounded in rural tradition) tended to tolerate folk revelry in the forms of drinking, joking, carousing, and satiric representation. The censorship of play's subversive potential extended to the theatre: the master of revels, an institutionalized lord of misrule, would inspect scripts and effect the necessary emendations before approving them for performance.

Under less restrictive circumstances, the lord of misrule facilitates playful revelry during holiday and festival. By sanctioning a lord of misrule, the governing order (lord of a manor house, for example) displaces responsibility for play onto a subordinated figure; but along with responsibility, the figurehead also gives up control over the revelry to the lord of misrule, who issues playful commands and organizes the festivity. In *The Golden Bough*, Sir James George Frazer traces the lord of misrule to the king of the Roman saturnalia, a festive winter holiday that concluded with the sacrifice of the symbolic king to Saturn, the god whose reign was thought to return during the holiday revelry—atemporal play, similar to theatre's actualization through representation.

The king/lord finds an apparent analogue in the archetypal trickster, usually as the sly servant or vice, who facilitates the comedic (festive holiday) action. In the *Dream*, the Puck and Philostrate act as a continuous, omnipresent lord of misrule on multiple levels: together, they undermine both archetypal comedy's old (initially dominant) order, and archetypal comedy itself as just such an old order. Appearing to conform to Elizabethan expectations of play and holiday festivity, the lord of misrule subverts expectation in the tradition of the fool, sneaking past the dominant order's vigilance

against disruptive and destabilizing play under the cover of apparent folly and harmlessness.

The *Dream* remains innocuous by adopting, as its surface narrative and main plot, a traditional comedic form. This form derives from Menander's New Comedy, a classical theatrical form and a cornerstone of Frye's archetypal comedic cycle, both of which focus on the retreat from an oppressive society as a means of dialectically renovating the governing order and ensuring society and order's continuity and functionality. This hinges on the young lovers' union that transgresses the current social organization; order must either accept the union and adapt, or else the couple begins a new order of their own. In either case, the new society welcomes any erstwhile antagonists who choose to join them, and together they abuse all others with playful language, a facet of the folk revelry that comedy invokes in celebrating the lovers' marriage. The trickster typically plays a key role in their union through direct aid or destabilizing antics, or both.

Beneath the *Dream's* apparently archetypal form, however, subversive and anomalous details undermine the ubiquitous order that Elizabethan audiences expected and Frye posits as an ideal. The Puck's cultural demotion to buffoonery following the *Dream* attests to the potency of his misrule and the danger Elizabethan authority recognized in both his playful character and the misrule over which he presides. This parallels the diminution of fairies in British culture following Shakespeare's *Dream*; Barber and Minor White Latham (in *The Elizabethan Fairies*) both note that fairies and nature spirits rapidly shifted, in the cultural consciousness, from very real and malevolent entities to ethereal and illusory fantasy as a result of Shakespeare's

portrayal. This synergized with the Enlightenment and the marginalization of folk tales and mythology, bringing the rural, natural world—which the Elizabethans saw as stable and monolithic in contrast to the time’s cultural instability—fully under the realm of reason by denying knowledge-value to the supernatural, now an illusory phenomenon dispelled by reason.

Shakespeare’s rational audience members similarly dismissed play. R.W. Dent, in his article on imagination in the *Dream*, elaborates the rationalistic Elizabethan theory of imagination as an interpretive device, subordinate the rational mind as a courier and interpreter between perception and thought. Passion could disrupt understanding by distorting perception through imagination; the rest of the time, the senses accurately and faithfully reported on a stable, external world. Jerome Mandel, in “Dream and Imagination in Shakespeare”, provides an incommensurable theory more aligned with a pre-enlightenment sensibility. Fairies and other supernatural entities, presumed to be at large and capable of affecting humans, were thought to tamper with the body’s internal humors and spirits as a means of distorting and manipulating mortal senses and dreams. In the *Dream*, Hippolyta aligns with this latter interpretation, suggesting the presence and influence of unseen forces. Theseus, on the other hand, embodies the rational, empirical perspective on imagination. He dismisses the nocturnal arboreal activities (the comedic action of the *Dream*) as imagination run amok, suppressing Hippolyta’s theory and the embedded dream-play in the interests of maintaining order’s stability and authority (a possibility echoed in the epilogue).

Theseus’s attempt to subordinate play may also figure the larger context of the *Dream*. Barber, Sidney Homan, Young, and other scholars maintain that Shakespeare

composed the *Dream* to serve as the evening entertainment at an aristocratic wedding. Jan Kott goes so far as to employ the scenario as a narrative device in his essay “Titania and the Ass’s Head”, while other scholars, Stephen Greenblatt among them, question the truth of such an ideal context.

This study treats the myth of the aristocratic wedding as a para-text inextricably bound to the *Dream*, regardless of whether or not such a wedding took place. Its presence transforms *Pyramus* into a translation of the *Dream* within itself, creating a similarity across the boundaries of play by figuring its theatrical audience into the play-field as the diegetic *Pyramus* audience, Theseus’ wedding guests. This subtle infiltration also manifests in the imagery surrounding a major singularity: the moon’s flight through a hollow earth, disturbing the normal diurnal cycle. The image figures the interspersions of the disruptive, subversive play-field in and with the dominant order, requiring a suspension of disbelief that banishes theatrical play’s illusoriness and establishes it as true representation.

Dealing with the wedding myth forces the modern audience to reenact the same suppression that editors and archetypal critics employ in normalizing the text. Accepting the wedding myth influences interpretation and contradicts a more rational, empirical approach requiring further proof of such claims and dismissing the myth as an act of imagination. In accepting the myth, the reader enacts a holographic regeneration, filling in a missing portion of the text: the first performance of the *Dream*, the occasion that motivated Shakespeare to pen the script.

Regardless of actual context (to the extent that such a notion applies here), Shakespeare demonstrates a keen understanding of play and culture, weaving the

general impulses that produce textuality into the *Dream*'s surface narrative, showcasing his own manipulation of theatrical order with subtle disruption and interference. In the epilogue, the playwright appeals to the rational audience members, imploring them to at least applaud a good bit of poetic imagination. As such, he addresses the rational view of play (and dream), but remains silent on other interpretations, maintaining dominant order's tendency (textually, and meta-textually) to intervene and suppress matters of transgressive imagination. Throughout the play, Shakespeare both overtly and subtly pits this impulse against its opposite and ultimately leaves rational interpretation in a double-bind of questioning the very idea of ultimateness; poetic imagination slyly appeals to its audience, inviting viewers to break from cultural order and engage in playful, imaginative interpretation. What follows is one response to this call.

CHAPTER 2  
“NEWTONS SLEEP”: COUNTER-READINGS OF TEXTUAL FORCES AND  
COMPLEXES

**Lunar and *Ludic* Interference**

Shakespeare's *Dream* treats imagination and textual forces through dream and play, activities which fall outside of normal, rational order. For Shakespeare, spoken language constitutes order in representation, and thus serves as a point of orientation for spectacle and other theatrical aspects. In Elizabethan theatre, spectacle was mostly stage business and movement, with no significant scenery. As a result, most characters in Shakespeare's green world plays characterize the setting through direct description and address; language in the *Dream*, however, characterizes the natural setting through imagery associated with the Artemisian impulse, such as the unruly forest and the suppressed moon. In this way, the audience's imagination depends on the spoken language for stimuli, and the speaking actors (and their director) must coordinate with that language to produce coherent stage action that complements the spoken word.

Theseus' opening speech illustrates language's power to order and organize, as well as the converse precariousness of any apparently stable situation. His very first word, "Now", emphasizes immediacy, referencing and actualizing the transition into theatrical play. Immediately following this, he invokes Hippolyta (referring to her as "fair", a term which Helena later problematizes to exponential proportions), but suppresses her, postponing her speech by continuing his own. He immediately echoes this suppression in his attempted subordination of the moon (the Artemisian counterforce's figurehead, strongly associated with Hippolyta) as a chronometer measuring the time between the present moment and the royal wedding. The moon

immediately complicates Theseus' declaration, that their nuptial hour "draws on apace", by contrarily and intentionally waning slowly, upsetting the temporal order Theseus projects onto the play's narrative. The Artemisian characters cannot overtly rebel against Theseus; they must accept the order he establishes, but in doing so may instigate internal complications which manifest the *Dream's* flight impulse as surface discrepancies and differences.

Hippolyta (who only appears with Theseus, and speaks only in contrariety to him) seizes on the unstable lunar calendar, using the variable moon to complicate Theseus' orderly, quantified days; the days leading up to the wedding will "steep themselves in night" which will "dream away the time", invoking darkness and unrestrained imagination to complicate Theseus' desire for clear-cut order (I.1:7,8). This order, of course, depends on total control and perspective dominance, figured in Theseus' command that Hermia's "eyes must with with [her father's] judgment look" (:57); incommensurable play and femininity are alternized and worked into the masculine system as *ad hoc* additions, but in situating play and union as imminent rather than immediate, Theseus emphasizes his incomplete power and its complication by the suppressed objects' immanence. Thus, festivity and union become Theseus' aims—ends that reflect the unity, consummation, revelry, and other general ends of archetypal comedy.

Theseus momentarily suppresses the instability of his authority and turns to play through Philostrate, dispatching him to incite "mirth", festive play, among the "Athenian youth" (:13). This spoken pronouncement also relies on suppression and subordination, first situating play in alterity before reaching out to subordinate it—consumption rather than consummation, but once internalized, the consumed objects (play, feminine

alterity) complicate the domineering order. In speaking (naming) play and the feminine moon into existence within the *Dream*, Theseus brings them into the order established by language, where they subsequently advance agendas contrary to Theseus' own. The moon complex takes advantage of language's instability, the *play* or ambiguity inherent within speech and any order founded upon it, to performatively emphasize disparity and contrast order's attempts at totalized unity.

Theseus' opening speech is marked by sharply intrusive punctuation (periods, dash, exclamation mark) that visually emphasize the fragmentation and disconnectivity of the elements Theseus attempts to unify through Newtonian textual tactics—suppressing/subordinating the feminine and playful realms to totalized control.

Hippolyta's first speech, on the other hand, flows in one long sentence with smooth punctuation (commas, semi-colon), demonstrating her intimate relation to the moon and the subsequent ascendance of the impulse they embody.

Early in III.2, when rational order is fully submerged in darkness and dream, this impulse toward discrepancy finds its most potent figure. Confronted with Lysander's absence, Hermia would sooner believe "This whole earth may be bored, and that the moon / May through the center creep, and so displease / Her brother's noontide with th'Antipodes", rather than entertain the notion that her lover has abandoned her in the wilderness (:53-55). This image of the moon's easy and concealed movement, and its consequent disruption of apparently natural masculine order, produce a major textual singularity: "th'Antipodes". Falling on line 1,309, it enacts the bifurcation it suggests, dividing the *Dream* (2,419 lines total) very nearly in half. What's more, it follows shortly after the Puck's summary of the play's preceding action, suggesting the scene break

between III.2 and .3 serves as an intermission, an empty center (sandwiched between, but devoid of, play) that similarly divides the theatrical experience. (The image's relation to intermission would be particularly potent in performance at Shakespeare's Globe.)

The singularity's associated imagery expresses the antipodal forces that interfere to produce the *Dream*. Etymologically, "antipodes" stems from the ancient Greek word for "opposing feet", a relation reproduced in the *Dream* as the masculine and feminine, orderly and playful, unification and disruption—the opposed impulses producing, as well as figured and at work in, the text. The moon manifestly represents the feminine's antagonism toward forced relation-in-opposition (the characteristics of alterity and inferiority Theseus forces upon both) and also stands for play's similar relation to order, showcasing the disruption both cause order as a means of subverting it. Like play, the moon reacts against linear temporality: Hippolyta's first speech posits a new or newly waxing moon (Q1, Q2, and FF print "New" on :10, whereas contemporary editions translate this to "Now") on the night of the wedding, but Quince claims that it will shine brightly enough to illuminate the wedding festivities. Similarly, characters consistently invoke the moon through the first half of the play, but the word drops out of dialogue after its appearance with "Antipodes" and does not appear again until the end of the IV, when Oberon revives her (the moon image) at dawn.

The moon's inconsistency emphasizes the distortion she, along with play, produce to complicate Theseus' plot. By displacing union and revelry to the *Dream's* conclusion, Theseus sets up a teleological narrative that will play out and ultimately satisfy his own desires. He manipulates the play's ontology without ever directly addressing it,

evidenced by the initial conditions and goals he sets and toward which the comedy (the play, in every sense of the word) strives. As such, Theseus' command that Philostrate stir the youth to merriment finds a response in the discord between the young lovers, a situation that will ultimately translate into the duke's desired end.

Despite this agency, audiences and critics regard the Theseus-Hippolyta conflict as a subplot, subordinate to the main lovers' plot. This subplot status, however, hides Theseus' agency and obfuscates the royal plot as the source of the *Dream's* various conflicts. Theseus' implied (but effaced) conquest of the Amazons prefigures the immediate discord between the four young lovers; the duke attempts to suppress both complications, but both continue to complicate the surface narrative. Theseus glosses over the violent nature of his history with Hippolyta, characterizing it as courtship, an iteration that suppresses violent resistance to masculine order and attempts to assert dominance and enforce mirth. The Amazons' all-female social order recalls Artemis, whom Theseus mentions only in the context of worship; she surfaces in the lovers' conflict that transforms, through reversal, the comedy's initial discord into its necessary ends, thus demonstrating the revelry implicit within, but temporally distant from, the discord generated as the immediate response to a call for mirth.

In attempting to resolve the initial lovers' conflict, Theseus associates Artemis with virginity and the moon, depicting devotion to the three as a deficient alternative to joining the masculine order. He is mostly concerned with hurrying the play to conclusion, attempting to force unity and play as a means of attaining consummation; but play cannot be strictly ordered, and just as he must wait for consummation, Theseus must also wait for the revelry (and its implicit unification) that signals the ultimate

culmination of the play, and thus Theseus' satisfaction. This order springs from subjugating Hippolyta and generalizing that subordination, producing the individual conflicts the *Dream* must resolve in order to be a successful comedy (in turn to invoke revelry at the meta-theatrical aristocratic wedding).

Theseus attempts to suppress his archetypal comedic order's violent and imposing origins, but these obfuscated characteristics continually force their way to the narrative surface, directly recalling the moon, Artemis, the Amazons, and Theseus' violent suppression of them all through his subjugation of Hippolyta, who introduces archery imagery and its relation to the crescent moon. This recalls the choice weapon of Artemis and her followers, the Amazons, all of whom achieve only marginal expression under Theseus' rule (narratively figured as the dim moon). As a huntress, Artemis uses her bow for sport (competitive play) and biological necessity (consumption); the Amazons used theirs as weapons against Theseus and consumption, a conflict which Theseus takes as an unspoken pretext, but translates from combat to courtship, comedic and playful. This hides the violent conditions behind the superficial comedic features of love and revelry, and the royal plotline retreats behind the apparent New comedic plot, simultaneously effacing Theseus' agency and thrusting the young lovers and their discord (which stems from the duke's own) to the forefront.

The *Dream* belies the violence underlying the surface comedy through *Pyramus* as wedding festivity—another singularity in tragedy-as-wedding-entertainment, since theatrical play in the narrative concentrates the meta-theatrical forces into self-referential definition. As the culmination of another apparent (theatrical) subplot, the performance brings the royal subplot's subversive nature to the surface at the point of

their mutual culmination, the simultaneous moment of union and revelry teleologically rooted in the initial violent “wooing”. The *Dream* may have just as easily been a tragedy—Hermia might have shared Juliet’s fate. (Similarities in their respective plays’ language suggests they were written—the plays, and the characters—concurrently and/or consecutively in the mid-1590s.) Thisbe’s death intertextually recalls Juliet’s, as well as the intratextual death Theseus offers Hermia in I.1.

Thisbe invokes the three Fates as the “sisters three”, emphasizing their femininity and recalling Artemis as another incarnation of a threefold female (V.1:323). The death Theseus offers Hermia aligns with Artemis’ incarnation as Hecate, her guise in the underworld, which the Puck invokes. (Hecate in turn invokes Robin Goodfellow in *Macbeth*). Artemis’ third aspect is Selene, a moon goddess, who appears in the *Dream* as the moon image—or rather, is invoked and suppressed from immediate manifestation, but still able to effect subtle complication. Mythologically, each aspect of the threefold goddess identifies with the domains of the others, but here they stand strongly for their primary characteristics: Hecate for magic, darkness, and a death; Artemis for virginity; and Selene as the feminine moon.

Hecate identifies most immediately with Hermia’s immediate, biological death. Artemis (as Diana) distinctly identifies with virginity, conflated with the moon and alternized from masculine order; but she also carries strong connotations as a nature goddess, and as such represents a chance at life for Hermia beyond the dead-end isolation that Theseus supplies her. Marriage is bound up with sexuality and biological reproduction, the natural cycle that recalls Artemis but seems at odds with her reputation for steadfast chastity. This instability translates back into Hermia’s

immediate situation in her flight with Lysander into the woods (nature) outside Athens (Theseus' bastion of order) at night, when the moon (and play, conflated with dream) dominates and complicates Theseus' order (the course he has set for the narrative). Throughout the *Dream*, Theseus alternizes the moon and nature as unruly and transgressive, and dismisses play and the supernatural as illusory products of the imagination. He implicitly homogenizes them in their alterity (all of them are "not-order"), but Hippolyta's invocation of night and dream provides them, in their collective alterity, a means of complicating the dominating order. The young lovers' conflict, stemming from order's suppressive tendency, forces Theseus to remove himself from the play-space as a means of suppressing Helena and the immediate comedic conflict she exacerbates. Once his presence, and order's, becomes mediated and implicit rather than immediate and overt, alterity begins asserting itself and establishing further ingress into, and complication of, the dominant order.

Lysander is an overtly playful character, using satiric language with Demetrius and Egeus, as well as suggesting the May game. He does, however, exhibit a pretense to order playful activity, setting a course and ultimate point. (This is later echoed and reversed in Oberon's playful manipulation.) A major point comes when Lysander asks Hermia to meet him in the wood; unlike "Antipodes", which bisects both written (spatial) and spoken (temporal) text, "wood" is a singularity only when verbalized. In speech, it puns on the location and the mood of their next meeting: both of them are wooed, and they will meet in the wood. The punny language engenders the playfulness of the proposed act, the "rite of May" (IV.1:130). The May game, an Elizabethan rural tradition, occurred on spring nights, when young men and women would retreat into the

forest, engaging in general playfulness and to allegedly find their true loves—the *Dream*'s main comedic action, when understood as play and another transformation of the *Dream* within itself. (Barber notes that May games did not necessarily occur in May; the *Dream*'s occurs on midsummer eve, a moment of imbalance in the natural, diurnal cycle—a short day and night interspersed with long periods of twilight.)

In II.1, Demetrius adds another dimension to the singularity: “woed” (homophonous with “wood” and “woed”), expressing the complication to order that play engenders. Around the same time, Helena revives the hunting motif, begging Demetrius to treat her as his hunting dog, a position she associates with violent physical abuse. Though she seeks to fully conform with the hunting/combat motif Theseus quietly establishes, Helena misses the point: in aiding the hunt, she participates in her own supersession. Having divulged her information about Hermia's flight, she has outlived her usefulness, but persistently attempts to divert the violent end of Demetrius' hunt from Hermia to herself. Unfortunately for Helena—the already consum(at)ed and subordinated female—Demetrius likewise conforms to Theseus' precedent, seeking consummation through hunting and forceful subjugation; game that presents no uncertainty and simply gives itself up to him offers no challenge or interest. This sort of internal discord inheres in Helena's character, a singularity that complicates both text and its dialectic undercurrents, effecting a dissonance that resonates throughout the *Dream*.

### **Helen(a)'s Strife**

Hippolyta's tragedy arises from her opposition to order, even when subjugated and oppressed; Helena's comedy stems from the complication she creates through her persistent attempts to give herself over to the dominant order. Helena herself embodies

and concentrates complication to the point of fundamentally problematizing her surrounding context. Her attempts to participate in the established order and advance its ends complicate her own desired position within it. This is not confined to the social order, as defined above, but also the archetypal comedic plot—the surface narrative itself, the very thing that ostensibly produces her and enables her presence in the play-field. As a second female lover, Helena provides a counterpart for Demetrius and a means of welcoming most, if not all, of the blocking characters (initially aligned with the dominant order) into the new social organization established in New Comedy's unified and festive conclusion. Helena fundamentally challenges these assumptions of ultimateness and closure, but her contradictory and contrary nature permeates all aspects of her character.

Helena exerts a significant verbal presence after being invoked along with “wood”, and while subsequently in the wood, but her voice drops out of dialogue almost entirely following III. Throughout the play, her only significant interactions are with the other young lovers, all of whom are notoriously (even archetypally) indistinct amongst themselves. Lysander can only differentiate himself from Demetrius through his true love for Hermia (dismissible as irrational passion, and thus insufficient cause for overruling Athenian law). Helena and Hermia receive more distinct superficial characterization: Hermia is short with dark complexion and hair, while Helena is tall and fair, aesthetically appealing to Elizabethan audiences. That, however, is the extent of their significant differentiation in language; the roles they play, the characters' identities, are not determined by particular traits, but by social relation. At the outset, Demetrius aligns with order and imposes on the love between Lysander and Hermia, while Helena

is scorned by Demetrius; but these identities prove unstable in the dark of a midsummer night, displaced from rational order and submerged in play.

Like their identities, the lovers' names are relatively nondescript—Demetrius, Lysander, and Hermia have no significant referent like Theseus and Hippolyta. Helena's name recalls Helen of Troy, and her physical appearance would have reinforced this allusion for Elizabethans. Though occasionally called Helen (presumably to accommodate meter), Helena does not share the Trojan Helen's dilemma—order rejects and suppresses Helena rather than desiring and fighting for her, contradicting audience expectations based on appearance and referentiality.

Lysander first invokes Helena in an appeal to Theseus, declaring that Demetrius has made love to Helena, and thus should relinquish his claim on Hermia. Theseus immediately suppresses the issue, as it complicates the revelry which the duke has only recently called for as well as the union he attempts to impose. Lysander invokes Helena a second time later in the same scene, as a characteristic of the May game, recalling play in the past as a means of situating another May game in the future. Helena demonstrates her intimate connection to play when she quickly and easily appears following this invocation. Ironically, Helena immediately commands the theatrical attention and diverts it to her desire for Demetrius, who represents the dominant order and her ingress into it, through marriage. Once she knows of Lysander and Hermia's plot to leave the city, Helena informs Demetrius and follows him into the forest just as he chases Hermia into the May game.

The couples' flight from order takes the form of play, which Theseus situates as distant to, and exclusive from, the dominant order itself. Both Theseus and Lysander, in

establishing a temporal order, displace play into the past and future only to invoke it from distant alterity to punctuate order (like the Saturnalia and folk carnival, and visual representation's translation to the printed page); but play's atemporality suggests that future and past are just different perspectives of a non-immediate moment (or non-local point). Lysander invokes a May game not in memory from the past, but into actuality from alterity, bringing play and flight into ontological dominance just as the moon moves through the earth and upsets the sun; as the Artemisian impulse infiltrates language to a destabilizing effect (exemplified in Hippolyta's language), and as the *Dream* punctuates (and is punctuated by) civilized, cultural order. What Lysander depicts as past play instead actualizes as the imminent May game—he appears to remember something that has yet to occur in the narrative, complicating narrative play's linear temporality.

Theseus, on the other hand, displaces play into the future; the May game is the playful revelry he commands Philostrate to incite amongst the Athenian youth, teleologically tied to the culmination in union and consummation. By situating play in the past, Lysander establishes the event itself as its own preconditions, essentially using it as a referent or blueprint of itself. Lysander, like Theseus, attempts to order play, and Helena complicates the embedded order of the May game just as Philostrate does to Theseus'. Both situations figure the immediate complication of a projected order or organization, while remaining covertly and teleologically subordinated to the *Dream's* ultimate end (the comedic state of union and revelry). Lysander's organization places himself, Hermia, and Helena in the play-field; omitting Demetrius suppresses his interfering presence, but including Helena provides Demetrius with a sympathetic ingress to complicate the lovers' game. Hermia solidifies Helena's presence in the May

game by characterizing her as a “playfellow”, and later, a “Maypole”—an axis of rotation in spring (comedic) play, around whom the males’ affection and attention immediately revolves (I.1:220, III.2:297). As such, Helena is inextricable from play, even though she aligns with order and complicates both through her dual nature.

Helena’s virginity is particularly problematic for order: though she initially lacks it, in the forest she reassumes it as a characteristic. None of the characters challenge the assertion, despite the obvious contradiction. This reverse progression can be rationalized by attributing truth to one claim and falsity to the other, or assuming that Helena speaks metaphorically; but just as Helena disrupts order, so the *Dream* similarly disrupts Newtonian rationalism with Helena’s retrograde virginity, which migrates from past to future just as the moon migrates from conclusion to opening monologue. The moon’s motion responds to Theseus’ attempts to subordinate her, whereas Helena’s change results from her acquiescence to order and her relation to play’s atemporality. Under natural, playful, nocturnal conditions, Helena reclaims her virginity, which she apparently surrendered to Demetrius before the *Dream’s* narrative began—that is, outside the play’s temporal boundaries. Outside the bounds of embedded play (the May game), under the rule of order, Helena’s virginity evaporates—before the night in the forest, she is accepted as having lain with Demetrius, and the morning after the May game she wakes up beside him. These later events fulfill Helena’s initial conditions, established in I.1—only Demetrius’ attitude, now affectionate toward Helena rather than Hermia, differs, and in this difference sets the conditions to conclude the archetypal comedic plot through happy, stable union instead of setting the (narrative) conditions that cause conflict and spur the plot into motion.

In III.2, when the young lovers shift identities due to their altered affections, Helena experiences the courtship whose absence she spends the first half of the *Dream* lamenting. However, she immediately identifies the males' affections as play, but she presumes that their words are satirical rather than the result of external manipulation, and also assumes that Hermia is in league with them. At first, Helena resists them, but quickly joins Lysander and Demetrius in deriding Hermia, singling out her short stature and dark complexion. This simultaneously brings Helena into accord with the order set by the males (scorning Hermia as a social norm), and that masculine order into compliance with Elizabethan sensibility. In supplanting Hermia as the object of desire, Helena realigns herself as the female associated with social order (the *Dream's*, and Elizabethan culture's). However, hers is only a superficial solidarity that plays off of, and with, order.

Helena maintains her conviction that the males and Hermia play a game whose goal is to mock her (Helena), and so the accord she finds in mutual discord is parasitic at best. Nonetheless, this is the only time in the *Dream* when she expresses sustained satisfaction and playfulness (albeit caustic wordplay). Leading up to this moment, Helena characterizes herself through extended monologues; following it, she contributes almost nothing to the dialogue. In this transformation, she resembles the moon, whose presence is implied but not immediately spoken; this, in turn, recalls the forest setting which the imagery and activity imply, but which the language never directly addresses or elaborates, just as Helena is invoked in language and materializes without ever being directly summoned.

As a singularity, Helena concentrates the mutual complication that textual forces effect on one another, interfering with both the surface narrative in which she appears as well as the underlying dialectic that produces them both. Helena complicates both order and play, pattern and flight, to an extent that suggests complication is not a result of the dialectic, but the figure produced by interspersing grounds—the anti-/Newtonian dialectic as a trialectic, comprising the Artemisian and Newtonian impulses as well as the Eristic conflict they generate as three distinct forces (signified by the disjunctive/conjunctive “-/” in “anti-/Newtonian”). The complication is as fundamental as the agents that complicate one another—without complication, the opposing forces have no relation.

Helena embodies this third impulse, the Eristic, here named for the goddess Eris (literally, Greek for “strife”). In name and function, Helena recalls Helen of Troy, whose own strife finds its mythological origin at the wedding of Thetis and Peleus (names which, together, recall Theseus—most distinctly when the female name is ironically precedent). The couple refuses to invite Eris to their marriage ceremony, attempting to suppress her from their narrative; but by attempting to preclude complication, they create its very preconditions. To interrupt or intrude, an agent must first be excluded, and thus attempting to exclude complication instead ironically enables it through the ostensibly preemptive act. The scorned Eris, a deliberate agent of complication acting purely out of spite, disrupts their revelry with her golden apple addressed “to the fairest” (fairness, of course, is associated in the *Dream* with Helena and with the battle-won Hippolyta in their complicating capacities), spawning the violent conflict surrounding the three vain goddesses (a trinity recalling Artemis) and the Trojan Helen that claims the

life of Achilles, the son of Thetis and Peleus. The *Dream*, through Theseus, also suppresses the immediate presence of the Eristic impulse, which allows it to assume its fundamental form of interference: Helena (even when mediated and suppressed in verbal signification) manifests and causes conflict and complication, ultimately finding revelry and play in covert, suppressed discord; while Eris, the direct referent of Helena's character and condition, hides behind a heavily veiled mythological intertext requiring significant teasing-out and inference by the reader.

The Eristic impulse contrasts the Newtonian's overtly forceful nature in its double-obfuscation. It hides behind the surface narrative (the comedic cycle) as well as the apparent anti-/Newtonian dialectic. The complementary Newtonian reading of the play—the archetypal New Comedy formulation—focuses on Helena's general similarity to other comedic heroines rather than her complicated, complicating nature which requires just such a suppression as a ground for its potent interference.

In this, Helena recalls the lord of misrule, whose play is an Eristic complication. The Eristic impulse's true nature (a participant in a complex multi-lectic with play/flight and order/pattern) hides behind its apparent nature (complication as a result of the clash between two opposing forces, in this case play and order) just as the lord of misrule hides his subversive nature behind an apparent subordination to order. Helena's narrative complications recall Philostrate's, who as master of revels is a translation of the Puck. Both masters of revelry appear willfully subordinate to order, but like the moon, they both complicate order from within, just as Helena's complication-in-complicity resembles Hippolyta's persistence despite subjugation. Helena's tragedy stems from order's resistance to her complicating presence, and thus

her complicity with the dominant paradigm; the Puck's comedy arises through the complication he causes through, and hides behind, his apparent alignment with order.

### **Meta-theatricality, Instability, and Meta-stability**

The Puck appears to work toward the goals which order declares as its own—happy union and revelry, the ends of archetypal comedy. In doing so, the lord of misrule only appears subordinate to the dominant order; in the end, order's agents unwittingly find themselves under play's influence. For much of the *Dream*, characters aligned with order attempt to suppress destabilizing play even as they seek play-as-revelry to accompany union, a major goal of Newtonian/Thesian/archetypal order. Comedy's end requires communal revelry; the Puck and Philostrate tend to this, but ensure that the dominant order's play is ultimately self-subversive.

The rude mechanicals' theatrical subplot subordinates itself to the royal subplot, answering Theseus' call for revelry by providing festive play to accompany the royal wedding—recalling, of course, the purported nature of the *Dream* itself. In this self-similarity, the rude mechanicals bring to the surface the very workings (printed script, rehearsal, director) that a theatrical performance hides. Such things belie theatre's constructed nature and retard representation as invocation/actualization, which should appear seamless, unified—except, of course, when the situation is meta-textual and self-reflexive, as are the mechanicals. In their pursuit to create an ideal whole (an archetypal comedy) they instead distort the archetypal track by extending and transforming the *Dream* into a grotesque parody of itself—*Pyramus* as a tragic transformation of the lovers' plot. New Comedy typically treats revelry as an implicit counterpart to union and renewal, but the *Dream* self-reflexively (and –reflectively) devotes its longest scene to theatrical play's celebration of royal marriage.

The course and culmination of the theatrical subplot illustrate the consequences of subordinating play to order. Most obviously, they force theatrical form past the conclusion of its main plot—the young lovers’ story arc—in the interests of achieving unity through concluding the subplots: the royal subplot’s end in consummation, tied to Theseus’ call for revelry to accompany his wedding. In filling this void—the absence of revelry—the rude mechanicals’ subordination to order demonstrates play’s elusiveness: their rational approach to play fails to invoke representation that takes itself seriously, but actively takes itself meta-seriously, and so finds a measure of success. The actors’ recurrent reference to monetary reward is symptomatic of their misplaced priorities: when the wedding is afoot and Bottom is nowhere to be found, Flute laments the loss of “sixpence a day” rather than the failure to provide play and revelry as a counterpart to union, and thus fulfill their play’s meta-goal (IV.2:18). Bottom cuts Flute short, leaving the lack of reward as the ultimate point of Bottom’s absence, chronologically and also metaphorically as the most distressing aspect of losing Bottom.

The cast of characters that the mechanicals portray is a strikingly unimaginative list: Pyramus (played by Bottom) and Thisbe (Flute) are joined by a Prologue (Quince), Wall (Snout), Lion (Snug), and Moonshine (Starveling). Each name is purely practical, providing simple characterization, and the supplementary characters themselves enact the straightforward identity implied by their names more as scenery than proper characters. When they speak, they address only the audience through expository monologues that are intended to silence audience imagination. The troupe, not wanting to disturb audience members with lions and killings, determine to carefully explain the theatrical nature of each narrative element. In doing so, they fail to recognize

imagination as a necessary component to theatrical play, and in this failure, they foreclose on it entirely, producing Newtonian monologues that dictate exactly how the audience should experience the play. They take this direct-dictation style to an extreme, granting linguistic agency to an object, animal, and concept (Wall, Lion, Moonshine) so that they may speak and clearly define their role rather than enact it and leave room for interpretation. (This reverses the situation of scenery in the *Dream* at large: there, the scenery is spoken, but in *Pyramus*, it speaks.) However, the actors commit to their own play and imagination: the characters (not the actors) deliver the monologues, and characters discussed in rehearsal are dropped from the narrative to accommodate textual emendations and preserve a one-to-one ratio between roles and actors.

The actors' names share a similar descriptive quality, reflecting the characters' simple natures through reference to their professional, material labors. Flute, as a bellows mender, recalls the sound of air escaping through a puncture. Starveling suggests emaciation, which was proverbial (among Elizabethans) of tailors. Snout recalls the spout of a tea kettle which, if damaged, would be taken to a tinker. As a joiner, Snug would assemble furniture, seeking a tight (snug) fit at the joints (joining-points)—a professional activity that amounts to reducing the play, or instability, in a solid structure. Bottom, the weaver, would wind his thread around wooden spools bearing his name. Quince derives his name from wooden wedges used by carpenters to construct frames for buildings (and also to secure type in early printing presses).

Beneath this surface simplicity, each of these names puns on their theatrical, playful identities (the character each portrays in *Pyramus*). Flute recalls Thisbe's

“small” voice (III.1:42). Snug experiences some anxiety over memorization—that is, fulfilling order’s (Quince’s and Theseus’) mandates and expectations. With fewer lines, Snug will be able to better join actor and character (memorization and repetition are good enough for a rude mechanical—the term puns on both material labor and poor acting), and will be required to make less noise. Rather than squeaking, Snug finds himself roaring as Lion, who does not engage in dialogue, and has no trouble remembering his explanatory monologue. Snout, in the similar pursuit of joining character and actor in representation, cannot see past his own nose to recognize the larger breaks their monologues open in the theatre’s metaphorical “fourth wall” (figured by the chink in Wall).

This struggle with uncertainty (of audience imagination and interpretation) develops from initial conditions of uncertainty. Quince opens his subplot with a query: “Is all our company here?” Quince doesn’t know if his full troupe is present, and the audience does not know that the actors are portraying actors; I.2’s opening line could be the voice of the actor playing Quince, calling out to his own meta-theatrical fellows. Bottom seizes this uncertainty as a foothold to play out his own name’s theatrical meaning; in his fervor to display his own virtuosity, Bottom plays only an ass. In the initial uncertainty, Bottom seizes theatrical order (as Theseus did before him, but Quince fails to) and attempts to fill the role of director as well as actor. Bottom takes himself as the measure of all things while consistently producing punny malapropisms subversive to his intended meaning and ethos. Not least among these is *Pyramus*, which brings suppressed violence and theatrical mechanics to the surface.

The Puck translates Bottom's ass-headed disposition into physical representation, but Bottom does not find this manifestation to be out of the ordinary. Like Helena, he presumes that he is the butt of some collective prank; resolving to call the other mechanicals' bluff, Bottom refuses to treat the ensuing situation as anything but mundane. Thus, even in Titania's company, Bottom's concerns are commonplace and only mildly epicurean; he reduces the fairies to their material namesakes (recalling his fellow actors' names) and places simple requests—some hay, a scratch behind the ears—that belie his simple, material nature and focus. Upon awakening, Bottom realizes the folly of how he treated the fantastic situation, ultimately concluding that his experience was a supernatural dream. His synesthetic reverie indicates his inability to comprehend and articulate such things that fall outside the rational realm, and so he decides to enlist Quince in writing another monologue, "Bottom's Dream", to be delivered as an epilogue to *Pyramus* (IV.1:208).

Quince's own material namesake would have been used in building theatres and homes, tasks in which Quince and his subplot metaphorically engage. He constructs a representation, transforming the palace hall into a theatre and bringing play and revelry into the home as the necessary complement to union and consummation. At the same time, he takes the consumption motif onto himself: his name also references a small, pear-like fruit used in Greek weddings. After roughly dragging the bride from her father's home (the physical violence Helena desires), the groom would present her with a quince to consume before crossing the threshold into their new home and her new life. The *Dream's* three brides (all conspicuously quiet throughout V) consume Quince (as the Prologue, *Pyramus'* Thesian ordering voice) as part of the revelry leading up to

consummation, the point at which they would finally enter the masculine order (though they would not be true women until they bore their first child). In union, the women participate in just such an activity, consuming theatrical play to sustain and complete the dominant—narratively, archetypal; meta-narratively, cultural—order. Appropriately, Quince plays Prologue, or pre-logic, rather than Prelude, a pre-play.

Starveling's portrayal of Moonshine concentrates the instability inherent in order's attempts to subjugate the moon and play. (Young suggests that, just as the faeries show Anglo-Saxon features, this is the English moon rather than the classical feminine moon.) As a masculinized moon, Moonshine is ethereal and impotent, one last self-defeating attempt at subordinating the moon in another level of play, beneath another layer of intrusive and internally complicated order. Moonshine ironically fills the gap left vacant by the moon's migration that upsets Theseus' order at the start of the *Dream*. Moonshine is an attempt to subjugate the feminine moon by reversing her sex and influence, instead resulting in a powerless and nervous masculine figure that subverts himself through simple self-description. The moon that order constructs is entirely impotent, parodying masculine order rather than subjugating the feminine Moon, ultimately playing to her rather than against her. Moonshine is a literal starveling in representation, his lack of agency creating a slim theatrical stature and recalling the new or newly waxing moon that Hippolyta (in I.1) projects onto the wedding night.

Reading the rude mechanicals' names as reflections of their professions grants ontological priority to the mechanicals as pre-existing referents, implicitly assuming an underlying (Newtonian) reality. Play, however, defies such external dependency, and Shakespeare's theatrical language grants priority to the signifier itself. Thus, the

mechanicals' names precondition their simple nature (solidifying them in the linguistic theatrical order) which manifests in their approach to theatre, rather than their names punning on pre-existing professions. (In this sense, the pun is a two-way street, actualizing an ironic double-meaning rather than invoking a pre-existing metonymic similarity.) This is the same contradictory referentiality that defines Helena's character and presence, and the same puniness of "wood"; the meta-theatrical singularities invoke a latent playfulness from language and complicate order from the inside out, displacing boundaries and resituating social positions.

Play's potency is not in outright opposition—that is Theseus' style. Rather, play finds its foothold in subversion— showcased in Moonshine's self-subversion. Every solid structure possesses the potential to be destabilized; the boundaries established by order are the very preconditions for play's transgression. Theatrical ordering and embedding are employed in an attempt to master the subversive potential embodied in the moon and play; but just as the moon complicates and reverses this gesture, play is also one step ahead. The rude mechanicals' practical approach produces a dull theatrical representation, and Philostrate warns the newlyweds of this; but Theseus insists on seeing *Pyramus* as a brief, efficient means of achieving comedic unity. Philostrate, as a good master of revels, nonetheless manages to ensure that play quietly destabilizes this manifestly Newtonian moment.

In V, Theseus relinquishes his dominance to play on multiple levels. Philostrate encourages the couples to make sport of *Pyramus*' theatrical shortcomings; in doing so, the ascendant order engages in meta-play that directly satirizes its (order's) own practical and rational values. Theatrical performance is not the script's direct referent,

nor is the script the referent of performance itself—representation is its own referent, and so the mechanicals' meta-theatricality becomes part of their play, as does the meta-commentary by Theseus, Demetrius, and Lysander. Theseus, in manifestly criticizing play, buys into its illusion—he retreats into the audience, relinquishing his immediate dominance of the play-field, giving it over to manifest play (albeit play that he indirectly orders), engaging play in his attempt to maintain a safe distance from it. The *Dream* has expanded its boundaries, encompassing the audience (particularly the Elizabethan wedding guests) as representatives of Theseus' own wedding guests, joining the couples in watching *Pyramus*. During the revelry, Philostrate takes the reigns while Theseus enjoys the festivities, and so theatrical play shrugs off Theseus' authority that initially situated play as distant and distinct from order; it welcomes previously external spectators into the new order which has grown out of, and now focuses on, play and comedy. Theseus is subsumed by this focus; though he maintains the appearance of seriousness by criticizing a poorly-executed theatrical production, in doing so he engages in a meta-game that implicitly brings him into play. Here, play achieves a meta-stability (and metastability, or viral dispersal) in continual transgression and subterfuge that grows from order's desire for immediate stability and the inherent impossibility of such a situation. This limitation and its relation to play's meta-stability is more explicitly and fully characterized in the relation of the fairies, order, the embedded play of the May game, and particularly the Puck, who finds meta-stability between levels of play.

### **Embedded (Play) Transformation**

The masters of revels and Helena resemble one another in their complementary complicating functions, as do the impulses they concentrate: discord and play exist and

persist purely for their own sake—only order presumes or pretends to some greater or totalizing point or purpose. Additionally, both characters require significant intertextual reference to realize the full capacities of their functions, both of which—to differing extents and in distinct fashions—enable the fairies' assumption of ontological primacy.

Just prior to invoking Helena and the May game, Lysander muses over the obstructions that true love faces on its path to union and consummation. He lists “War, death, and sickness”, which correspond to Hermia’s three choices: death as dictated by Athenian law through Theseus and Egeus; war as engaging Demetrius in the pre-established course to union; and sickness aligns with devotion to Artemis through Theseus’ metaphor comparing a rose withering on the bush to Hermia’s maidenhood. The virgin flower wastes away rather than being plucked and distilled into perfume, suggesting an impurity (an invasive and disruptive agent similar to sickness) that only the masculine order can eliminate. (Perfume, an unspoken component of Theseus’ metaphor, further subordinates the female rose to the process of finding a male counterpart. Ironically, in this pursuit of purification, order opens the door for internal subversion by positing the feminine’s natural place as internal and disruptive to masculine dominance.) This headstrong, domineering nature disrupts love, cuts it short; Lysander likens it to lightning in the night, situating love in darkness (implicitly related the moon), which he subsequently links to play—the May game, lovers’ play.

At this point, Lysander once more invokes Helena. In the absence of order’s suppressive force, she appears and Lysander greets her: “God speed, fair Helena. Whither away?” (I.1:180). “God speed” typically constitutes positive sentiments prior to a departure or absence, but Lysander uses the phrase as a greeting, suggesting the

retrograde motion of Helena's virgin characteristic (and her overall atemporality, through which she relates to disruptive play). (Here, Helena once again recalls Philostrate, who enters with Theseus, but whom Theseus addresses only in dismissing him, prefiguring Helena's departure-in-arrival.) Lysander also invokes Helena's complicated fairness—which she Eristically rejects—and the withering rose whose virgin connotation is at immediate odds with Helena's previous characterization. Here, though, it relates directly to the virginity at issue, subtly highlighting Helena's discordant characteristics.

In the ensuing conversation, Helena uses pastoral imagery to characterize love, but abruptly re-invokes sickness, restoring the term's uncertainty and instability, and this in turn provides the fairies with an immediate foothold in the narrative. Though they do their best to casually blend in, the supernatural spirits intrude sharply into the play-field. As Frazer notes, midsummer's eve was believed to be a time when the natural and supernatural world intermingled, increasing spirits' ability to directly influence humans and their affairs; the fairies similarly intrude and subtly intersperse Theseus' mortal order.

The fairies' names contrast starkly with the Athenians'. The names of the fairy king and queen have no apparent external referent, resembling the young lovers'. The Athenian nobles in turn resemble the Puck, the fairy clown, in their names' immediate referentiality, while the mechanicals' meta-theatricality is bound up in their punny names. As actors, they labor directly for Philostrate, who links them to representation and play. The minor fairies, whose names' mundane material references recall the mechanicals', are characterized as playful but in representation are relatively dull—perhaps a direct result of Bottom's immediate influence.

The playful spirits invade the space and time of the embedded May game before the mortals arrive on/in the scene, preemptively reinforcing their ensuing claim to precedence and agency which is complicated by conspicuous appearance in a natural space Lysander invokes as playful; the fairies' play intrudes into Lysander's attempts to order play, just as Lysander's play intrudes on Theseus' order, which reasserts itself through Oberon and Titania, who are translations of Athenian royals from order into play.

The Puck's greeting to the fairy, "whither wander you?", directly recalls Lysander's inverted greeting to Helena with the distinctive "whither"—here, the word is associated with "wander", replacing "away" but maintaining similar connotations of contrary motion. Whereas Helena moves "away", suggesting direct flight, wandering suggests a continuous remove from stability or direction; and following the notion's introduction (by the Puck) in relation to the wandering fairy, the term applies almost exclusively to the Puck (and once to the moon). "Whither" simultaneously invokes other indirect lunar associations, recalling the withering virgin rose and the metaphoric sickness, and presaging the fairy queen's seizure of, and domination through, the concept. The Puck and the fairy provide additional traction by adding a manifestly supernatural context to "sickness".

As with Helena, the inverted motion indicates some disturbance. The fairy follows linear narrative flow, but the connotations of departure in the Puck's greeting resonate with her activities—she is only passing through the clearing and attempts to depart after her first speech. Lysander's allusion to play evokes Helena's similar arrival-in-departure; and Theseus' opening comment—that the freshly-opened play is quickly

waning—is complicated by the moon, which also moves in a contradictory, retrograde arc through the text. Philostrate reflects the Puck’s manifold relation to the moon in being acknowledged by Theseus only in being dismissed from his presence (the alternization of play).

The Puck detains the fairy, and as their conversation progresses, it becomes apparent that each inverted entrance signals a destabilizing force’s intrusion into the play field: the first was overbearing order, which subjugated natural playfulness; once the ordering agent departs the play space, the friction between the opposing forces manifests itself (as Helena) almost immediately after play reemerges in language (as “wood”). The fairy’s arrival-in-departure signals play’s ascendance, recharacterizing previous iterations of the textual impulses into superficially unfamiliar relations. For example, the dynamic between the Athenian duke and future-duchess transforms into the dynamic between the estranged fairy king and queen. Crossing out of order and into play redistributes dominance and desire—the Indian boy is a transformation of the union and consummation Theseus seeks, but which the moon withholds (Artemis retains her chastity and redistributes it to Helena) and displaces into the future; in Athens, this enables Hippolyta’s resistance, and in the forest grants Titania a certain power over the masculine order.

The couples share an immediate resemblance in their discord, although the mortals’ is implicit while the fairies’ is overt. Titania’s name resonates with the Greek order that dominates the *Dream*, a relation reflected and compounded by her own pretence to toward order—but unlike Helena, who tries to acquiesce to the existent order, Titania imposes her own rule. She establishes the fairies’ primacy in II.1, placing

them in Titanic positions above Theseus and the mortal order. At this point in the narrative, sickness as a complication to love still has no direct referent in the play (though it metaphorically recalls the virgin rose); Titania seizes on this and subordinates an imbalance and hostility of the natural realm—which she retroactively establishes—to the conflict between herself and Oberon—which the Puck establishes prior to the queen’s entrance. She does not use the term “sickness”, instead referring to decomposing carcasses, miasma, and “rheumatic disease”, creating an implicit, immediate referent for “sickness” as a complication of love and further establishing the fairies’ influence in the *Dream* by positing a causal responsibility for the main action and its hidden source (:105).

Though she mentions the problems this natural turmoil causes for mortals, Titania does not explicate any significant ramifications within the civilized mortal realm. The preceding scenes make no reference to these natural disturbances, and so Titania leaves the connections implicit, just as she avoids speaking “sickness”. Direct reference highlights inconsistency, exposing the fairies couple’s presumption to subtle influence when they really possess none.

Titania’s name, then, is both an ontological (linguistic) ingress into the ordering (Newtonian) impulse and an indicator of her alignment with it. As a female, her sex contradicts the hitherto fully masculine expression of the ordering impulse, as does her alignment with play. The latter stems from her nature as a fairy; the supernatural spirits intrude into Theseus’ order, gaining ingress through Hippolyta’s submergence of orderly play into disruptive dream (which Lysander characterizes as play) and subsequently attempting to master it from within. Titania’s predisposition toward order stems from

Hippolyta's subjugation: Theseus concretizes a male-female power dialectic, and so the female figurehead necessarily accompanies the male. This necessitates a counterpart for Oberon, generating Titania from order's demand for unity (between sexes) and consistency (in their organization); as such, Titania's existence is conditioned by order as she emerges both from it and as a reaction to it.

Titania characterizes Oberon as transgressive against the natural fairy society, disrupting the general playfulness of the fairies by demanding Titania surrender the Indian boy. Titania, in response, excludes Oberon from the fairy society. In so doing, she falls into the very condition (mandating some sort of organization) that she rebels (and revels, through fairy playfulness and union with Bottom) against; she disrupts the unity she meant her organization to achieve, exacerbating the conflict and spurring it along its course.

The Puck, Titania, and Oberon all recognize the Indian boy as the source of the fairy couples' squabble, which in turn produces the purported natural disharmony that translates (through a metonymic relation of poetic language, the metaphor of complicated love) into the social discord Theseus' order experiences. In translation, however, the initial situation finds an inverse characterization: Oberon, the ordering male, is ostracized from Titania's order. The fairy order is naturally playful, and Oberon disrupts their "ringlets" and "roundels"—circular, manifestly cyclical and stable dances—which effects a disruption of the normal cyclic order of the seasons (II.1:86, II.2:1).

The masculine authority figure finds himself out of bounds here, now a transgressor against the dominant order. Oberon himself, as fairy king, is normally ascendant in this play realm; but Hippolyta's invocation of night, dream, and disruption

is in full effect, complicating Oberon's rule and allowing Titania to supersede him and retain guardianship of the Indian boy. Titania's vow to the boy's mother recalls the law of Athens, both the source and product of linguistic authority and ontological control—word as law. Titania retains possession of the Indian boy thanks to language's ontological primacy; Oberon, the masculine order, now disrupts the ascendant order that the feminine, playful impulse rules through language.

James Calderwood, in "The Illusion of Drama", reads the conflict over the Indian boy as the object's passage into heteronormativity. By encouraging Hermia to marry Demetrius, Theseus aims to supplant her virgin homosociality (with her longtime playfellow Helena) by subordinating her to the dominant heterosexual order; Oberon, on the other hand, seeks to break the current heterosocial order and bring the boy into homosociality. The Indian boy himself displaces immediate female presence-in-subordination, dissociating power from sexuality. This allows Oberon to completely invert Theseus' masculine sexual priorities, diverting Titania's amorous attentions to Bottom as a means of distracting her from political pursuits, and thus subversively wresting the boy away from her. Like the boy himself, this victory is spoken but not directly actualized; the fiction contributes to the fairy couple's reunion, just as the embedded play/dream (which Theseus collapses into fiction) contributes to the resolution of the mortal plots.

Oberon maintains strife long enough to secure political power before bringing the fairy and mortal couples into unity. Having done so, Oberon fulfills his professed goals, which together establish holistic, stable social orders—aligning with Theseus' ultimate ideals, but arriving at them through play as well as feminine hunting and combat—within

the embedded play-field. With the purpose of the May game fulfilled, embedded play/dream ends. Oberon, Titania, and the Puck exit, leaving the lovers asleep on the forest floor, and at dawn, the scene transforms under the rational light of day. Theseus, Hippolyta, and Philostrate enter in the midst of a hunt, and though Hippolyta still resists Theseus, her contrary statements are phrased in the past tense; the couple has been reconciled in the form of Titania and Oberon (the royal couple's translation from rational order to supernatural play), evidenced by the mortals couple's mutual participation in competitive hunting. The lovers' play has produced archetypal comedy's end, a social and sexual ordering which now passes over into waking rational life, and satisfies all of the demands which order (Theseus' and Frye's) makes of the main comedic action.

Much like Theseus, Oberon initially fixates on quickly solidifying a normative order—and just as Theseus laments the temporal distance that separates him from the wedding night and promptly calls for revelry and conformity to masculine order, Oberon similarly seeks to wrest the Indian boy from Titania and to stabilize the unbalanced young couples. Unlike Theseus, who wields his onto-linguistic priority in an attempt to command play and order it on a manifest linguistic level, Oberon instead manipulates the narrative, as play and dream, at the imaginative level through the flower.

The impulse toward order, in the form of Oberon, seems to effect the very unity it calls for as Theseus. However, Oberon lacks any real agency in the play-realm. Thus, while he maintains appearances of mastery, the Puck—the fool, the lord of misrule—possesses true agency, which he hides behind apparent submissiveness to Oberon. Though he appears to obey Oberon, the Puck-as-jester actively subverts the king's

commands and authority, hiding his potent misrule behind superficial appearances of acquiescence and simple-minded foolishness.

### **Anarchy's Stalking-horse**

As a singularity, the Puck concentrates the playful and transgressive impulse. The complications revolving around (and within) the Puck are more overt than Helena's, but at the same time they are also more well-disguised. Rather than manifesting his discrepancy in potent but isolated details, the Puck weaves his play into order's pattern, appearing to advance the very thing he undermines.

In his self-obfuscation and easy migration between play and order, the Puck sharply contrasts Theseus. The initial complication by the subordinated moon staggers Theseus, and he entreats play to hurry along the conditions for consummation; but Theseus has suppressed and deformed play, and so it appears as such, distorted by temporal ordering. Oberon's immediate narrative characterization hides his true nature as an iteration of the ordering impulse that also motivates Theseus; but the moon's complication submerges order into dream, a space and time Theseus initially alternizes. Thus, when the *Dream* plunges into night and play—both of which complicate order—Oberon is powerless. Titania totalizes play's ontological priority, officially speaking the spirits' playful quality into existence for the play-order, just as her vow to the Indian priestess establishes a linguistic authority for her claim on the boy. Through these, she establishes agency for the playful fairies and treats overt masculine order as a hostile interloper, adding more definition to the Puck's initial summary of the fairy nobles' conflict.

Like the Puck, the fairy couple hides their true nature—as transformation of the Athenian royal couple—behind an immediate appearance. Unlike the fairy nobles,

however, the Puck's characteristics are not reorganized in translation across the play/order boundary. Rather, he demonstrates considerable subtlety and savvy in all things playful, most notably the arranging, manipulation, and navigation of play and order—both embedded (interspersed) within the *Dream*, and constituting the *Dream* itself.

The Puck demonstrates this mastery in, and over, instability from his very first moments on stage. Like Quince, he opens his first scene, II.1, (chronologically, the third subplot to emerge) with uncertainty, asking the fairy about her business—that is, her presence in play. Her response, scattering dewdrops for Titania, provides the Puck with her identity and function. Quince, on the other hand, knows his actors' identities, but is unsure of their presence at the rehearsal meant to establish their functions. Thus, Quince's question is a self-defeating effort, since anyone absent would not be able to answer, an end which implicitly maintains uncertainty instead of eliminating it. (This is, of course, when Bottom steps in and begins directing the director, playing a pragmatic ass even in his first moment.) The fairy in II.1 is just that: the "Fairy" (her designation in the stage directions), a generic spirit with no inherent distinction from others of her kind. This is a strong contrast from the highly individualized Puck—or rather, it will be in the space of a few lines, because at the beginning of the scene, the Puck likewise possesses no immediate identity until the fairy posits one for him—Robin Goodfellow

Unlike Oberon and Titania, the Puck, as Robin, would have been immediately familiar to an Elizabethan audience. Latham's study suggests that his incarnation as a devilish Puck keeping the company of fairies was an unprecedented twist—even moreso in that they were fairy nobles, and Robin Goodfellow was known as a rural spirit

with an active contempt for high society. Rather, he was known for a tendency to aid the peasantry in household chores and minor tasks, but if his assistance was not recognized and rewarded, he was thought to engage in minor disruptive pranks.

Here again he stands out from the crowd, as Elizabethans invested in fairies and spirits believed them to be malevolent and dangerous entities—all but Robin Goodfellow, who refrained from violence and overt injury in favor of good humor and laughter. The surname “Goodfellow” results from this genial disposition, as well as a desire to appease the spirit through flattery; Latham admits to finding no records of his purported race or origin before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Shakespeare invokes and reenacts this indeterminate origin in the Puck’s first moments before the fairy designates him as Robin Goodfellow. Ever the consummate player, the Puck takes the fairy’s words as rule, retroactively characterizing himself to accord with the identity signified by “Robin Goodfellow”—the British spirit, now established as a goblin and fairy court jester, a multiplicity of roles reminiscent of the variegated names and incarnations of the lord of misrule. Thus, Titania’s proclamation of fairy playfulness only speaks what the Puck has already reflexively enacted—he invokes and establishes play through playing, rather than by ordering it.

Oberon acknowledges the order established by the Puck and Fairy, aligning with the conflict and relationships that the Puck establishes; as a male authority figure, Oberon cannot help but accord with language, especially when spoken by a member of his own order. (This is demonstrated in Theseus’ acceptance of Egeus and Demetrius’ demands. The Puck, of course, does not fundamentally align with Oberon, but neither duke nor king grant much weight to anything beyond the immediate meaning speech

expresses.) Thus, as Oberon accepts the Puck as his cohort and treats Titania as a scornful lover, Titania adopts the Indian boy into her identity, but only at Oberon's prompting—and at no point in the play does she ever (directly or otherwise) acknowledge the Puck, the source of these suppositions. Titania derives her identity indirectly from the Puck's characterization, mediated through Oberon's speech.

Oberon retains Theseus' mastery of language as play's ordering element, despite adopting the play-mode. Though the emphasis shifts to play rather than order, theatrical play is still ordered by language, and as such Titania accepts Oberon's official declaration of complication despite her suppression of his overt claims to authority, recalling and inverting the dynamic between Theseus and Hippolyta. Additionally, this demonstrates the continued masculine dominance of play-order through continued linguistic subordination to masculine authority, established by Theseus and translated into the fairy court as Oberon. It effects a blindness toward manipulative, organizing play; Titania neither acknowledges the Puck, nor that she has been duped out of possession of the Indian boy and consequently into Oberon's control.

Oberon's disruption of fairy play transforms Theseus' attempts to impose order on revelrous and theatrical play; order disrupts play's nature just as play transgresses and complicates order. Oberon's break from harmonious play and persistence in re-establishing his own masculine order (often referred to but only briefly and ethereally actualized) transforms Theseus' alternization of play in the interests of protecting his mortal order's stability. Both are similar illustrations of the same impulse, attempting to assert dominance over a play-field; but this play-field is ontologically constituted by interference and resistance, the full extent and ramifications of which often hide in

perceptual blindspots and evade conscious identification. Titania attempts to suppress Oberon's order which interrupts play, and he reacts with subversive play that effects a transformation back into a playful masculine order.

Oberon beats play at its own game: subtle complication, through the magic flower. (Oberon situates the flower in the west, antipodally opposing the east, presented as the Indian boy.) However, he remains at a double-remove from the direct power that masculine order wields in civilization; the flower only allows him to enchant the sleeper, then point him or her in a suitable direction. Oberon initially tends only to Titania, anointing his queen's eyes and leaving the Puck to deal with the mortals, recalling the king's previous, indirect influence over Titania and his inability to effect large-scale organization. The Puck, on the other hand, exercises significant mobility, which in turn grants him intimate insight into the nature of play, and play within play, that Oberon entirely fails to grasp—thus, Oberon can speak things into mediated narrative existence, but the Puck actualizes these statements by playing them into existence.

The fairy king's inherent mastery of language allows him to retroactively establish the magic flower's existence, but he must send the Puck to retrieve it. By explicitly claiming exclusive knowledge of the flower, Oberon sets conditions (rules of play) that keep the Puck subordinate; whether or not the Puck knew about the flower, Oberon insinuates himself as a fundamental component of actualizing the flower, even though he contributes no authentic action—Oberon is the dominant order's relatively impotent iteration-in-suppression. Just as Theseus dominates Hippolyta and she evokes alterity to complicate his order from within, the dream/play-order dominates and contains Oberon, allowing him influence only if he works through the play-order. This requires

the Puck's playful assistance, and so Oberon dispatches his jester to "put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes" (demonstrating and emphasizing playful disregard for absolute spatiality and temporality) (II.1:175).

The extent of the Puck's mobility draws on his similarity to Quince, Philostrate, and Shakespeare. Shakespeare and Quince are directly identifiable as translations of one another across the boundary of representation, just as it is relatively easy to identify Philostrate and the Puck as lords of misrule motivated by the same impulse. But the Puck's manipulation of the young lovers during the May game, treating it as sport and pageantry, also grants him directorial characteristics, establishing his similarity to Quince, just as the Epilogue cements his identification with Shakespeare. This opens up a complex interaction of differentiated mediations and identities that cannot be teased out here beyond the most significant detail: the Puck/Philostrate/Quince complex is the only one that encounters and interacts with another iteration of itself. The mechanicals are unaware of the influence the Puck exerts over them, and the *Dream's* audience is not privy to Philostrate's interactions with the mechanicals, though Quince and the master of revels encounter one another in V.

Despite his apparent subordination on all fronts, Quince's characterization of the forest clearing is key to the Puck's mobility. In the forest rehearsal-space, Quince declares that the "green plot" will serve as their stage and the "hawthorne brake" as their avenue for entrances and exits (III.1:3,4). The green plot is, of course, the *Dream's* green world plot, the main comedic action, the May game that takes place in the same clearing that Quince designates as a theatrical play-space. The hawthorn brakes recall Demetrius' prior exit, when he "hides [himself] in the brakes" by vacating

the stage, literally entering into a break in presence (similar to the break between scenes) to escape Helena by exiting through the hawthorne brake (II.2:227). Even before Demetrius appears in the forest, however, the Puck goes off in search of the flower, departing from that same locale through the same hawthorne brake. After the Puck uses them, they accrete levels of egress that establish their function retroactively, and in retrograde: they are next used by Demetrius as a narrative exit, then by the mechanicals as a literal theatrical exit. They provide an exit from the play space on narrative and meta- levels, provided one knows how to properly navigate them. Thus, when the Puck goes to retrieve the flower, he exits the play-field on manifold levels, in a way that Oberon cannot even perceive, let alone navigate or manipulate.

The Puck twice admits error, but each instance misdirects Oberon's (and the audience's) interpretation, disguising his mobility and agency. After encountering Demetrius and Helena, Oberon instructs the Puck to find and enchant a young man characterized only by Athenian clothing, a loving female, and a disdainful attitude. Though Oberon refers to Demetrius, all of these traits characterize Lysander, whose disdain is for obstructive authority (which Philostrate incites). As such, the Puck carries out Oberon's orders in exact accord with their iteration, taking advantage of the command's non-specific language, the play (looseness) of language that allows the Puck himself to play and transform Oberon's order into further complication.

Oberon realizes that his plans have gone awry when he encounters the distressed Hermia. Turning to the Puck, he asks "What hast thou done?", reviving the indeterminacy inherent in the Puck, his actions, and their consequences (III.2:88). But rather than letting the Puck respond, Oberon immediately answers his own question:

the Puck “hast mistaken quite” and confounded true love instead of turning unrequited love true (:88). The Puck replies that it is the work of fate, which he characterizes as an overpowering force that causes men to break oaths, again invoking the duke’s underlying agency while diminishing Oberon’s apparent authority.

Theseus’ overwhelming imposition has produced every facet of the current situation—the lovers’ discord, exacerbated by the Puck (who as Philostrate incited the lovers’ plot, and as the Puck takes it to extremes) and Oberon’s involvement as a transformation of the mortal ruler. Theseus, as fate or ultimate order, provides the ground for Eristic interference by suppressing Helena, who first emerges at the mention of “wood” and vows, and subsequently complicates the May game by bringing Demetrius into the forest. Their quarreling causes Oberon to extend the flower’s influence to the mortal lovers, which results in Lysander breaking his implicit vow of being wooed by Hermia. Even in this simple response by the Puck, accounting for his actions to Oberon, the *Dream* gestures back to Theseus as initial agent of conflict.

Oberon does not recognize this, but immediately sends the Puck “about [the] wood” after Helena. This time, Oberon directs the Puck with a specific signifier that he cannot misinterpret, but in sending him to retrieve Helena, Oberon enables latent complication by calling for the direct presence of the Eristic force (which Philostrate provided in I.1). Oberon’s command for Helena’s presence ironically reverses Theseus’ initial suppression, but still situates Helena in alterity, only accessible to a playful character—Lysander recalls her from alterity in I.1, and the Puck now announces her arrival rather than actively leading her.

Following the lovers' quarrel, wherein Helena demonstrates her Eristic nature, Oberon attributes the discord to the Puck's "negligence"—either the Puck is "still...mistak[en]", or he "commit't [his] knaveries willfully" (:46, 47). The Puck's response seems to admit error, but with the caveat that his original instructions were decidedly open to interpretation. More than this, the Puck emphasizes that the mistake has produced sport (play), emphasizing his role as jester and the amusement he derives from comedic discord—here, the discordant action reverses the initial relations of the lovers which incited the comedic plot, further complicating the situation and maintaining instability. This sport is a transformation of the mechanicals' play for their own royal couple, celebrating union. Here, the Puck continues to assert the power of play over order, rather than vice versa; his play seems hasty, as Oberon and Titania are still in the midst of struggle, but as an immediate result of further complication, Oberon sets out to retrieve the Indian boy, resolve the political struggle and bring about union.

Dismissing the Puck as an archetypal fool, Oberon sets about resolving the strife once and for all. This time, however, he directs the Puck specifically toward Lysander and Demetrius: the Puck pretends to be (verbally but invisibly acts, or plays, as) each's rival, leading them around the forest until they are exhausted and fall asleep. Oberon commands the Puck to manipulate the males aurally toward the goal of establishing the order projected by the fairy king—the Puck, however, has just manipulated Oberon in precisely that fashion toward his own (the Puck's) ends.

The Puck begins his defense by appealing to Oberon as "the king of shadows", ostensibly gratifying Oberon's presumption of rulership over the ethereal spirits and their supernatural realm, distinctly characterized by fairy play (III.2:348). The *Dream*

confuses and conflates play and dream, and Elizabethan understanding of dream's supernatural influence recalls play's intangibility, which differentiates theatrical performance from its mundane actuality (a group of people standing in a room telling untruths). Oberon is the king only of immediate appearances, his own claim to rulership and the Puck's apparent subordination to him, both of which play out in the duo aligning the lovers into happy union; and of interpretation, the dominant reading that ignores disturbances beneath the surface appearances.

The context of "king of shadows" complicates this title itself, as it is preceded by "Believe me" and followed by "I mistook". The statement's surface appearance (attributing dominance to Oberon as the referent of "king") is complicated by a meta-theatrical subtext, the Puck's unstable identity and propensity for play (acting, taking on characters/identities). Even as the Puck addresses Oberon, he speaks as Oberon, demonstrating the instability of the spoken word by subverting it. Read as such, the Puck implores his listener (the audience, and Oberon) to accept his character, believe him to be the king of shadows. This situation—the Puck as the man in charge—reverses the surface appearance and illustrates the underlying relationship that enables the surface appearance and this veiled explication of itself.

The title, "king of shadows", suits the Puck as well as it does Oberon—whereas Oberon's rule is illusory, the Puck controls play, and thus the illusion itself (the lord of misrule's ironic disguise as a displacement of authority). The Puck attaches "mistook" to "belief" and "king of shadows", suggesting the instability (demonstrated by the Puck) of overwhelming conviction (manifest in Oberon)—Oberon is mistaken in his conviction that the Puck is mistaken (and implicitly subservient), in accepting that the Puck's

actions are not intentional, in believing in his own absolute agency, and in taking the Puck at his word. Barber succumbs to the same illusion in characterizing Oberon as the king of the May game (the lord of misrule, saturnalian king), as does Frye in his conviction that Oberon is the architect of the comedic action and the Puck merely a subservient vice. This arises from the superficial semblance of rulership, an unstable and unreliable referent in the *Dream*.

The Puck, as Robin Goodfellow, finds an interfering referent in Robin Starveling. Both surnames have the same number of syllables and rhythm in writing, but when spoken—the only time their similar rhythm and meter would be apparent—Starveling's name is contracted to "Starv'ling", similar to starling, which recalls Robin, and additionally recalling the "e" absent from "th'Antipodes", related to the self-defeating parody of the moon he portrays and the self-defeating similarity his name bears to Robin Goodfellow when spoken. This blatant possibility for metonymic confusion that subtly confounds itself is the same that suggests Oberon as the May king, the lord of misrule; such an interpretation stems from a failure to see past verbal declarations of agency and recognize Oberon's relative impotence and his reliance on the Puck, the true May king who rules play from the invisible, untouchable silence behind the scenes.

The Puck's actions, of course, ultimately build toward unity—or rather, play out the course unity takes when distorted over a temporal track. He only carries out Oberon's commands superficially; in manipulating the "king of shadows" in language and play, he fosters Oberon's apparent agency that disguises his impotence even from himself (Oberon), and which simultaneously illustrates the Puck's hidden influence (which does not concretize into order thanks to his playful nature and constant transgression). The

Puck uses the flower only on Lysander, but does so twice; Oberon tends to Demetrius, who has engaged in the May game by directly courting Hermia, passing into Oberon's sphere of (indirect) influence—play/dream. In the mean time, Lysander's initial enchantment remains, causing the lover's quarrel which results in Oberon's suspicions of the Puck's intentions, and the Puck's subsequent subversive manipulation of the immediate situation. Just before dawn, the Puck re-applies the love potion to Lysander's eyes, and Lysander's affections return to Hermia, setting the conditions for comedic resolution. Only Oberon's semi-direct influence on Demetrius remains, equally contributing to the main plot's resolution. The subsequent reunion with Titania reconciles the royal dispute, a quality which transfers to Theseus and Hippolyta, leaving Egeus as the odd man out. (Later versions give Philostrate's lines in V to Egeus, placing the latter in charge of the revelry and thus complicit in it and the new social order he initially opposed; as such, Philostrate appears only in I and IV, and remains silent.) Theseus suppresses Egeus' dissent, and the previously projected order, in favor of the immediate harmony that will lead directly to consummation and conclusion—Theseus' ultimate goals. In doing so, he moves the marriage forward, further permitting the effects of play/dream to quietly alter his pre-established order.

Thus, the Puck only appears to carry out Oberon's commands and establish an imposing order, while manipulating Oberon into contributing to the Puck's inherent (though affected) goal: Robin Goodfellow's folkloric role of bringing true lovers together through playful complication. The Puck instigates this by dosing Lysander, which complicates Oberon's plan, forcing the fairy king to enchant Demetrius. Neither Demetrius nor Oberon are aware of the greater, but (relatively) subtler, force acting

upon them, a result of the Puck's embedded/layered play which results in an apparent (re)turn to stability. (This layering additionally recalls Quince's relation to two other, more playfully-oriented iterations of himself, and the flower's apparent self-negation.)

As a manifestation of the play-impulse, the Puck exists as a simultaneous manifestation and transformation of play's destabilizing effects. To say that he concentrates playful force into immediate agency is a misnomer, since he is equally a product of that playful impulse's crystallization into the form of a character. As such, he exists in synchronization with the disruptions that leave other characters reeling and disoriented. Play is both temporally and spatially interspersed with order, and as such, the master of revels enjoys easy navigation between the two while remaining safely inconspicuous—maintaining the primary, playful characteristics between the Puck and Philostrate, both of whom pass undetected. Theseus demands revelry to secure his order's totality and stability, and Philostrate produces the youths who further complicate Theseus' order. They engage in the May game, the festive play that unifies the young couples, as well as Oberon with Titania, who causally prefigure and establish accord between Theseus and Hippolyta, who in turn invoke festive revelry to accompany their own union.

The Puck's mock-acquiescence to Oberon perpetuates a superficial appearance of subservience that protects him in his subtle, subversive activities. These dually hide themselves behind superficial accord with order and apparent self-negation. In transformations across play boundaries, the Puck also advances Theseus' goals through Oberon (himself a transformation of Theseus) thanks to subtle manipulation and further complication that ultimately lead to happy union and general playfulness.

### **The Epilogue: “End of the Dream”**

Theseus begins V by collapsing play into dream, and dream into misguided imagination; indeed, to Elizabethans, “dream” was an appropriate term for any fantasy or irreality—like theatrical play. Theseus subsequently suppresses Bottom’s epilogue, the ballad detailing the weaver’s supernatural “dream”. In deriding *Pyramus*, however, he unwittingly falls into play, and having done so, may retire to bed with Hippolyta, finally reaching his ultimate end, exiting the play into the “night of...solemnities” Hippolyta projects, in I.1, onto the wedding night.

This leaves the stage vacant, and the helpful Puck appears, sweeping up after the wedding celebration. Titania and Oberon enter next, finally in happy harmony, and bless Theseus’ palace. At the aristocratic wedding, the children playing the minor fairies would presumably have enacted Oberon’s command, overrunning the bounds of play into reality and extending the blessing to the semi-external Elizabethan order (previously incorporated as representatives of Theseus’ wedding guests). In this, the fairies spend their final moments in the narrative attempting to assert, one last time, their dominance and agency. Anything that goes wrong from this point forward is presumably the fault of the Puck, whom they leave alone onstage. The Puck does not disappoint, subversively delivering the epilogue that Theseus refuses. Bottom’s epilogue, of course, would have complicated Theseus’ rationalization of the night’s events; the Puck’s, on the other hand, seems offer the rational audience a way out—the same route that Theseus takes.

At his epilogue’s start, the Puck collapses actors and fairies (both equally ethereal) into “shadows”, conflating play and dream just as the Puck’s immediate, and Theseus’ retroactive, influences do to the May game. If the audience found the fairies

in particular, or the comedy as a whole, in any way distasteful, they are welcome to suspend their suspension of disbelief; but to do so is to judge play, dream, and *Dream* by standards other than their own, dismissing them as distortions effected by imagination, with spirits as objects rather than agents, as in the narrative—a narrative that has, since the beginning of the wedding celebration, expanded to encompass the outside audience, still analogous to the Greek wedding guests, who would have remained after their host couples retired. The Puck fully extends the possibility of rationality, prefigured by Theseus, to the audience in the same way that play extends itself to the audience, which absorbs Theseus and renders his authority impotent during *Pyramus*. But here, the Puck sets another snare: such a rationalization still buys into the play's convoluted, meta-theatrical logic that is not quite what it seems.

If imagination's influence ends along with dream and play, then the rational Demetrius is not truly in love with Helena; a rational reading that dismisses and dispels the influence of imagination similarly abandons this supposition that enables the conclusion of the linear narrative. The rational ending destabilizes and reverts back into the *Dream's* unbalanced and discordant initial conditions, which express an apparently prior conquest, suppression, and subordination of destabilizing impulses that is ostensibly fulfilled at the narrative's conclusion. The Puck's Epilogue is a transformation of "Bottom's Dream", as it retroactively upsets the logical foundations and rationalization of the preceding narrative.

This is the same linear disruption expressed in Helena's apparent retrograde motion, echoed by the fairy in II.1, as well as Philostrate, and the moon. In the case of Helena and Philostrate, it stems from Theseus' initial displacement of play into distant

alterity. Theseus initially situates play and revelry at the *Dream*'s conclusion, whereas Lysander places it in memory, positing Helena's presence. The resolution-through-play, in the distinct form of the May game that includes Helena, directly triggers Oberon's reunion with Titania, which translates back into Theseus and Hippolyta, whose union must also have festive play—*Pyramus*, which also includes Helena (translated from vocal player to silent audience) and caps off the *Dream*. As Theseus and Hippolyta retire, the play is ostensibly over. But the Eristic Helena, in achieving her goal of incorporation in the narrative's dominant order, reveals her ultimate end is only another point of complication, this time of linear culmination itself. The hidden, preserved Eristic reaction finds a figure in Hippolyta's brief outburst (which contradicts Theseus playful mockery), and in the Puck's reinvocation of the moon through layers of aurality—whether new or waxing, the image/sound complex of the howling wolf, mediated in the Puck's speech, maintains the figurehead of the subversive complex in a new, veiled mode.

The intertwining of fairy and Athenian royal couples creates further causal issues. The fairies immediately transform and figure the Athenians, subtly displaying conspicuous characteristics that demonstrate their immediate translation across the play-order boundary. Additionally, Titania asserts that they have been in conflict since “middle summer's spring”, or the beginning of midsummer, or midsummer eve—the very moment they inhabit, their conflict established only moments before by the Puck, just as Philostrate incites the lovers' conflict on Theseus' command. The fairies' declaration of primacy seems to gain some legitimacy in this admission: Titania claims that they are the source of the sickness in the natural world, which translates through the rose

imagery to the complication aroused by the Artemisian impulse, figured in Theseus' conquest of Hippolyta and the Amazons.

Theseus begins the dream with the self-referential and –actualizing “Now”, reflecting the priority of the signifier (which constitutes its own signified), prefiguring and conditioning the apparent acausality and nonlinear temporality rampant in the *Dream*. The alocal causality of this loop finds its own figure in the Indian boy. Though the fairy couple reunites onstage, Oberon only mentions that Titania has surrendered the boy to him. Manipulation and subordination are similar to the point of being the same thing for the fairy king; in manipulating Titania into lusting after Bottom, Oberon has essentially achieved his end, and thus simply speaks his possession of the Indian boy at an opportune moment. Following this, the Indian boy seems to disappear from the narrative, but this only highlights his utter absence altogether—the fairy couple does not mention him after their reconciliation, nor does he ever appear onstage.

This does not stop the Puck, Oberon, and Titania from each acknowledging the Indian boy as the source of the fairy couple's squabble. The *Dream* grants ontological priority to signifiers, rather than signifieds, so the Indian boy is able to drive the narrative without ever appearing in representation. Just as Theseus' responsibility for conflict and the fairies' responsibility for the natural turmoil is posited but never explicitly verified, the Indian boy never actualizes—he is spoken, but never speaks, much like the moon as imagery. With no referent, the Indian boy is as ethereal as play itself and evaporates when masculine order dominates.

Theseus directly represents the *Dream's* aristocratic audience, just as the Elizabethan wedding guests represent Theseus' own; in relation to them, Shakespeare

served a function similar to the lord of misrule's. Quince, however, provides a more immediate, meta-textual representative in his role as theatrical writer and director. This apparent correlation provides a perfect ingress into the Puck's nature, which hides just beneath such superficial identification as appearing to support Oberon (and his ideals) as a henchman, and as the archetypal trickster who assists the young lovers in achieving union and acceptance. The Puck plays the fool and lord of misrule both narratively and, as/through Shakespeare (who hides behind the Puck, play, and dream to efface his agency), culturally. Despite his superficial allegiances, the Puck fulfills his roles' true functions in complicating the embedded (play/dream) order, destabilizing archetypal plot and theatrical representation, and translating these into a subtle iteration aimed at the Elizabethan cultural moment, extending the instability of the narrative conclusion to the aristocratic wedding party through meta-textual similarity, and forcing them to grapple with the same dilemma of rational and imaginative interpretation.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Walton Wood received his Associate of Arts from Edison College before transferring to the University of Florida's English program in 2005. There, he began studying William Blake and produced his honor's thesis examining recursive narratology in William Blake's *The [First] Book of Urizen*. He received his Bachelor of Arts (*summa cum laude*) and Master of Arts degrees from UF, and this thesis satisfies the conditions of his acceptance into the English doctoral program.

As an undergraduate, Wood co-founded the student-run and -financed Shakespeare in the Park, co-directing the '07 and '08 productions. In May of '09, he directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Acrostown Repertory Theatre in Gainesville. Over the years, he has appeared in various stagings of Shakespeare's work. He is inclined to believe that, on the whole, Newton and Frye really aren't such bad guys.