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## **Within Midsummer Nights: Dichotomies in the Collective Dream**

*Cheryl New*

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Generations of readers have recognized William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a light-hearted comedy that delights and engages. Its subject appears straight-forward and winningly superficial: love—love that conquers all—and how it affects the lives of four Athenian youths. But if we are to look to the title to receive some direction, we would notice a succession of nouns: *summer*, *night*, and *dream*. What do these things mean? Each of them has an opposite, an archetypal antithesis that rules one aspect of the play. These pairs, as well as the pairs of lovers themselves, enforce an extended series of dichotomies on the play which in turn veil wonderlands of meaning and symbolic significance. The unconscious interpretation of these meanings echoes the nature of dreams—that which we recall as a perpetual memory but never experience.

To place *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appropriately in its context, we must first understand the rites of summer that extended from the beginning of warm weather in May throughout the season. Two main festivals mark this broader period of celebration: May Day, the first of May, and Midsummer, the summer solstice. "On May Day, the return of spring was celebrated with a collective return to the woods at daybreak to gather branches of sycamore and hawthorn to trim doorways, church, and street, and to collect the Maydew believed to confer eternal beauty" (Paster and Howard 92), much like the juices of Cupid's flower which render the spurned Helena into "fair Helen" (4.1.159). Couples that went into the woods to gather such boughs might easily linger there. The forest, with its shade and the absence of civilization, offers sanctuary to moral abandon, a keener awareness of nature and heightened fanaticism. And so it comes as no surprise to Theseus to see Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Lysander lying on the ground in slumber: "No doubt they rose up early to observe / The rite of May" (4.1.131-32). But in Shakespeare's day, the rites of May as well as those of Midsummer were close-

ly related, indeed, almost indistinguishable. They had already come to be associated one with the other, despite their differences. “If May Day celebrated the natural world and the light of day, Midsummer’s Eve celebrated the supernatural and the night. Midsummer’s Eve was a time of fantasy, magic, and heat-driven madness” (Paster and Howard 92) that tended ultimately toward erotic love and fertility. Thus, the play is composed of the elements of both night and day and all they represent. The shortest night of the year, Midsummer, yet allowed enough time for all sorts of mystic trickery. And it is when the sun does not seem to move (solstice being derived from the Latin word for still) that insanity increases and love, the foremost lunacy, has full play. Fairies are most prevalent during this sultry season. “The summer still doth tend upon my state” (3.1.149), declares Titania, queen of the fairy-world. Though ambiguously “still,” summer remains a time of transfiguration: of lovers’ souls, of Bottom’s head, and of beliefs and preconceptions concerning the authenticity of dreams.

With summer as one of the main components of the setting for the play, the other falls to the realm of nighttime. “Dark night, that from the eye his function takes” (3.2.177), takes reason also from the head. One cannot see clearly nor “see” with the mind’s eye. The only luster offered to the night—that of the moon—is pale in comparison with the sun’s far-reaching, penetrative light. But even the moon’s glistening does more to obscure than illuminate. Its sheen produces a “glimmering night” (2.1.77) that, with its pallid twinkling, its inconsistency of light, transfigures staid reality, lending it something of the spiritual and ethereal. “The connection between the moon (that magic planet), witchery, fancy, fantasy, and love is here made explicit” (Miller 257); the moon’s dull yet potent gleam is the link between them. Continually waxing and waning, the moon presents the same transformations that witchery (magic), fancy (imagination), fantasy, and love are all capable of, but because it oversees the night, it implies that such things—witchery and fancy among them—are secret things, things perhaps that fairies do or cause when we do not see. Since love cannot be seen (like Cupid’s own concealment from Psyche) and incantations must not be spied upon, the fairies’ doings must also remain somewhat furtive, acted out under cover of darkness. Oberon admits that he and Puck must “effect this business yet ere day” (3.2.395). The hours between dusk and dawn are the time for effecting the reversals that the lovers undergo. Supernatural or otherwise *unnatural* forces use the darkness

to shield them and the half-light to empower them.

But the moon has meaning outside of the deceptive light it produces. It has long been associated with the power of the goddess, conjuring up images of not only darkness and night but also mystery and death, along with the particularly feminine associations with water, cycles, and fertility. “The moon, as the celestial body governing not only the tides, but all other waters, and believed to be instrumental in the formation of dew, must be present in order to affect Midsummer waters and bring forth the dew” (Vlasopolos 24), and the dew must be present to invoke the supernatural. Oberon calls it “this field dew consecrate” (5.1.410). Titania, in turn, labels the moon “the governess of floods” (2.1.103). Clearly, the waters of the world, whether bent upon destruction or miracles, hold sway in human fate, and the moon is their sovereign. Its presence is imperative and therefore glitters throughout the play, mentioned a full forty-five times, excluding stage directions, in one of its many forms: moon, moonlight, moonbeams, or moonshine. Within the first few opening lines, Theseus complains, “O, methinks, how slow / This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires, / Like to a step-dame or a dowager” (1.1.3-5). Theseus, the most reasonable and, we might say, the most *male* of the characters, immediately connects the moon with age, with perhaps the most unpleasant aspect of the triple goddess who represents, by turn, maiden (Diana), consort (Venus), and crone (Hecate). Hippolyta in contrast looks to the new moon, likening it to “a silver bow / New-bent in heaven” (1.1.9-10). The reference unmistakably suggests Artemis, or the Roman goddess Diana, whose emblem is the crescent moon. It is also interesting to note that Theseus remarks on the four *days* they must wait, and Hippolyta, the four *nights* that will pass quickly in dreams. The Amazonian queen naturally aligns herself with the night and the new moon, and in doing so, with all that the celestial body represents: enchantment, love, fantasy, ambiguity.

The feminine energies that work through the play as an undercurrent to the more readily noticeable male authorities convey, nevertheless, their own sense of power. Theseus, Oberon, and Egeus stolidly give commands, but all goes awry when magic and the night step in:

For 'tis an old saying,  
‘There is a great joying,  
When maids go a Maying,’  
They’ll have a green gown. (qtd. in Paster and Howard 114)

The “green gown” of this early seventeenth-century ballad, grass-stained by hasty lovers, marks the maids new-found sexuality. Not surprisingly, there is an emphasis on the results of “Maying” for the women only. They are the ones who will give birth nine months later. Even Titania, the lofty fairy queen, speaks somewhat nostalgically about this reproductive miracle from which she is excluded: “her womb then rich with my young squire” (2.1.131), she says of her Indian votaress. However, her sympathies still lie with her deceased friend whereas Oberon cannot even understand, it seems, what she describes. He demands the changeling boy as though he could buy the mysteries of birth itself. He disdains the “feminine world rich with all the mysteries of fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth that women can treat with easy familiarity but that can be conveyed to [him] only through imperfect analogies to masculine trade and money-making” (Calderwood 55-56). Similarly, Egeus, the “father [who] should be as a god” (1.1.47) to the child of his own making, tries to restrict the goddess-like power of his daughter by assigning her to a man of his choosing or “to the cold fruitless moon” (1.1.73). Views of sexuality in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, constrained in the convent or loose in the woods, concern the women primarily. Fittingly, the moon, as the symbol of the feminine divine, is pulled back and forth between these two stances, described as “chaste” (2.1.162), yet “look[ing] with a watery eye; / And when she weeps, weeps every little flower, / Lamenting some enforced chastity” (3.1.198-200). The denotation of “enforced” is teasingly indefinite: “the straight-on meaning of ‘enforced chastity’ is ‘chastity forced’. Looked at askance, however, it means just the opposite, ‘chastity compelled’” (Calderwood 61). Such compulsory purity opposes what the summer, the night, and the feminine forces would otherwise bring about. Their time may be limited to a short season and a few hours of darkness, but the darkneses of the womb and the afterlife—to which the goddess as gatekeeper holds the key—continue, in their cycles, regardless of the sun and coming cold weather.

Ultimately, then, the theme of the play, love, is divided into two main belief systems. The night promotes fertility, wanton sexuality, and passion—erotic love. The day inevitably results in conventional marriage, the desire to reproduce safely channeled into orthodox monogamy—companionate love. “‘Love-in-idleness’ may even be transformed into true love if it is, or becomes, reciprocal and if it can flourish in daylight and in an acknowledged relation-

ship with a larger social world” (Summers 17), as in the case of Demetrius to whom Oberon never gives the antidote. However, there appears to be a strong though transitory rebellion against such convention. “The lovers, whose function is that of generation, flee from the constraints of the city into the woods, where they act out the pagan rite of fertility amid darkness, confusion, and the manipulations of those forces which rule vegetative nature” (Vlasopolos 29), namely the fairies, the symbolic figures who cause so much of the night’s mishaps. Nature, the feminine influence, is unrestrained and savage, a “rash wanton” (2.1.63) like Titania, and it is to Nature herself that the lovers naturally turn. Civilization is male-induced order, a systemization that seeks to tame the wild and the inexplicable. Erotic love results from a lack of order; that is why the males of the play, by and large, discount love as invalid. It also brings about rapid and inexplicable change: “Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity” (1.1.232-33). This sudden change, like love itself, cannot of course be explained. “Reason and love keep little company together” (3.1.111), as Bottom points out, an irony in itself because if reason represents the male viewpoint and love the female, then male and female should naturally repel each other—an unlikelihood in any case. Actually, companionate love and erotic love are both necessary ingredients in a marriage. Just like the Maydew that bestows loveliness on those who use it, passionate love may most quickly accomplish such a revolutionary change, but it is companionate love that stays the transformation. Cupid’s (*Eros*) flower may change Demetrius’ mind, but in time, we may believe, even if Demetrius were to be administered Dian’s bud, he would continue happy with his fair and stately wife.

If the light of reason opposes love’s idle vagaries, how much more so does it resent those of the imagination, a faculty lodged in the mind where logic would otherwise hold sway. The embodiment of imagination run amuck, the fairy world, is intentionally ephemeral and vague. The fairies’ presence on the stage is an overt reality that contrasts with the condition of faith they naturally imply. Puck’s practical jokes can all be explained away as chance or coincidence by the unbelieving or the too rational. Theseus numbers among these last:

I never may believe  
These antic fables, nor these fairy toys.  
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends. (5.1.2-6)

Here, he bluntly calls cool reason (in the midst of summer's heat) to his aid to negate the vision, the dream that cannot be easily explained. He discards the entire night and all the change that took place as mere frivolity. Imagination, as an agency of change (like love, like the fairies), encourages mutability. This disfigurement is what Theseus will not allow. He understands only Egeus's clear-cut stance concerning Hermia. When Egeus speaks of disfigurement, he refers not to "change" but to complete annihilation: "to leave the figure or disfigure [obliterate] it" (1.1.51). Theseus, likewise, cannot tolerate the contradiction in Hermia's recollection of her shared dream: "everything seems double" (4.1.184). *One* version is right. The one disproves the other. What he fails to understand is that a "distinctive feature of the *Dream* . . . is the use of polarities held in balance, unresolved opposites" (Young 173). Both can have their own unique level of truth. But Theseus is all for resolution, and polarities, to him, have no business within the same context of a dreamlike memory, let alone verified reality. Hippolyta, however, evidently places some value in the coincidence that so many share such a singular memory, standing against male opposition by recognizing that transcendent "something of great constancy" (5.1.26). But for Theseus, imagination will always be too versatile, too uncommitted to one truth. Such multiple realities imply the pantheism of pagan cultures, and they can have no place in the rational, Christian day that espouses monogamy, monotheism, and an absence of the fantastic.

How can these antitheses agree? They are like "hot ice and wondrous strange snow. / How shall we find the concord of this discord?" (5.1.59-60). And discord does occur each time the two forces clash. When the powers of the feminine and the masculine refuse to exist in harmony, or when Titania refuses the bed of Oberon, havoc is unloosed. Much like the yin yang of Taoism, the converse properties must be in balance or nature feels the effects. Thus, the bad weather of Midsummer is caused by the marital strife of the fairy king and queen. Titania is the first to confess it: a "progeny of evils comes / From our debate, from our dissensions" (2.1.115-16). Moreover, their identities are called into question. "Am I not thy lord?" (2.1.63), Oberon demands. "Then I must be thy lady" (2.1.64), Titania admits. Their very sense of self lies in their relation to one another. Similarly, "the word 'masculinity'

depends for its meaning upon its opposition to the word 'femininity'; 'femininity' is the other of 'masculinity', that which it excludes, but also that against which it defines its boundaries and without which it therefore cannot exist" (Hackett 45-46). The parallels of masculine and feminine attributes extend to include the antitheses that line up under their lead. Lunacy has no definition without reason. How can the day be bright without the contrast of darkness? To end the disarray, the two must submit to each other. One cannot eradicate the other without committing suicide in the process. The female is here presented as the passive one who relinquishes control (specifically, of the changeling boy), but the male depends just as much on the female: "Jack shall have Jill; / Nought shall go ill; / The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well" (3.2.461-63). The coupling is the only means of restoring peace. This coupling, acted out in the triple-marriage at the end, satisfies the laws of nature. "[T]he rose distilled" (1.1.76) finds happiness because it is composed of both parts: the female flower as a sexual symbol gone through the process of distillation, purification, a reordering imposed by men. But then, how lovely is the scent. Only when extremes coalesce can genesis occur.

Though the rites of Midsummer stem from pagan beliefs, Christianity reclaimed them, using the feast of St. John as the Church's condoned summer celebration. Shakespeare highlights this paradox: the inevitable result of opposites is that they must merge. If the one is unbending, the other must not capitulate but adapt: "the female ivy so / Enrings the barky fingers of the elm" (4.1.36-37). Though she twists, curves, and conforms to the rigidity of the masculine tree, she encircles it, too, and swathes it with her own being. Reason is inflexible, but the night, the forest, and the dream are always "yielding" (5.1.427). And they are both essential. "The closing mood of stability and order is thus built on somewhat unstable foundations" (Hackett 43); the unstable foundations are rooted in the night, in dreams, in fairy magic, and in passionate love but they serve nevertheless as a platform for what is acknowledged during the day. In this dichotomy, the steeple is not any prouder than the base. As with any binary extremes that seek to occupy the same metaphysical—or literal—space, a continued oscillation governs the pair. One, at any given moment, must be better, higher, stronger than the other. Recall the opposite electrical charges in physics, dissonance and harmony in music, or even genius and idiocy in psychology. But the one initially labeled superior may be, at times, inferior, too, and if the pairs fluctuate at a quicker rate, the



differences are less distinguishable. The opening and closing, for example, of a door, intensified to the speed of light creates an image that is neither shut nor ajar but a blur of indeterminate status: a struggle between the opposites and yet a sublime fusion of the two. Diana's flower, *artemisia vulgaris*, erases the effects of the original love-juice, for "Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower / Hath such force and blessed power" (4.1.72-73), but this transitory power does not subvert the masculine forces of the play. After all, the night will ultimately recede to day. "The Christian light does not dispel, but rather confirms, in terms of a higher reality, the accomplishments of the pagan night" (Vlasopolos 28); marriage must enclose the generative frenzy within tender but requisite bounds.

That is not to say that there will not be ongoing misinterpretations. Thus, Bottom, the everyman, the blunt, unimaginative workman, encounters Titania, the epitome of royal enigmatic femininity—and entirely misunderstands. Comedy ensues. "In the comic encounter, extremes meet and coexist: imagination and love and magic at their most entrancing in Titania, philistine realism at its most appealingly vulgar in Bottom" (Miller 263); it is no accident that love, magic, and imagination are ascribed to the character who is both woman and fairy and realism, to the human male. The human does not inhabit the fairy kingdom; the male is not privy to secrets of the feminine divine. Thus, Bottom perceives the fairies in the most literal sense, focusing upon their names: "Cobweb" to him evokes an actual cobweb, not lightness, airiness, or gossamer translucence. The fairies are not so banal. To see them in such a way, one must "run roughshod over the delicate distinctions which have characterized the mode of existence of these elusive beings" (Miller 266), reducing them to their names or to the level of "fairy toys" (5.1.3). We should not follow Bottom's error in trying to make sense of the senseless and the irrational—irrational because it does not coincide with our terms of rationality. Even Bottom realizes his own incompetence against the voiceless vision he half-remembers: "Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream" (4.2.198). The dream is both what he experiences that night and what embodies the substance of the world of night. Such an essence cannot be literalized. Words disdain wordless mystery just as reason forsakes the bed of love. Neither can the night make sense in the day nor the moon disturb "Her brother's noontide with th' Antipodes" (3.2.55).

Since the Midsummer “madness” cannot be plainly worded, stylistic comparisons seek to achieve in their implicit meaning what explicit speech fails to capture. Similes serve to open the dialogue between Theseus and Hippolyta and from there on we cannot be sure whether or not the play itself is one large metaphor. The fairies, volatile creatures, appear as metonyms themselves for the changes and other agencies of change that permeate *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Puck, for example, can appear “in likeness of a filly foal; / And . . . In very likeness of a roasted crab” (2.1.46-48). Simile and metaphor are all one to him. Whether he is *like* something or *is* that thing makes no difference: “Sometimes a horse I'll be, sometimes a hound, / A hog, a headless bear, sometimes a fire . . . Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire” (3.1.103-06). Like words, the fairies' presence belies their absence. When they are invisible on stage, they are yet before our eyes. We need words to be present most when the object or thing they name is absent. Metaphors, in turn, use what is not there to describe what is. It compares two things of no relation and relates them as closely as to say the one is the other, a falsehood rendered factual by means of rhetoric. “These visibly invisible fairies lie like metaphors, and tell the truth like metaphors” (Calderwood 111) in that they contradict the laws of nature but only to point to higher truths in nature. As symbols, they personify everything that the night seeks to make real. They succeed better than the play's other comparisons. When Lysander laments the trials of true love, he calls such love on earth “momentary as a sound, / Swift as a shadow, short as any dream” (1.1.143-44), three similes which are as ambiguous as the definition of true love. Not all sounds, shadows, and dreams are brief. In a similar vein, Demetrius later likens the happenings of the night to “far-off mountains turnèd clouds” (4.1.187), a comparison as nonsensical as it is poetic. We may well do the same: the props on the stage, as solid as Snout's wall, might easily recede into the background, evaporate like clouds.

The fairies, in their unique status, may follow their whims much more freely than the human characters. Just as they move at unattainable speeds while circling the earth, so can they symbolize things too inscrutable for symbols. They may function as signs, but what they signify they never say. These nighttime tricksters allude to “the metamorphic agency of love personified, pansy-juice and all” (Miller 256), and not only love but all that requires faith. They are not illusions but rather emblems of things illusory. However, when the players try their own metaphor—as in the case of moonshine—they pass

over all that is elusive about moonlight. They reduce the moon's opalescent allure to a tailor who "must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine" (3.1.55-57). Although Quince meant to say "figure" in lieu of "disfigure," his error is prophetic. Robin Starveling does indeed "disfigure" moonshine; he quite destroys it. Theseus is willing to let the actors play out their art as they will—the play, both what it is and what it depicts, is all a farce to him anyway, but Hippolyta responds with some incredulity. She recognizes that "[t]o embody fancy and to personate moonshine are like trying to paint a simile, to map out or spell out what cannot be pictured as such; and a figure cannot be figured in this sense without becoming literalized—or lost" (Marshall 546). Such beauty must be handled gently, not with clumsy metaphors or a poorly-made costume. Indeed Shakespeare (through Theseus) almost hints that such fragile grace is safest in a poet's hands:

And as imagination bodies forth  
The form of things unknown  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name. (5.1.14-17)

Imagination is generative. It can create something "unknown" (and possibly unknowable) from nothing, and it falls to the poet to name and clarify these new-made somethings. The poet localizes what would otherwise be otherworldly. Perhaps this is what Theseus resents most: that the fools he denounces do not keep silent. The poet struggles for words to give voice to the abstract and the ideal, lovers search futilely for the vocabulary to embody their passion, and the lunatic speaks with his own language. These three have committed one same crime: "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, / Are of imagination all compact" (5.1.7-8). They are the believers of fairies. Theseus here recites "a formulary that felicitously merges both felicitous and sinister connotations in the concept of the creative" (Burke 302); the vocalized creativity of poetry is what primarily threatens the masculine principles that Theseus would uphold. A disfigurement of moonshine is permissible, but a genuine translation of the dream strengthens the "airy nothing" until it has a body of its own, one stout enough to walk about and make converts to this lunacy.

The emphasis on the shortcomings of language calls attention to the writing of the play and the fact that it is a fabrication. The miniature play that

closes the revels of the three couples also accentuates the play that contains it, undermining the suspension of disbelief that would otherwise lend the play its authenticity. Theseus notes that the workmen turned actors “are but shadows” (5.1.210), and Puck refers collectively to himself and all the players as “we shadows” (5.1.418). The fairies, too, are shadows, for Oberon is the “king of shadows” (3.2.347). Shadows imply that they faintly resemble something real, but whatever that is, it is left out of the play, and all that remains, in a realm of darkness, is shadows slightly darker. “Players and fairies are both shadows, are indeed shadows of one another, the players being fairies, the fairies players” (Calderwood 153); this puzzle results in shadows of shadows, even further removed from reality. To try to define these shadows is impossible. In fact, if we are to view them as products of “the poet’s pen” (5.1.14), they may very well be that bodied “airy nothing” (5.1.15). Then why a play on nothing? It is because the “shaping fantasies” (5.1.5), while nothing corporeal in themselves, can give shape to the vast nuances the play touches upon. Their lack of definition and their capacity for creation gives them limitless power, and so “the theater, by means of its artificiality, accomplishes a transformation that engenders in its audience a clarification . . . of the real” (Oatley 19-20). We find ourselves like Bottom, with a fairy queen (who is not real, a shadow of a shadow herself), desiring to “purge [our] mortal grossness” (3.1.154). We may dismiss the play as Theseus does the fairies, as sights real only to madmen, lovers, and poets. But in a play on Midsummer madness and love, written by a poet, we would do well to examine our own surroundings, to see if we might find shadows there as well. “All the conventional distinctions between fact and fantasy, shadow and substance, dreaming and waking, and art and nature are broken down here” (Young 122), for if we derive substance from shadow, then the dichotomy is no longer clear—likewise if we are awake and coherent throughout the *Dream*. The life of the stage connects too easily with life outside of the stage and thus blurs the lines between the two.

Even more perplexing than the theater’s unreality is the unreality of dreams, and Shakespeare layers dreams within dreams, so that their ends and beginnings become nearly indistinguishable. Hermia dreams that a snake eats her heart away. She wakes to find herself in another dream—Lysander not in love with her. When that nightmare ends, she cannot be sure if she is awake. As Demetrius marvels, “It seems to me / That yet we sleep, we dream”

(4.1.192-93). Like the “fruitless moon” (1.1.73) which, being chaste, produces nothing, so Oberon promises “all this derision / Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision” (3.2.371), knowing full well that it will only seem fruitless but will in truth be fruitful. It is during these dreams that the magic is performed and that the lovers experience the jealousies typical of love. The term *dream* “proliferates to include the literal dreams—of desire or fear, reconciliations or delusion—of someone asleep; the waking imagination’s individual dreams of loss or desire or fulfillment; the dreams of ‘shadows’ of poetic or dramatic creations presented on the stage or recollected in the mind; and the collective dream of human life” (Summers 3), so the dream is within the fancy within the play within the universally shared dream within the collective unconscious. Like Oberon’s earlier promise, Puck also states—this time to us—that “this weak and idle theme [is] / No more yielding but a dream” (5.1.422-23), knowing himself that it is the stuff of dreams that creates (like the poet’s pen) and yields more than one might expect. As the audience, we have all dreamed the same dream and the mythic connotations evident in the play have stirred in our collective memory something that is like a dream half-remembered, half-forgotten. “We emerge back into our lives wondering if the fairies were ‘real’; that is, we are puzzled by the relationship of these artistic symbols to the tangible concreteness of our daily existence” (Bevington 44), and by our relationships now to each other. Have we all dreamed the same dream? Like the four lovers who are dazed at first and only slowly recall their mutual presence, we, too, emerge marveling in our own souls and must translate the dream to see how closely it is shared amongst us, not only the dream of the play but of the meanings they provoke.

“The magic of the play,” Marshall tells us, “is that separate minds appear to be transfigured together; dreams (or what seem like dreams) appear to be shared” (567). In the same way, this unity extends to include the many opposites continually evoked throughout the play. The opposites do not negate each other. Rather, a synthesis of the dual extremes gives way to creation. Ultimately, the women, representative of fertility and transformation, unite with their men, choosing monogamy and stability. But the union does not represent a capitulation of the feminine to the masculine. It is couched in the very feminine element it claims to subdue; although Theseus seems to have his way, he himself has been penned by one of the poets he deplors. Thus, even this dichotomy, built of strong, male, parallel lines, breaks down. Things

like day and night, reality and dream, reason and love *do* keep company together. That is the magic of summer, of the night, and of dreams. The strict binary system—what we put such great stock in—falls apart. The void between the antitheses becomes charged with meaning and at the same time lessens, disappearing into concentric circles of shadows made of shadows and dreams within dreams. The dream is perhaps most literally Hermia's dream. It is also Oberon's and Puck's dream (laced with love-juice) for the romances of Titania, Bottom, Demetrius, and Lysander. It is most explicitly Shakespeare's written *Dream*. But in the outermost, final ring, we recognize the mythic plane on which all humans share a universal reverie comprising the symbols and archetypes of the myth from which springs our first inborn connection with this charming, summer-night dream.

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