

The Comedy of the Lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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A predilection of older criticism to view the young lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as romantic protagonists¹ has given way to a general recognition of their comic function in more contemporary criticism.² What should follow is the recognition that the play is not primarily about them, that they do not form a main plot, but that they are just one voice in a four part madrigal of the nobility, lovers, artisans and fairies.³ That voice, until the last act, has been so written as to provide at least as much comedy as is provided by the artisans. The lovers' on-going contribution is principally farce, a form which demands extreme contrast between surface and substance, form and content.⁴ It requires minimal individualization and maximum complication. Their scenes have been shaped by the playwright to provide what farce requires: a comic victim. Only in the fifth act do they have a function in the genre of romantic comedy. There they fulfill Northrup Frye's argument of comedy: lovers must live happily ever after to fulfill our necessary assumptions about human destiny.⁵ For the first four acts however, Shakespeare uses them always as victims: of Athenian authority, of their own adolescent obsessions, and of enchantment. They can serve both ends, be objects of laughter evolving into objects of sympathy, by virtue of human assumptions about foolish adolescence evolving into future maturity, a corollary of the comic argument.

When the lovers first appear, they are unwilling participants in melodrama, a litigation in which parental and royal authority is to be imposed. (Hermia, Demetrius and Lysander are brought before Duke Theseus by Egeus, Hermia's father, for sanction of his paternal rights.) During the hearing in which Theseus is judge and Egeus plaintiff, three of the four lovers "dress the stage," and though two are the accused, they speak only what they must and defer to authority, in the manner of all young who are bent on staying out of more trouble. Indeed it is as *trouble* that they are introduced. Theseus has just rekindled his enthusiasm and set the tone for weddings, joy and happy celebration, when he is confronted with trouble: family conflict and romantic despair. After rendering judgment against the lovers, Theseus exits drawing Egeus and Demetrius

after him.

Shakespeare next focuses upon the personal dilemmas and it is at this point that the lovers begin to take on comic dimension. The balance of the scene presents first a pair, then a group, then solo perspective upon their four-way involvement. Though of the same world, and experiencing the same emotion as Theseus and Hippolyta, the lovers reflect the wide discrepancy between those who master and those who are mastered by love. By juxtaposing characters in parallel states, Shakespeare has made the contrasts look more like opposites. As the royal couple is mature, these lovers are immature; as Theseus and Hippolyta understate their passion (I.i.1-11) these lovers overstate theirs (I.i.132-49). Shakespeare does not differentiate the characters of the young lovers, and so all four seem a common type, a gang, an adolescent pard, who are so engrossed in their feelings and discoveries about romantic love that they make a group as much by their mutual compulsions to talk of nothing else as by their exaggerated infatuations.

The significant information about the lovers which we receive in the balance of the first scene is about what they are feeling, not who they are. Doubtless this treatment of the lovers reflects a desire to parody Elizabethan romantic conventions, rather than a clinical interest in obsession, but it cannot be doubted that it was Shakespeare's purpose not to differentiate them. Their personal, individual traits were not so relevant to the action of this play as their typical adolescent responses. They prove likable, if unremarkable, young people who experience love, like magic, as something they cannot control. In the interests of characterization, much has been made of little (Helena's fairness, Hermia's shortness, etc.) but it is more pertinent to note Shakespeare's exploitation of their sameness in relation to the comic values of their scenes, their function as dupes of their feelings, and the part they play in the comic proportions of the play as a whole.

Repetition is a comic device:⁶ the more characters look and sound alike, the more they are like mechanical toys and less like persons, the funnier they seem. And the lovers do come into the story at the extreme remove of being treated as chattel, as things. Egeus' case is that a daughter is a possession, and while Lysander has come as thief into the case, it is primarily a matter of his legal property rights in Hermia.

Shakespeare has fragmented his perspectives on the lovers' private affairs into three units: a twosome, a threesome, and a solo, to show that *nothing* can divert or vary the content of adolescent responses to love. In the first unit Lysander and Hermia deplore their fate, then decide to elope. In the second, Helena enters and deplores having lost Demetrius, and Lysander and Hermia assure her she will get him back because they are running away. In the final unit Helena rails at the injustice of Demetrius' change of heart and decides this latest news will give her occasion to see him again. Each unit has followed the same pattern: communal handwringing followed, quite irrationally, by positive action. Shakespeare has prepared the predictability of the lovers' responses. They act alike and so partake of the comic that comes from humans acting as puppets, mechanically.

Having established the lovers as comic characters, Shakespeare next sets up a comedy of mistaken assumptions. Bergson has categorized this as "reciprocal interference of series."⁷ Their comic obsessions are compounded by enchantments, and they become unwitting performers in fairy entertainments. They will be comic victims on two dimensions simultaneously. When Demetrius and Helena enter Oberon's domain, they interrupt his preoccupation with his own marital affairs, just as Lysander, Demetrius, and Hermia entered Theseus' domain in the first act. Oberon will now act as judge, albeit unknown to them, and like Theseus, he will act, as he thinks for their best interests, but he also will further complicate their affairs.

It has been traditional to focus upon the lovers' story and interpret Oberon's function in light of his service (or disservice) to them. Instead, consider Oberon's intrigue and note the lovers' function in it. They become corollary to his affairs, as they prove corollary to those of Theseus, and a parallel between day life and dream life is polarized. Farce and intrigue are complementary (as farce and romance are not), so that the farcical situations the lovers fall into seem naturally Oberon and Puck's "fond pageant" just as later Theseus will have *his* interlude, his play within a play. The lovers romanticize their way through Theseus' and Oberon's worlds, never realizing they are romantics, just as the artisans clown their way through Athens and the wood, never knowing they are clowns. To look upon the action in the wood as Oberon's intrigue⁸ in which both the lovers and the rustics have a function, is to provide the overall dream with a coherence, however garbled the lovers' and the rustics' interpretations become.

The first scene of the lovers in the wood makes the most of the lovers' blindness to the world around them. Demetrius and Helena speak as if they were still at court, as if woods were just a group of trees. It is not until line thirty of this scene that they show any awareness of their surroundings, and then it enters the dialogue as yet one more talking point about love. The humor of the scene arises from the male-female conflict in which the apparently weaker bests the stronger, an instance of Bergson's inversion.⁹ Helena can frustrate Demetrius by parrying all his arguments and shifting all responsibility back to him. He is a magnet, he is the master the dog can't cease to follow, his *absence* causes illness, and when he finally resorts to threats of violence, she smugly replies, "Your virtue is my privilege" (II.i.220).¹⁰ Demetrius quits the field and Helena pursues him. After discord between Demetrius and Helena, there is next concord in the progression of male-female scenes when Lysander and Hermia enter. These lovers sport themselves in accord in the same manner and tone as the previous pair Demetrius and Helena did in discord. The effect is to dissociate their affections from personality. The more the personalities resemble one another, the more the switching about of love-objects seems plausible, since personality would appear less and less dictator of special attractions.

The action of the scene between Lysander and Hermia is preparing to sleep. It also prepares for Puck's entrance and his mistake. Now comic

values double and triple, for the lovers are funny not only for their foolish attitudes about sleeping apart and for their being the butt of enchantment, but also for Puck's compounding the errors by mistaking them for their "look-alikes." Hermia's:

But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy
Lie further off, in humane modesty,
Such separation as may well be said
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid,
So far be distant; (II.ii.56-60)

becomes Puck's:

Pretty soul! she durst not lie
Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy. (II.ii.76-77)

The comedy is an instance of Bergson's "reciprocal interference of series": "A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time."¹¹ The comedy of this scene comes from juxtaposing human pseudo-morality with fairy amorality. It only remains to show the consequences of the mistake, and so Demetrius and Helena enter. It is Demetrius' presence which brings Helena to this spot, but it is coincidence that this is the moment in which Helena will abandon hope. Demetrius continues running, but Helena ceases to follow. Shakespeare is now deploying triple use of reciprocating series and pressing for maximum contrast. In this instance Helena abandons hope of winning Demetrius and pronounces Hermia the winner. She discovers Lysander and wakens him so that he sees her and not Hermia, and thereby she makes Hermia loser instead. We know why Lysander has changed direction in his affections, but we have yet to know the reactions to this change. Shakespeare carefully develops them one at a time. Demetrius is out of sight and Hermia does not wake, so attention is focused on Helena and Lysander alone. Lysander woos and his wooing is comic because he is seeking plausible reasons for what we know has been external intervention. He speaks of Demetrius, and Helena mistakes his passion for her for passion directed against Demetrius, and she therefore tries to protect her love. When Lysander makes it clear that it is her he wants, she doubts. She too casts about for plausible explanation of his behavior and concludes that she is being mocked. The rebuffs she has had anticipate unkindness, not kindness. She recoils. She has moved into Demetrius' role and Lysander has moved into hers. She must run away and he will follow. To fix the power of the flower, Lysander is made to turn back to Hermia before he goes. She now repels him. He explicitly renounces her and exits. And to complete the consequences of Puck's mistake, attention then shifts to Hermia. She must play Helena's role at the end of Act I: the deserted. The scene ends in an echo of the round dance pattern that now emerges as the play reaches its midpoint and one high point of its action.

When the lovers reappear they enter and interrupt Oberon and Puck, and so they can serve as the butt of Oberon and Puck's joke. They enter as unwitting comic victims. Oberon says, "Stand close" (III.ii.41). The fairy

court will observe, not participate in, this scene of human wooing. They will be audience, and this casts Demetrius and Hermia in the roles of performers. Having no personal interest in the lovers beyond what is their beneficent or mischievous characters respectively, Oberon and Puck can become spectators and so focus the action of the lovers as a play within a play.

The scene between Hermia and Demetrius is perhaps the most rhetorically exaggerated scene yet expressed by the lovers. Demetrius has finally found Hermia, but found her filled with stinging epithets and vituperation against him. The only reasonable explanation she can make for Lysander's absence is that Demetrius has killed him. Her affection is not for sale, however much she may be pleading for Lysander's return. She exits and this last rejection puts Demetrius out of hope. He gives up the chase, and continuing the metaphor of bargain-making and debt, he settles himself to sleep, much as Hermia and Lysander had earlier put themselves to sleep with word games.

This action is a repetition, with roles reversed, of Demetrius' encounter with Helena in which he had pronounced unequivocal rejection, and *she* had abandoned hope. It is also repetition (with different characters) of the last encounter of lovers: when Helena defended Demetrius and scorned and fled Lysander. It is also evidence necessary for Oberon to have in order to discover a mistake and take steps to bring about his original intention.

Oberon acts immediately and decisively, sending Puck for Helena while he will perform the action he had originally intended. Puck returns. He has found Helena with Lysander in tow. As a royal jester and prankster, he has not missed the potential entertainment values in the situation he has stumbled upon, and he has brought them both back, hoping Oberon will enjoy the spectacle.

Puck: Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand,
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

Oberon: Stand aside: the noise they make
Will cause Demetrius to awake.

Puck: Then will two at once woo one.
That must needs be sport alone;
And those things do best please me
That befall prepost'rously. (III.ii.111-22)

"Preposterously" was, to an Elizabethan, "topsy-turvily," in inverted order. It is also a device of farce.⁹ Oberon agrees to withhold future remedy for the sake of present laughter and so the show may go on. The lovers again become "the players" at this fairy king's court, the unconscious performers for others' amusement. Shakespeare has provided royal license to enjoy, to laugh at the farce of these lovers' confusions and misunderstandings.

It is pertinent now to direct attention to the plot the lovers execute.

There is, without a doubt, a pattern to the evolution of the lovers' private action, the right matching among themselves. In speaking about the lovers in the first act, it was mentioned that they were not differentiated in personality; rather, they functioned to show an arbitrary character of adolescent and obsessively romantic love. Love masters these young people. Fickleness is presented not as a characteristic of personality but as a characteristic of adolescence. In this play they neither cause their own ills nor effect their own cure, but instead they dance to a tune they believe that they have heard the piper Love play. The implication is that however comic the action may be, it is also an inevitable stage in adolescent development, a necessary ritual action youth must perform. If this is correct, then it is relevant to attend to the pattern in which the lovers move. The idea of a dance has already been advanced by Enid Welsford in *The Court Masque*: "The plot is a pattern, a figure, rather than a series of human events occasioned by character and passion, and this pattern, especially in the moonlight parts of the play, is the pattern of a dance."¹²

This statement raises questions about the relation of dance to drama which need not be argued here, but it is interesting to note the way in which Welsford holds the lovers' action as primary instance for her thesis:

The lovers quarrel in a dance pattern: first, there are two men to one woman and the other woman alone, then a brief space of circular movement, each one pursuing and pursued, then a return to the first figure with the position of the woman reversed, then a cross-movement, man quarreling with man and woman with woman, and then, as finale, a general setting to partners, including not only the lovers but fairies and royal personages as well.¹³

C. L. Barber deliberates upon Miss Welsford's thesis: "This is fine and right, except that one must add that the lovers' evolutions have a headlong and helpless quality that depends on their not being *intended* as dance. . . . The farce is funniest and most meaningful, where they try their hardest to use personality to break free, and still are willy-nilly swept along to end in pitch darkness, trying to fight."¹⁴

Now consider that farce results from the dialectic of extremes: the *surface* frenzy and distraction of the lovers trying to explain their own behavior, and the *substance* of a highly ordered, carefully balanced pattern of movement which magic, chance, and adolescent limitation have dictated. The pattern of adolescent attractions in general much resembles the round dance: a to-and-fro from partner to alternate partner; out of friendship into love; out of love . . . "and Grand Allemande."¹⁵ In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the magic and enchantments function as symbols for no less irrational adolescent fickleness, so the pattern of action by the lovers is offered as a pattern of typical adolescent behavior: a trial-and-error period necessary to be undergone in order to reach the self-mastery of mature love. This norm is not comic in and of itself, as a round dance is not comic. But this norm is also unappreciated by the lovers. Comedy arises when a dialectic is set in motion between the lovers' acts and their eagerness to be interpreting these acts in the "romance" in which they imagine themselves to be heroes and heroines. The romance is rarely comic as a form (witness *Two Gentlemen of Verona*), and, as mentioned, the adolescent

"round dance" is not comic in and of itself, but both may become comic when they are made to appear functionally related.

Shakespeare has created his farce by setting the lovers at the remove of Puck and Oberon. He has established just that distance and perspective where it is possible to know the cause and still enjoy effect. The comic here is an inversion of one of the farce dialectics in the Titania-Bottom scenes where the surface is decorous and the substance is preposterous.¹⁶ The very orderliness of development in the lovers' actions is a necessary substance to contrast with the surface: their confusion and helplessness. Without the orderly pattern of the round dance, the confusions would seem random; without the lover's frenzied responses, the scenes would in fact be only a round dance.

Without question the lovers' pattern of movement has been constructed in orderly, even mathematical progression. Before the play starts, Demetrius loves Helena and Lysander loves Hermia. In the first act Demetrius has changed his mind so that both he and Lysander love Hermia and Helena is left forsaken. The third change brings an alteration in Lysander's affections so that now Lysander loves Helena and Demetrius loves Hermia. Working "the change" once again, Lysander loves Helena, Demetrius loves Helena, and Hermia is forsaken. The final move, removing the charm only from Lysander's eye, brings the action full circle. Each alteration in the men's affections brings a complementary disaffection in the women's: Helena finds herself wooed in scorn and Hermia thinks herself victim of deceit. All movement is constructed out of the simple polarity of attraction-repulsion: each character moving toward, or drawing away from another in scenes of soliloquy, of pairs, in triangles or in foursomes. There are in fact 23 configurations the lovers pass through before Puck manipulates the final "setting to partners." Four of these configurations are in the first act and seven are in the second. The final twelve constitute the climax in their private story. And it is the very complexity and variety, which urge the round dance as a form, by which the action can be understood. The round dance itself can be seen as a refined ritualization of the attraction-repulsion patterns of early courtship.

The "choreography" of the lovers' action in this scene demonstrates Shakespeare's care to construct his action in units of likeness with difference, reinforced and emphasized by repetition. It is in this manipulation that Shakespeare's comic art emerges, implicit but doubtless most artful for being so. Here are the last ten configurations which constitute the entertainment Puck anticipates:

Configuration Number	Number of Persons	Action	Pattern
14	2	Helena enters, pursued Lysander	An identical repeat of last scene in Act II
15	3	Demetrius awakens to woo Helena and quarrel with Lysander	a triangle: inversion of one opening Act I

Configuration Number	Number of Persons	Action	Pattern
16	4	Hermia enters and pursues Lysander who rejects her	Her-Lys reenacting Dem-Hel first scene in wood: girl pursuing unwilling boy
17	4	Helena pleads with Hermia who is mystified	New alignment: girls vs. boys
18	4	Two men woo Helena and quarrel	Repeats triangle above
19	4	Hermia pursues Lysander who rejects her	Repeats first foursome
20	4	Hermia turns in anger on Helena	Repeats two girls, but action repeats boys quarreling
21	4	Two men and Helena against Hermia	Triangle made to oppose forsaken girl
22	4	Men quarrel and exit	Repeat
23	2	Girls quarrel and follow	Repeat

Number 15 recurs in 18 and takes the men off stage in 22. Hermia pleads and Lysander rejects in Numbers 16 and 19. The men quarrel in 15, 18 and 22. The girls become alienated in 17 and quarrel in 20 and 23. Only move 21 is not a repetition but it is a superimposition of the girls' quarrel on the inverted triangle: a combination of 18 and 20, so that 22 is an expansion of 20, and brings the scene to its end.

This climactic scene is the longest in the play, constituting more than one-fifth of the whole. It has three movements: the setting up of the conflict (122 lines); the confrontation which is Puck's pageant (208 lines); and the resolution (115 lines). The midpoint of the play falls within the scene and, when it finishes, the play is two-thirds over. This scene also has a parallel in the fifth act where preparations take 105 lines, the rustics' play-within-a-play takes 206 lines, and the final resolutions 76 lines. Shakespeare set the dialectic of farce to work mid-play, as he set the comic parody to work at the end of the play.

Thus far we have discussed in some detail the comic structure of the lovers' quarrels. The texture of the scenes is also contributing to the farce, often through comparable devices such as repetition, inversion, and the reciprocal interference of series. Close textual analysis will reveal many instances, but it is sufficient to select the climactic scene in the wood to illustrate the manner in which Shakespeare shapes texture and structure alike to realize his comic vision.

At the beginning of the lovers' final confrontation scene, when Lysander pursues Helena on stage, his first speech has the same injured tone in which Demetrius began the last scene pleading with Hermia:

Demetrius to Hermia:

O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe. (III.ii.46-47)

Lysander to Helena:

Why should you think that I should woo in scorn?
Scorn and derision never come in tears:
Look, when I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
In their nativity all truth appears.
How can these things in me seem scorn to you,
Bearing the badge of faith to prove them true? (III.ii.127-32)

Both speeches belie depth of feeling by their exaggeration of subject, their elaborate deployment of metaphor, and their rhyme. Lysander, to Helena, is especially ill-placed, for he is caught between being thought scornful, therefore rude, or serious, and therefore faithless. Helena answers his speech, scorning his faithlessness: line for line and rhyme for rhyme.

Lysander: a-b, a-b, cc?
Helena: d-e, d-e, ff!
Lysander: g?
Helena: g!
Lysander: H! (III.ii.123-37)

The rapid, balanced reply, retort, reply moves like table tennis. Helena returns all serves until Lysander is goaded to a smash, with his one unanswerable, if hardly tactful, argument: "Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you" (II.ii.137). This is blurted out and rhymes with nothing. It also wakes Demetrius, who says:

O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, devine!
To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show
Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!
That pure congealed white, high Taurus snow
Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow
When thou hold'st up thy hand: O, let me kiss
This princess of pure white, this seal of bliss! (III.ii.138-46)

The text is an instance of the comic device, reciprocal interference of series. Demetrius' speech is repetition of Lysander's when he woke to see Helena, but it is at the same time a reply to Lysander. There is also the incongruity of waking with such a mouthful of words, and finally the humor of overstatement and mixture of metaphor. The texture of the language throughout intensifies impressions of confusion. The more confused the lovers become, the more farcical they are, for the discrepancy is thus widened between their actual predicament and the predicament they imagine themselves in.

Confusions are multiplied by the increase in quarrels started—boy with girl, girl with girl, girl with boy, and boy with boy—and by the increase in number of participants. The scene began with one against one, then a third was added, and a triangle resulted. Finally there was the impact of four, each one against each other one, so confusions grew by geometric progression. The confusions finally erupt in slapstick comedy of physical

aggression by the smallest and most cowardly of the quartet. This is matched by loud challenges to a duel by the young men, and the scene ends with a feeling that all has indeed befallen preposterously.

The last of the lovers' comedy is in the final matching of pairs. Puck sets himself to perform his duties with gusto. He skips:

Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down:
I am feared in field and town.
Goblin, lead them up and down. (III.ii.413-16)

He will play "cops and robbers" with these mortals whose melodramatic postures have provided the evening's entertainment. He will engage in their final comic victimization. He misleads Lysander first, then Demetrius. In this way Shakespeare suggests lapsed time, allows the lovers at least some show of their brave words (again in contrast to their state and therefore funny), and re-creates confusions. Then he shepherds the deliberate configuration of the lovers: each enters alone, despairs of going further in the dark, lies down and falls asleep. Helena is third, and after her Puck counts: "Yet but three? Come one more:/ Two of both kinds makes up four" (III.ii.465-66). The effect is to continue to distance the mortals, now as numbers or pairs. Hermia enters and when she sleeps, beside Lysander, the foursome is complete. Puck administers the herb to Lysander, and in a patter of doggerel and maxims which liken the lovers to Jack and Jill, the man and his mare, he finishes his task.

This final configuration is in fact the end of the farce comedy of the lovers. When they awake, they will no longer be funny. They may copy their model Duke Theseus in trying to make witty jokes at the expense of the rustic entertainment they will watch, but in themselves they are no longer comic. Resolution of conflict accounts in part for this, but Shakespeare has also used the night exploits, the dream-like experience, to effect a transformation toward adulthood. Their adolescent obsessions have evaporated, so they are no longer comic victims. And when they cease to be comic, they must surely drop into lesser place. In fact they are the least important voice in the fifth act medley of nobles, fairies, artisans, and lovers.

Their importance to the play lay in their comic value and, in the scenes in the wood, Shakespeare utilized them with no less comic effect than he utilized the artisans in "Pyramus and Thisbe" at the end of the play. By making comic capital from the potentials in deliberate non-individualization and situation, Shakespeare shows himself a craftsman of farce. By demonstrating that farce demands a dialectic of extremes to sustain and expand its comic increment so that it is not only funny but continues to be funny, line by line, and becomes funnier until its inevitable climax is reached, Shakespeare achieved one of the comic highpoints of the play. Finally, however, by never forgetting the whole, that interweaving of parts, he created a comic design which is art by virtue of its contrasts, parallels and order. It is a high order of comic art which Shakespeare achieves in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it is when we view the lovers as figures

in farce that this design emerges most clearly.

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NOTES

¹ E. K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Survey* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1925), pp. 80-83; Thomas Parrott, ed., *Shakespeare: Twenty-three Plays and the Sonnets* (New York: Scribners, 1938), p. 133; Hardin Craig, *Shakespeare* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1931), pp. 98-99.

² C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 128; D. P. Young, *Something of Great Constancy* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), p. 68; Larry S. Champion, *The Evolution of Shakespearean Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 47.

³ M. E. Comtois, "The Hardiness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Theater Journal* (1980), 305-11.

⁴ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Antheneum, 1967), pp. 241-44.

⁵ Northrup Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," *English Institute Essays*, 1948 (New York, 1949), pp. 60-62.

⁶ Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in *Comedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 119-31.

⁷ Bergson, pp. 123-27.

⁸ M. E. Comtois, "Oberon's Plot of Intrigue," *Selected papers from the West Virginia Shakespeare & Renaissance Assoc.*, VIII (Spring 1983), p. 68.

⁹ Bergson, pp. 121-23.

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963).

¹¹ Bergson, p. 123.

¹² Enid Welsford, *The Court Masque* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1927), p. 331.

¹³ Welsford, p. 332.

¹⁴ Barber, p. 129.

¹⁵ The final call in a typical square dance figure.

¹⁶ M. E. Comtois, "The Making of Farce Out of Fancy at the Center of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *On Stage Studies*, 5 (June 1981), pp. 33-44.

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A Midsummer Night's Dream by Peter Cash English Association Shakespeare Bookmarks No. 7 English Association Shakespeare Bookmarks Number 7 A Midsummer Night's Dream (1596) by Peter Cash SCOPE OF TOPIC Few of Shakespeare's plays are better known and more popular than A Midsummer Night's Dream. This Bookmark is a narrative account of its nine scenes which seeks to highlight the reasons for this popularity, not least Shakespeare's craftsmanship. Lovers, so the inter-related scenes argue, gild each other's images, seeing in their beloved ones qualities which are not there and describing them in over-excited language. Thus Twelfth Night exhibits in its action one of the fundamental motifs of comedy: the education of a man or woman. A Midsummer Night's Dream (original title). PG-13 | 1h 56min | Comedy, Fantasy, Romance | 14 May 1999 (USA). Lovers' lives are complicated by city law, feuding faerie royalty, and love. The lovers are likewise delightful with great, fun-packed performances by Christian Bale's Demetrius and Dominic West's Lysander in complete tune with Anna Fiel's Hermia and Calista Flockhart's Helena. Even David Strathairn's Theseus and Sophie Marceau's Hippolyta are wonderful. The story is moved from Athens Greece to Athens, Italy, at the turn of the 19th century with the lovers escaping on bicycles. Stanley Tucci's confrontation with the bike is a delight. This is a wonderful film with some new twists that depart from but do not detract from the Bard.