University of Alberta

THE SPIRIT IN IMAGINATION

A Midsummer Night's Dream

by

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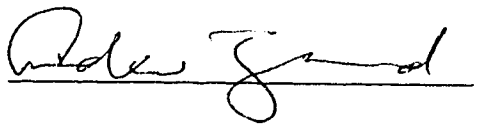
30 SEPTEMBER 1996 

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *The Spirit in Imagination: A Midsummer Night's Dream* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

The Spirit in Imagination: A Midsummer Night's Dream analyzes how Shakespeare's play uses the Elizabethan audience's knowledge of biblical texts in order to broaden the scope of the theatrical experience. References to *1 Corinthians* 2 create a subtle likening between St. Paul's vision of the spirit and Shakespeare's vision of the audience's imaginative participation in the theatrical event.

The thesis contains research on other works that consider the topic of Shakespeare's biblical connections; analyses of the Elizabethans' predisposition to recognizing biblical allusions in plays; a comparison of St. Paul's vision of spirit to contemporary attitudes regarding the imagination; and a dramaturgical reading of the play, bearing in mind these perspectives. Through a dynamic connection with its audience, and the evocation of St. Paul, the play takes the notion of the poetic imagination as evidence of divine inspiration and extends it to include the audience's imaginative participation.

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The secret of theatrical success is this: you must set a decoy at the door so that part of your audience can amuse themselves there while the rest are inside. Shakespeare, Molière, and the profound Chaplin know this well.

— *Jean Cocteau*

— 1 —

PAUL AND *DREAM*

> The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was.
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, IV. i. 208-211)[1]

Bottom awakens after his night in the forest, and utters this ridiculous phrase as he searches for a way to describe what he believes he has dreamt. The humour of the line lies in his confused mixing of senses and sense faculties, but it is heightened for the auditor by a familiarity with what the line refers to. Bottom is, in fact, misquoting a verse from the Bible:

> ...The things which eye hath not seen, neither ear hath heard, neither came into man's heart, are, which God hath prepared for them that love him.
> (*1 Corinthians* 2:9)[2]

On the surface, Bottom's misquotation is just more buffoonery from a character from whom the audience has been led to expect buffoonery. With no knowledge

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[1]All quotations from the play are from Alfred Harbage, gen. ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (New York: Viking P, 1986).

[2] All biblical quotations, except where noted, are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1969). I have taken the liberty of modernizing some spellings and expanding abbreviations. My apologies to any who may take offence at this.

of scripture, one audience member might find amusement in the image of a person trying to see through ears and hear through eyes. Another, recognizing the origin of the phrase, laughs also at the parody implied by the author. To yet another, though, there may be something else contained in the phrase that is not altogether funny—something that reaches across or through the humour for a truth in the situation and mood that is not readily identifiable. Is this moment a crack in the surface of the play, exposing something foundational running underneath? Or, with reference to Cocteau's phraseology, is it a moment in the theatre when the decoy at the door—say, a clown—gives a small gesture in the middle of his juggling act to invite those interested (and aware of his tricks) inside?

I ask these questions for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that many others have been moved to wonder at the line's implications. The result has been a wealth of answers—some indifferent, some reactionary, and some nearly rapturous in the recognition of its origin and connotations. But there are always loose ends left dangling. In Bottom's line I believe there is a thematic interpretation of the play that is related to its time and to its self-conciousness as a play, and this is the idea I have chosen to explore. In *Early Shakespeare*, Frank Kermode says that "unless we see that these mature comedies are thematically serious we shall never get them right."[3] I suppose I take Kermode at his word when I state my belief in the core of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as having been profound to its first audiences.

But how important can this reference be? Though not the only biblical allusion or religious reference in the play, it is the only one that is so identifiable. What meaning could be implied by it, beyond its immediate comic effect? My line

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[3]Frank Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," *Early Shakespeare*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 3 (London: Edward Arnold, 1961) 220.

of inquiry will follow the idea that the context of the line within the play, and the play within the context of Renaissance England, together suggest a particular thematic interpretation of the play on the part of members of the audience for which it was first performed. To me, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears to relate to, and interrelate with, ideas and philosophy contained within Paul's Epistles in general, and within *1 Corinthians* specifically. The play is by no means a conventional morality piece (though moral questions do form a part of its thematic structure); but rather it goes beyond its own ethical questions to bring mystical aspects of life to the fore. Looked at from the perspective of its relation to spiritual and cultural life in Elizabethan England, the physical performance of the play may even be a demonstration of the theme of the existence of profound meaning beyond the realm of tangible experience. Was Shakespeare trying to get at something when he incorporated a near-direct biblical quotation? What are the issues to which the quotation and the play both point? How might contemporary auditors have reacted to the line within the context of the performed play?—and does the play itself hold clues to this?

On the surface, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to ignore Christianity altogether, drawing from sources as diverse as Greek mythology, the Roman Apulius' *Golden Ass*, and traditional English folklore. One justification for this study, however, is that late sixteenth-century England was a time and place where the *ethos* was strongly religious. Though confusion and controversy abounded as to the methods of religious observance, and as to the political power of the Church in relation to the State, religion still formed the roots of daily lives. Renaissance England was a religious culture—and there is no question of degree on this point. The culture was not simply one "whose members generally were

religious."[4] Deborah Shuger speaks for many scholars[5] when she states that "religion during this period supplies the primary language of analysis," and that "it is the cultural matrix of virtually every topic."[6] Every subject eventually needed to be considered in relation to God and the soul. How does *A Midsummer Night's Dream* fit into, or emerge from, such a culture? Undoubtedly (though this is impossible to prove) it was criticised by many Puritans for its pagan sources. But if one looks carefully, and in light of Renaissance culture, clues can be found to the essentially religious heart of the play. Defining the "religion" demonstrated there in terms of this or that sect is impossible, however, for the very nature of the play is to mystify its own spiritual underpinnings. On the other hand, I believe there is some spiritual message in the function of the *performance* of the play. There are numerous examples of dramatic literature from the period that use biblical allusions and references,[7] but most affect and are effective on a literary or textual level—a particular allusion is made, whether allegorically or not, and the significance of that allusion can be gleaned by the reader or auditor regardless of the medium in which it is conveyed.

One example comes from *Hamlet*, as Claudius struggles with his conscience in the chapel:

> What if this cursèd hand
> Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
> Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
> To wash it white as snow? (III,iii, 43-46)

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[4] Deborah Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkley: U of California P, 1990) 7.
[5] A representative sampling includes Roy Battenhouse, James C. Bryant, Northrup Frye, R. Chris Hassel, Jr., and E. M. W. Tillyard.
[6] Shuger 7.
[7] Three of these, *Dr. Faustus*, *Endimion*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, are discussed in the next chapter. For a comprehensive study on the topic, see Murray Roston, *Biblical Drama in England* (Evanston: Northwestern U P, 1968).

Claudius is dealing here with matters of heaven and hell, and his very struggle is more than evocative of biblical issues. Shakespeare is, in fact, making Claudius refer directly to a passage from *Isaiah*, in which God counsels the Jews. Note particularly what Claudius omits from his reference:

> And when you shall stretch out your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; and though ye make many prayers, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood.
>
> Wash you, make you clean; take away the evil of your works from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.
>
> Learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless and defend the widow.
>
> Come now, and let us reason together, sayeth the Lord; though your sins were as crimson, they shall be made white as snow.... (1. 15—18)

Claudius' final inability to repent, and the irony of the scene as Hamlet (the "fatherless") looks on and makes his own decision, is magnified by a knowledge of where Claudius' words originate. He does end up, in fact, judging the fatherless and defending the widow, but obviously not in the spirit intended by Isaiah. While there is much in this scene to examine with regard to its biblical reference, the point here is that this particular reference is textual, making no direct comment upon the theatrical setting.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the other hand, the recognition of biblical allusions does affect the immediate performance dynamic existing between the play and its Elizabethan audience. Both the play and the biblical context from which Bottom's fouled quotation comes deal with matter concerning perception and the senses. How might the two sources, immediate (performance) and background (literary context), have intertwined in the audience members' eyes? What meaning did the play derive from such a mixture? Given the textual

and performance contexts of the play, what response might Shakespeare have been looking for in his audience?

In order to come to some answer to these questions it is necessary to approach the play (or, more accurately, the play's performance) from two angles—obliquely through the comparative study of a number of literary and cultural influences affecting the first production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its auditors, and directly through the application of this study to the play itself. Though the process of this approach sounds simple enough, there are nevertheless many tasks to accomplish. A subset of questions that will need attention include:

1) What kind of audience or audiences was Shakespeare writing for?

2) What awareness might that audience have had of biblical texts, and of philosophical issues related to them?

3) What message does the passage in question convey in its own context?

4) What is the contemporary context of the use of 'religious' material in drama, and how might that context have influenced Shakespeare?

5) How is biblical material used by Shakespeare in other plays, and how is it used by his contemporaries?

6) Finally: how does the specific reference to the verse from *1 Corinthians* operate within the performed world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? This final question also asks on what levels the references operate, and whether and how they add to or change the meaning of the play.

Before beginning to explore answers to these questions, it is essential to note that Bottom's misquotation has not gone unnoticed by scholars over the years (I can therefore take comfort in the fact that I am not alone in my quest for its meaning). The connection of the reference to St. Paul is rather obvious to most who study the play; however, conflicting opinions abound as to the line's precise

meaning and dramatic importance. To some it is a simple parody; to some it forms the climax for the conflict between *sapientia* and *scientia* as a demonstration of the magnitude of the Pauline dialectic of faith and reason. To still others it is a single strand in an overwhelming web of sources, references, and imagination.

Thomas B. Stroup makes an argument for the biblical sources of Bottom's name and thematic role. In an article entitled "Bottom's Name and his Epiphany"[8] Stroup points out various opinions for the sources of the character's name. The traditional view, encapsulated by E.K. Chambers in the Arden edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, explains *bottom* as "a weaver's term for the reel of thread, which is the bottom or base on which the thread is wound."[9] The general acceptance of this plausible source for Bottom's name, according to Stroup, caused other scholars who recognized the significance of biblical references in the play to miss the most obvious and compelling source, which is the verse immediately following the one garbled by Bottom himself. According to Stroup the Geneva Bible was the one most widely used in Shakespeare's time,[10] though the verses in question are worded similarly in the Great Bible and the Bishop's Bible as:

> ...things which eye hath not sene, and eare hath not
> heard, neither have entred into mans mynde, which
> thinges God hath prepared for them that love hym.
> But God hath opened them unto us by his Sprite[11], for

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[8] Thomas B. Stroup, "Bottom's Name and his Epiphany," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Winter, 1978) 79-82.
[9] Qtd. in Stroup 79, 80.
[10] See also Jan Kott, *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition*, trans. Daniela Miedzyrzecka and Lillian Vallee (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern U P, 1987) 39.
[11] The word "sprite" is interchangeable with "spirit," both in the Bible and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Also, the definition of both "spirit" and "sprite" applies variously to both Christian and Pagan iconography. Thus, the fairies in *Dream* are referred to as "spirits," and the "Spirit" exists throughout the Bible as, for example, the soul of an individual or the spirit of God. What links the two uses of the word, at its baseline, is the quality of ineffibility evoked in each.

> the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the *bottom* of God's secrets... (italics mine).

Stroup is convinced that this passage is the source of Bottom's name, not only because the word lies so close to the misquoted passage, but also because the content of the verses relates thematically to Bottom's character and situation (Stroup also maintains that the thematic reference extends back several verses.) Bottom's epiphany lies in his realization of the bottomlessness of God's secrets: that he has touched upon a reality beyond the everyday upon which he has no power to understand or expound upon. In Bottom's words, "man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had" (IV, i, 207). He has realized that the world in which he lives is only one reality amid several, no more or less real than the others.

In an article entitled "Saint Paul and Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies,"[12] R. Chris Hassel, Jr. summarizes a number of elements that point out the Pauline elements of the comedies, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with the ultimate intent of illuminating Shakespeare's Anglicanism and defending the Christian interpretation of his canon. While the proof of Shakespeare's religious affiliation is not the focus of this thesis, its aims do have to do with the recognition and contextualization of biblical material—Pauline themes in particular. In his argument, Hassel notes several deliberate allusions to St. Paul in Shakespeare's comedies, including that of Bottom to *1 Corinthians*. Another reference to the same epistle occurs in *Twelfth Night*, during Feste's epilogue, in which he "appropriately celebrates the maturation and epiphany of Olivia, Orsino, and Toby Belch with this famous rendering of St. Paul's commonplace on maturing in faith:"[13]

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[12] R. Chris Hassel Jr., "Saint Paul and Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies," *Thought* 46 (Autumn, 1971) 371-388.
[13] Hassel 371.

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> ...
> A foolish thing was but a toy,
> ...
> But when I came to man's estate,
> ...
> 'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate.
> (V, i, 378-84)

This echoes *1 Corinthians* 13:12:

> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

This same echo occurs in *Dream* when Demetrius awakes and, still under the influence of the love-juice, tells Theseus that his vanished love for Hermia "seems to me now/ As the remembrance of an idle gaud/ Which in my childhood I did dote upon" (IV, i, 165-7). Of course, what the character of Demetrius believes is that some rational process of maturation has taken place; but what Shakespeare seems to imply through the allusion is that a correlation exists between love and faith. In these instances, reference to Paul serves Shakespeare to deepen the interpretation of the human experience as represented on the stage, and the biblical allusion acts as a tool to enlarge subtly yet significantly the context of the play's intellectual content. Hassel is adamant that Shakespeare conciously employed this device as a means of connecting with things that were familiar to the audience. One of his most compelling arguments is that:

> The universal patterns Shakespeare employed would have been available, well-known, and comprehensible to almost all of his audience. Christian doctrine cannot be considered accidental, incidental, or obscure when it appears in Renaissance popular drama, just because it might appear so today. The burden of proof should certainly be the skeptics' in this area, not that of the Christian interpreter of the comedy of a conforming Anglican written to a predominantly homogeneous Christian audience. Such doctrines would have been assimilated as cultural assumptions;

> only their challenge would have occasioned notice or comment.[14]

Barry Weller's opinion on the importance of Bottom's quotation, and thus the importance of Shakespeare's use of biblical material, is much less enthusiastic. In an article entitled "Identity Dis-figured: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,"[15] Weller examines the varying levels of reality and identity represented within the performance world of the play. He sees Shakespeare's tack in many of his plays as an expression of his "suspicion of the corporeal — or, more broadly, the visual— and the literal-mindedness into which it betrays those who trust it."[16] He also speaks of the importance of the audience's participation in the event, about how the mind of the audience member is the actual playing field during the performance of the play, and how Shakespeare frequently uses techniques, such as the play-within-a-play, to challenge everyday notions of reality and perception in the audience. Weller's analysis is acute and plausible, but ultimately he ignores the Elizabethan audience member when he discounts on a single level the possible magnitude of Bottom's awakening speech within its context:

> ...whether a particular critic emphasizes the echo of Scripture... or its debasement will probably depend on her or his idealizing drive, how much she or he wants to claim for the visionary content of Bottom's experience. But Shakespeare often associates openness to theatrical experience with religious faith, as when the significantly named Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* prepares us for the theatrical magic of Hermione's resurrection by announcing, "It is requir'd/ You do awake your faith" (V, 3, 94-95). Nevertheless, I would urge you not to become fundamentalists in responding to Shakespearean scripture. "Faith is the substance of

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[14] Hassel 374.
[15] Barry Weller, "Identity Dis-figured: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Kenyon Review* 7 (1985) 66-78.
[16] Weller 68.

> things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:11).[17]

Though, according to Weller, the likening of the imaginative act in the theatre to religious faith is a commonplace in Shakespeare, it is either unimportant or "not seen." His caution is well founded, and exploring scriptural references in Shakespeare (or any other popular dramatist of the period) from a fundamentalist perspective would be myopic. However, choosing to ignore the implications of the original audience's cultural background, including its religion, in relation to the images and themes presented in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is equally near-sighted. It closes off the potential for analysing an entire level of meaning within the play that, at least in part, represents the play's connectedness to the audience for which it was intended. Aside from Weller's caution (duly noted), his article is among the best at analysing Shakespeare's incorporation of the representative act of performance into the meaning of the play as a whole, and this aspect of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* must bear a great deal of importance in any study of the play's relationship, intellectual or spiritual, with its audience.

In describing the levels of reality represented in a staged play, Weller first distinguishes the physical presence of the actor as character, separated in the eyes of the audience from the intellect of the author. According to him, the intellectual recognition of the author's craft, juxtaposed against the suspension of disbelief experienced in the face of the embodied presence of the actor as character, is a part of the situation that allows Aristotle to assert that action creates character. Shakespeare frequently plays upon the distinction between what is and what seems to be, and makes use of the actor's presence to that end. *Titus Andronicus*, for example, pits the eloquence of speech against that of the actor's body. Despite the disfigurements perpetrated on her, Lavinia nevertheless is able to

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[17] Weller 75.

communicate through the actor's body and its expressiveness as interpreted by Titus. Shakespeare's drama is acutely aware of itself as theatrical presentation, relying heavily on the dynamic existing among text and intellectual content, the medium of presentation, and the audience's imaginative participation with the resultant action on the stage. He frequently explores the theatrical transaction by referring to the communicative act in his plays on many levels. The resulting implications are often a questioning of communication itself—a questioning of the ways in which one sees and understands:

> Meaning for Shakespeare was always a transaction. As Rosaline tells Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*, "A jest's prosperity lies in the ear / Of him that hears it, never in the tongue / Of him that makes it" (V, 2, 871), and this situation of reception, and the ambiguities of perception and response, are constantly emphasized when Shakespeare has an opportunity to present a play within a play. The very "impurity" of the theatrical situation, where the words of the authors are dependent for their utterance and, to some extent, their expressive power on the body and voice of another more accurately suggests Shakespeare's views of how meaning is transmitted than the encounter with his words in the privacy of a study.[18]

So, to Weller, meaning is dependent upon the understanding of the communicants, which can be wildly variable in the theatre. This is one point that Shakespeare seems to emphasize when he takes the opportunity to illustrate the theatrical situation. What Weller fails to note is that in *Dream* Shakespeare uses the play-within-a-play device blatantly within the context of a discourse on the nature of existence and perception that, by the time this discourse is in full swing, has already been expanded to include St. Paul.[19] The second chapter of *1 Corinthians* is rife with discussion on the sensual and spiritual properties of

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[18] Weller 74.

[19] This discourse will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this study.

knowledge and communication. How, then, can a direct reference to it be ignored?

Unlike Weller, Helen Peters approaches the situation through an examination of Bottom's character. She finds continuity between Bottom's nocturnal experiences, his awakening revelations, and the final act of the play. She takes his behaviour through the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" as the result of what he has learned in his dream experiences allowing him to fulfil his didactic function. She says that:

> Perhaps the phenomenon of the effect of Bottom's vision can be explained by Saint Augustine's theory that philosophical truth which is gained in a dream is lasting and true even if the particulars of the dream are neither. While this is not to argue that Shakespeare was intimately acquainted with the works of Augustine, the opinion of the theologian on the nature of dreams would surely have been fairly common knowledge. In the Augustinian view, Bottom would retain his knowledge of the transformational quality of love which had been revealed to him in his dream and would, with his earthy common sense and showmanship, be a suitable vehicle for revealing the truth about love's power even if he were unable to discuss the details of the experience itself.[20]

Peters also tries to explain Bottom's garbling of the scriptural material in a way that, it would seem, exonerates Bottom from having garbled it at all. Citing a sermon written by Donne,[21] she asserts that since all the senses are secondary and subject to that of sight, Bottom's quotation (or rather the idea contained within his speech), alludes mainly to having had a *vision.* Even though the rest of the quotation is skewed, the first organ of sense referred to is the dominant one—the

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[20] Helen Peters, "Bottom: Making Sense of Sense and Scripture," *Notes and Queries* (March 1988) 45-47.
[21] On *1 Corinthians* 13.12, in which he considers the supremacy of sight over the other senses.

eye—and therefore it does not matter whether the rest of the senses and their appropriate organs are in order or not:

> ...it does not matter to him that the remainder of the vehicles of sense and their perceptions are mismatched, because all senses are subject to sight, and he has had the ultimate vision in the play.[22]

Jan Kott provides what is perhaps the most comprehensive analytical synthesis of the literary traditions that feed into the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, including those fostered by *1 Corinthians*. He places a great deal of thematic significance on Bottom's awakening speech. In Kott's words, "borrowings and quotations are never neutral. Each quotation enlists its own context to challenge the author's text for better understanding or for mockery."[23] Within the intellectual emanation of classical texts, in which meanings are exchanged, tested and compared,[24] Kott sees Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Apulieus' *The Golden Ass*, and Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* all meeting in Bottom's wakening monologue.

The Carnival tradition, or *serio ludere*[25] (a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin) finds its roots in two different places, one of which lies in such medieval church festivals as Twelfth Night and the Feast of Fools. In basic terms, these festivals involve a turning upside down of accepted social order, with the ultimate goal of illustrating and restoring it. Carnivalesque literature, such as *In Praise of Folly*, draws heavily upon Paul's concept of "the foolishness of wisdom" or of the wisdom of this world being the foolishness of God. Kott identifies three passages from *1 Corinthians* that turn up frequently in carnivalesque literature (as well as in Neoplatonic writings):

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[22] Peters 46.
[23] Kott 32.
[24] Kott 32. Kott characterizes the ongoing commentary on, and intermingling of, literary texts as "the eating and digesting of the classical texts."
[25] "Serious laughter."

> Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1.20)
>
> And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are. (1.28)
>
> If any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. (3.18—19)

The relation of these passages to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is evident in many aspects of the play. They tie in with its themes of the irrationality of love; the different forms of understanding—or, perhaps, the varying degrees of understanding—demonstrated by the diverse cast of characters; and the innocent wisdom of the uneducated Bottom.

Kott also notes that Paul is frequently found in the writings of the Neoplatonists as the teacher of the *supra intellectum* mysteries. What Paul points to in his first letter to the Corinthians is the impossibility of human understanding of the supreme being. Neoplatonists such as Ficino and della Mirandola saw patterns in myths which, through the interchange of signs and meaning, attempted to signify the "One beyond Being, unity in plurality, the God concealed."[26] Cupid, the blind Cupid of Desire (the emblem of Elizabethan brothels) represented to Neoplatonists the earthly bonds of mortality while the celestial Venus, Cupid's heavenly corollary, represented the ascension of the human spirit. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both traditions, the carnival and the Neoplatonic, are represented and coalesce in Bottom's awakening speech.

* * *

[26]Kott 33.

At this point, we have an impression of what others have thought of Bottom's speech, and of the potential for the serious interpretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* If we follow the line of St. Paul further we should find more avenues to explore. Since much of the second chapter of *1 Corinthians* (from which Bottom's misquotation comes) deals with sense and perception, as does the play, we will need to look at something of what the Elizabethans thought on those subjects, especially in relation to the imagination. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* draws from a large number of sources and treats its subjects from many different angles, even in regard to one single element— in this case, its use of biblical phrase and spiritual allusion. The perspective of this study requires that I attempt to see how the play, or rather, the play's performance, can be affected, given that the allusion is taken at face value; and conversely, perhaps what the play and its performance does in an interpretation of the allusion. In order to do this, I must establish first of all the possibility of the original audiences' ability to note the references in the first place. This will involve an examination of influences that could have affected the Elizabethans' willingness and/or ability to grasp biblical allusions in the theatre. Since the references themselves and the allusions to them in the play have to do with perceptual and spiritual issues, affecting my analysis, these same issues must be examined from an Elizabethan perspective. Once these issues have been addressed I will embark on a dramaturgical analysis of the play, bearing them in mind.

— 2 —

AUDIENCE, RELIGION, THEATRE

The production history of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is long and varied, and, as with all the plays of the produced canon, interpretations of this play have been designed to appeal to the myriad tastes of the innumerable audiences that have seen it. What is striking about the play's most recent manifestations is their deepening focus on the possibilities for dark eroticism that Shakespeare presents us with on one level in the amalgamation of his own imagination and his many diverse sources. This focus, of course, tells much about the audience and even society at large today. In an age of communication that is increasingly more imagistic than linguistic, and of visually spectacular representations of love in forms both romantic and sexually grotesque, events occuring in the forest of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can handily be tailored to suit the expectations of an audience aesthetically and morally tuned to the modern media—specifically those of film and television. The representation of the breakdown of order with the aim of highlighting the socially accepted order can still be used to some effect, though the overall *meaning* of this construct in the play has undoubtedly changed significantly.

To a populace whose only media were words both spoken and printed, and an audience whose life was decidedly more homogeneously affected by religion, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* must have been interpreted in a far different manner than it is today. While it is well documented that many of his contemporaries

thought little of the sensibilities of their audiences,[27] by the very inclusion of biblical references we must infer that Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights had some expectation of their audiences' recognition of them and their drawing of meaning from them.[28] What follows is an exploration of issues that may have affected either the audience's predilection to discern biblical material at all, or how the issues might arise over the course of the play.

There are two kinds of influences that might affect the Elizabethan audience's recognition of biblical allusions in any given play. One comes from outside the theatre, one from within. The first has to do with cultural conditioning—what members of the audience might bring along that has been derived from influences aside from those of the theatre itself. The second has to do with what the audience is used to seeing and hearing in other plays,[29] and how these experiences, by extension, might affect its sensitivity to and acceptance of a play's portrayal of borrowed material—in this particular case, material borrowed from the Bible.

To an Elizabethan, the subject of religion was for all intents and purposes unavoidable, and the writing, first performances, and auditing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* took place within a strongly Christian *ethos*. This is not so facile a statement as it seems. The late sixteenth century in England was a time of religious strife. Religio-political factions, most visibly the reactionary Puritans, each had their own cause to pursue.[30] The State and the Church maintained their

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[27] Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audience* (New York: Columbia U P, 1941) 147.
[28] In the words of J.A. Bryant, Jr., "Scripture was familiar to [Shakespeare's] audiences; therefore Shakespeare used Scripture." *Hippolyta's View: Some Christian aspects of Shakespeare's Plays* (Kentucky: U of Kentucky P, 1961) 16.
[29] And, for that matter, other performance modes, such as minstrelry.
[30] On the refusal of Catholics to attend Protestant churches, Robert Persons in 1580 writes that Catholics are faced with "schisms and sects, wherein they hear nothing but wrangling and contradictions in matters of controversies...," and come to "a certain contempt and careless insensibility in these affairs." For a much fuller discussion of these issues see Peter Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973). This quotation appears on page 197, where

official theology, with the Crown passing laws to enforce its obsevance among the populace. Nevertheless, Christianity and the Bible were the platforms upon which all factions stood, regardless of their vocal level or political power. Stating that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* first played within a Christian *ethos*,[31] then, is not a simple statement because it implies that contained within this *ethos* is a basic knowledge and awareness of scripture and religious practices. Theology existed on both personal and political levels, and if these levels shared any commonality, it was through scripture. The most significant aspects of the Reformation in light of the present study are the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, coupled with its addition to the burgeoning body of literature facilitated by the development of the printing press, and the general advance of literacy. These, along with the basic tenet of Protestantism prescribing an emphasis on the individual's personal connection to scripture (as was read or read to him in his own language), made for a growing common knowledge of biblical texts.

If the auditor of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is referred directly to *1 Corinthians* through Bottom's speech, what is there to be evoked? These chapters in the Bible deal with issues of wisdom: "natural" and "revealed" wisdom; the nature of what divine wisdom is; the mediums through which this wisdom is communicated; and the quality of the ability to receive wisdom. Verses 6 to 10 of *1 Corinthians* appear with slight variations in the Tyndale Bible of 1534, the Great Bible of 1539, the Bishop's Bible of 1568, and the Geneva New Testament of 1557 as:

> And we speak wisdom among them that are perfect:
> not the wisdom of this world, neither of the chiefest of

Milward also notes the fray's effect on Shakespeare as making him, in the eyes of many scholars, "the great agnostic and forerunner of the 'national apostasy'."

[31] One in which strict censorship laws governed the representation of scriptural material on the stage.

> this world which come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God, *which is hid* , in a mystery, *to wit* , that secret wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory. Which wisdom none of the heads of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But we preach as it is written,[32] Things which eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, neither have entered into man's mind, which things God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath opened them unto us by his Sprite,[33] for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the bottom of God's secrets. For what man knoweth the things of a man: save the sprite of a man which is with him? even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.[34]

Distinguished here are two kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of the world; and the wisdom of God—or, antithetically, the wisdom *not* of this world—which is hidden "in a mystery." One kind of wisdom, "natural" wisdom, is separate from that which is "opened" or revealed by "the Spirit." To the Elizabethan, this antithesis would not have been unfamiliar in everyday life. These two kinds of wisdom were at the heart of disputes surrounding the required level of education for the Clergy, and Richard Greaves provides a summation of the two sides:

> On the one hand, the gospel, the fountain of knowledge, could not be maintained by ignorance, and those who presumed to rely excessively on the Spirit without concomitant studious endeavor tempted God. On the other hand, the mysteries of the Christian faith could not be ascertained by natural wisdom but only by spiritual revelation. Because of the uncertainty of human knowledge, "the professors thereof oftentimes run amasket [lose their way]: they leese themselves, and wander they know not whither."[35]

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[32] c. f. Isaiah 64:4.
[33] See footnote 9, on page 7 of this study.
[34] From the Geneva New Testament of 1557, qtd. in Stroup 80. In the Geneva version of 1560, "bottom of God's secrets" is replaced by "deep things of God."
[35] Richard L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981) 88. Quoted is John Jewel, an Anglican.

The controversy over wisdom was not isolated, and Greaves notes several disputations in his study. One of these[36] lies in the the scriptural support for the side of non-education. One passage which is especially notable is *Acts* 18: 24-26 in which Appolos, a man "mightie in the Scriptures," agrees to be taught religion by the uneducated tradesman, Aquila. The verses are highlighted in a side note to the Geneva version of 1560:

> This great learned, and eloquent man disdained not to be taught of a poor craftes man.

The idea that divine truth rested in hands other than those of the well-educated clergy was a popular one during the Renaissance, with the belief that the "Spirit" could be revealed to other than "the heads of this world." Indeed, according to Paul, the keepers of worldly wisdom should be the last to look to for the presence of the spirit.

But in the final analysis, neither Anglican nor Puritan theologians denied the need for divine revelation to accompany rationality.[37] The controversy had been sparked by the popular appeal of ministers who were not formally educated in theology and thus shared more with the lives of ordinary people. Churchgoers, disdaining the ministries held by "temporising formalists," preferred instead the plain language of someone who would "not quote the Fathers (and good reason, for his horse never eate a bottle of hay in eyther of the universities)."[38] The ministers of this ilk would likely have aspired to Paul's description of himself in *1 Corinthians* 2:1:

> And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with the excellency of words, or of wisdom, showing unto you the testimony of God.

And then in verse 4:

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[36]Greaves 90.
[37]Greaves 89.
[38]Greaves 87.

> Neither stood my word, & my preaching in the
> enticing speach of mans wisdom, but in plain evidence
> of the Spirit and of power....

Paul suggests himself and his behaviour as the kind of medium through which the power of the mysteries of God can be sensed—a person who can *demonstrate* the spirit with minimal erudition. Evidence shows that a large number of people in Elizabethan England preferred the scriptures to be extolled in the language of demonstration.

Further, this language of demonstration can take the form of foolishness, and the roles of fool and preacher are frequently identified with each other by St. Paul, as in *1 Corinthians* 1.27 (12 verses away from Bottom's quotation). At this point, St. Paul is justifying his preaching in the face of its being ridiculed by the "wise" rulers of the world:

> But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to
> confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak
> things of the world, to confound the mighty things.

From this aspect of *1 Corinthians* sprang the medieval Feast of Fools, which arguably formed a crucial element in the development of secular comedy during the Renaissance.[39] It is also responsible for the prior appearance of the *serio ludere* (serious laughter) in works such as Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and Apuleius' *Golden Ass.* During the Renaissance, the wisdom of foolishness was considered a commonplace.[40] Therefore, the evocation of St. Paul by the character of Bottom, both fool and unlearned craftsman, does not constitute a contradiction. Shakespeare's medium and his message, the foolish craftsman attempting to plumb the depths of existence, are perfectly synchronized within the world of the play and within the world of performance before an audience. An audience

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[39] See Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the Theater*, Fifth Edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987) 114. See also E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford U P, 1903).
[40] Hassel 380.

inclined to be suspicious of moralists and sympathetic towards a common man who has obviously had a revelatory experience would naturally sympathize with the character of Bottom, particularly as he is self-reflexively (and unselfconciously) referring to a segment of the Bible that speaks of his own situation.

Judging so far from the "hidden" content of the play, the controversy among the clergy, and the preference of the people for less educated and erudite ministers, the way seems to be opening up for Shakespeare having included his scriptural references for a purpose. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though a comedy, overtly examines themes of illusion and reality and includes the audience in its discourse in much the same manner as do Shakespeare's later plays (e.g. *Hamlet*). Is it so unusual, then, that as in his later plays, he relates thematic material from the Bible to the discourse on the imagination?

All this seems rather obscure; the meanings I am gleaning from what appears to be a fairly straightforward comedy are quite well hidden within the fabric of the play. Was anybody in Shakespeare's time interested in working that hard to find meanings that were hidden in a play? If duality and ambiguity of meanings are hidden within plays, could the popular audience have been literate and sophisticated enough to catch them? Alfred Harbage in *Shakespeare's Audience* seems to think so, concluding that "it would be impossible to prove that more than a fraction even of the groundlings in Shakespeare's audience had no passport to books," and that "of course, our instincts may still instruct us that no one out of a London shop could possibly have appreciated *Hamlet*—just as no one out of a Stratford shop could possibly have appreciated it."[41] Harbage champions the popular audience of London's public theatres, and it is certain that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was played before those audiences. That it was written

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[41] Harbage 147, 157.

first for a specific occasion and a specific audience is also generally accepted, and this audience was sure to have been highly literate. D. F. Mackenzie's view of the play's intellectual potential in its original performance takes this into account:

> If we think of the original audience, courtly and cultured and demanding in its art the intellectual stimulus of symbolic meaning, we must look upon the play as something more than a slight *divertissement*, interesting mainly for its charm and innocent humour on the foibles of lovers.[42]

Indeed, it is certain that at least part of the court audience was acquainted with the literature of the earlier Italian Renaissance, including the writings of the Neo-Platonists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, who were fond of burying allusions to divine mysteries in their writings.[43] A quotation from Plotinus provides a sense of what Pico strove for, and also gives some insight into the nature of the biblical references in *Dream* and the circular nature of St. Paul's poetry:

> He that would speak exactly must not name it [the ultimate One] by this name or by that; we can but circle, as it were, about its circumference, seeking to interpret in speech our experience of it, now shooting near the mark, and again disappointed of our aim by reason of the antinomies we find in it. The greatest antinomy arises is this, that our understanding of it is... by a presence higher than all knowing.... Hence the word of the Master [Plato], that it overpasses speech and writing. And yet we speak and write, seeking to forward the pilgrim upon his journey thither.... [44]

The implication for poets here is that while language is their primary instrument, it yet does not have the power to transform the spirit of the divine into tangible

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[42] "Shakespeare's Dream of Knowledge," *Landfall* 18, no. 1 (March, 1964) 40-48.
[43] A seminal work on this topic is Edgar Wind's *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968). His focus is mainly on the Italian Renaissance in painting, though his discussion includes the literature of the Renaissance in general.
[44] Qtd. in Wind 9.

reality. The *actual* spirit is not describable in language, but can only be circled around and pointed towards. It is the conception and sense of otherworldliness, and the separation between the ideal and the earthly (in the platonic conception), or the spirit and the flesh (in Christian doctrine), that leaves the Neoplatonists who attempt to evoke the unearthly disappointed of their aim. However, there is implied in the Plotinus quotation a desire to access the unknown through the tools at hand. The further implication of this is that there can be something in the creation of writings to be found between the lines. Obviously, this would hold interest for poets as well as philosophers and theologians. And interest in Neoplatonist writings was displayed in the earlier sixteenth century by Colet, More, and Grocyn; in the latter half by Sir Philip Sidney.[45] Given this, then, an interest in "hidden meanings" did exist concurrently with the first production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and at least a portion of the audience would have been attentive to them.

What may have assisted audience members' awareness of the context of Bottom's misquotation, and alerted them to the presence of a "hidden" meaning contained within it, is the date of the performance in relation to its reading in the church. *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* first performance has been variously dated by scholars. All agree that it was written for the occasion of a wedding, though which wedding and which date is uncertain. 26 January, 1595, 18 February 1596, and 2 May, 1594 are a few of the dates that have been set forth with some authority.[46] The date of the first performance bears some significance in this discussion.[47] For instance, if it were to have taken place on 26 January, it

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[45] See Milward's chapter on "Elizabethan Atheism," 195-214. Milward notes that Sidney entertained the ex-Dominican Neoplatonist Giordano Bruno, who dedicated two books to him. See page 201.
[46] See Madeleine Doran's introduction to the text in *The Complete Works*; also William B. Hunter's article "The First Performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Notes and Queries* 230 (March, 1985) 45-47.
[47] Conversely, this discussion may have some significance to the date.

would have fallen within at most a few days of the reading in the church of the conversion of St. Paul (*Acts* 22, 26).[48] In any case, Evensong during the last two weeks of January, according to the Calendar, was devoted to the reading of *1 Corinthians*. This would support the freshness of the text in the minds of audience members during the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, particularly if attendance were higher immediately following Epiphany. In February, were the play to have been staged then, the reading of the text in church would only have been a few weeks past. The beginning of May would be much further removed from the January reading. However, the last two weeks' Evensongs of that month were again devoted to reading Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians. What this evidence supports is that a reference to St. Paul revealed explicitly or implicitly to the audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was likely not far chronologically from the actual reading of its source in the church. This may indicate a strengthened awareness of Paul's epistles on the part of the first audience.

The topic of the audience's ability to detect biblical allusions can be approached from another angle. We can look for the presence of biblical references in other plays, seeing how their meaning interrelates (on varying levels) with the meaning of a scene, plot, or thematic structure. Assuming that an audience is familiar with biblical readings, references to them exist for playwrights as devices by which thematic information is communicated to an audience in a kind of shorthand; or else their context is evoked in order to interpret or comment upon it.[49] The action of Renaissance plays is embroidered with images that heighten thematic movement. References to classical stories and characters enrich the texture of the play for the audience, forcing the

[48] The themes in *Corinthians* are echoed in *Acts*, but in the conversion of Paul, there is the added element of blindness and the regaining of sight.
[49] See Kott 32.

entertainment beyond the physical and immediate performance to encompass the larger world of memory, literature, imagination, and myth. As an intrinsic part of the growing body of available printed literature during the later 16th century, the Bible also provided a means of tapping that with which the audience was familiar—adding connotations and mood within the space of a few words that would otherwise take a great deal of time and distract from the play's main action.

Following are brief examinations of other plays in which the playwright makes use of biblical references. The ways in which the references are used vary, but all are incorporated to enhance the meaning of particular scenes or situations—if not the meaning of an entire play--and all are dependent upon the auditors' foreknowledge of the material referenced if they are to have any effect at all. It is important to note that biblical material is incorporated as smoothly into these plays as their references to classical themes, characters and situations. Casual observance by an auditor without a grounded knowledge of biblical texts will not serve him or her to detect the allusions, much less make any sense of them. If this is the case, why would any playwright go to the trouble of making the references at all, if he did not believe his audience was capable of noticing them? Further, the following plays do not use the stage as a pulpit. Rather, their authors make use of a commonly recognized symbology in order to connect with their audiences in as rich a way as possible—and this includes the use of biblical images and themes. To one scholar, Shakespeare definitely connected to his audience in this way:

> Shakespeare's comedy is not, of course, doctrinal in any narrow sectarian sense. But its repeated festive celebration of personal and communal regeneration through a willed act of faith and a miracle of grace is basically doctrinal and unquestionably Christian. What other context of values and metaphysical

> speculation would most of his audience have readily recalled or conceivably accepted?[50]

Written by John Lyly and "Played before the Queen's Majesty at Greenwich on Candlemas Day at Night, by the Children of Paul's,"[51] on February 2, 1588, *Endimion* bears a direct resemblance to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in its blending of myth and folklore, the punishment of a lover through the casting of a spell, the theme of the irrationality of love (carried through parallel love plots), and the portent of dreams. As does Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lyly incorporates mythical and heroic elements into *Endimion*, but tinkers with them in such a way as to make them unique to the story at hand. In the original myth, for example, Cynthia (the moon) falls in love with Endimion and eventually casts a spell over him which causes him to sleep. In Lyly's play, however, the myth has been altered so that Endimion falls in love with the moon—who is obviously an unattainable object of his affections. The break with the original myth continues as his earthly lover, Tellus, becomes jealous and contracts a witch to cast a rumplestiltskin-like spell over him as punishment. Endimion's friend, Eumenides, forsakes love in order to find an antidote for his friend's condition, which he does after decades of searching. Tellus, meanwhile, has been banished by Cynthia to live out her days in solitude. In the end, order is restored when Cynthia bestows a kiss on the sleeping Endimion, to complete the antidote finally discovered by Eumenides. Endimion is restored to youth and allowed to complete his days in worship of Cynthia (however unrequited), and three pairs of lovers (including Tellus and her keeper) are united in the tying up of the play's sub-plots.

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[50] Hassel 375.
[51] Carter A. Daniel, ed., *The Plays of John Lyly* (Lewisburg: Bucknell U P, 1988) 150.

Thematically, *Endimion* is puzzling. Granted, there are sub-themes which are quite clear, one being the irrationality of love. As one editor states, "the 'meaning' of this play defies clear encapsulation, but no one can doubt that it has meaning.... *Endimion* never illustrates a precept but rather constitutes in itself a probing into several areas of human activity."[52] This is similar to the state of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which there is a multiple plot structure and a number of overriding themes, but no single one that encapsulates the play's meaning entirely. Following the notion of *Endimion's* "probing into several areas of human activity," we can note that very early on in the play it is indicated that this is in fact one of its aims, by the inclusion of three fairly clear biblical references.

The Prologue to *Endimion* is an apology that in fact makes no apology at all for a tale of the Man in the Moon:

> ...we hope that in our times none will apply pastimes, because they are fancies. For there liveth none under the sun that knows what to make of the Man in the Moon. We present neither comedy, nor tragedy, nor story, nor anything, but that whosoever heareth may say this: "Why, here is a tale of the Man in the Moon."[53]

As we find later, the tale contains all of the elements that the prologue denies. All the prologue seems to claim for the play is that it is what it is. Within this seemingly innocuous prologue, however, is a distinctive phrase that bears a particular mood and connotation. "For there liveth none under the sun that knows...." "None under the sun" is a notable replacement for "nobody," in that this particular astronomical locator for humanity occurs mantra-like throughout

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[52] Daniel, "Endimion: Afterword" 196.
[53] John Lyly, "Endimion," *The Plays of John Lyly*, Carter A. Daniel, ed. (Lewisburg: Bucknell U P, 1988) 150.

the book of *Ecclesiastes*. Three instances of this phrase occur within the first chapter:

> What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? (1:3)
>
> The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. (1:9)
>
> I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. (1:14)

Another catch-phrase in *Ecclesiastes* centers on the "vanity" of mortal pursuits. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity,"[54] and variations of this join the multiple occurrences of "under the sun" as obviously deliberate linguistic "markings" of the book. In *Endimion*, within the first scene after the prologue, Endimion confesses his angst and his love for Cynthia, the moon, to his friend Eumenides. Eumenides, astonished, begs his friend to leave off this impossible pursuit, to have his "melancholy blood" purged. This exchange follows:

> Endimion: My thoughts have no veins, and yet, unless they be let blood, I shall perish.
>
> Eumenides: But they have vanities, which being reformed, you may be restored.[55]

The word "vanities" is here pointed up by the wordplay on its adjectival form ("vein" for "vain"). This exchange echoes one of the final uses of the word "vanity" in *Ecclesiastes*, where the young man is counselled to "remove sorrow from thy heart:"

> Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the

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[54] *Ecc.* 1:2.
[55] Lyly I, i, page 150 (no line numbers given).

> ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.
>
> Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. (11:9, 10)

Another resonance of *Ecclesiastes* occurs in the play, though it is not so linguistically obvious. Tellus, devising a vengeful plot against Endimion for being in love with Cynthia instead of her, tells her servant "I will entangle him in such a sweet net that he shall neither find the means to come out, nor desire it," and in her next speech that "He shall know the malice of a woman to have neither mean nor end, and of a woman deluded in love to have neither rule nor reason."[56] In her plotting, Tellus resembles one particular kind of woman to which the Preacher in *Ecclesiastes* refers:

> And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.... [O]ne man among a thousand have I found: but a woman among all those have I not found. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions. (7:26-29)

To our way of thinking, these statements are blatantly chauvinistic, but in the patriarchal Elizabethan world they played easily into the popular valuing of male friendship over other relationships. In *Endimion*, Tellus represents a fine example of the scheming woman, while Eumenides represents the "upright" male friend. Lyly's evocation of *Ecclesiastes* was probably not meant to be so blatant as to encourage the audience to look distractedly for literal meanings and literary connections. Rather, the references appear to act peripherally to set the mood of the play, perhaps lending it an air of wisdom. Through them, Lyly is able to

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[56] I, ii, 152.

quietly incorporate a moral message without preaching (which is ironic because of the title of the book—*Ecclesiastes, or, the Preacher*—from which the references come). As in *Endimion*, the richness of *Ecclesiastes* lies in its ambiguity. Further, one maxim that is frequently brought out in *Ecclesiastes*, and bears noting by the auditors of any entertainment, including the performance of *Endimion*, has to do with the enjoyment of worldly pleasures:

> Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no
> better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink,
> and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his
> labour the days of his life, which God giveth him
> under the sun. (8:15)

Turning now back to Shakespeare, there are examples throughout the canon of his plays that demonstrate his awareness of scriptural material and his dependence on the audience's knowledge of the Bible. Through the use of his audience's foreknowledge he is able to develop a shorthand between stage and audience, which packs even more tightly his already compact use of language. One example of the almost off-handed way in which Shakespeare sometimes uses scriptural material is found in *The Merchant of Venice*, with Shylock's elated "A Daniel come to judgement! yea, a Daniel!"[57] The phrase, however, is meaningless to the individual who is unfamiliar with *The History of Susannah* from the Apocrypha. During the courtroom scene of *Merchant*, the audience's knowledge of who the judge is creates irony in Shylock's excitement, but its knowledge of the story to which Shylock refers deepens the irony considerably:[58]

In the story of Susannah, a woman is wrongly accused of adultery by two Elders of the community after refusing to submit to their lecherous desires. Her

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[57] IV,i, 221. All quotations from *Merchant* are from Alfred Harbage, Gen. ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (New York: Viking P, 1986).
[58] Milward 128. Milward draws several parallels between the plays of Shakespeare and the sermons of contemporary ministers, notably those of *Hamlet* and Henry Smith. 126-143.

word not being as strong as that of the Elders, she is judged before the people of her town and sentenced to execution. At the last minute, Susannah cries out for God's help, and he chooses to grant it to her through a young boy named Daniel. Using the relatively simple technique of examining the witnesses to her crime separately (these witnesses also being her accusers), Daniel finds that their stories do not corroborate. Popular opinion then dictates that the two Elders be executed for bearing false witness—as it turns out, they have already blackmailed several women into having sex with them. Susannah is exonerated, and in fact she is honoured for trusting in God and for not succumbing to the evil Elders.

> A Daniel come to judgement! yea, a Daniel!
> Oh wise young Judge, how I do honor thee!
> (IV.i. 221)

Shylock makes this statement after Portia-as-Balthasar begins to sway in his favour. Shylock believes he has been wronged by the court by not being immediately granted his pound of flesh. With Portia's appearance and knowledge of the law, he casts himself as the wronged Susannah and puts Portia in the role of Daniel, who will save him at the last moment from injustice. Unfortunately for him his demands, while legal, are also morally unjust. Later, Shylock finds that he cannot claim his bond without killing himself in the process, and a delighted Gratiano responds by turning the original analogy on its ear:

> A second Daniel! a Daniel, Jew!
> Now, infidel, I have you on the hip!
> (IV,i, 331)

In *The History of Susannah* and in *Merchant*, both "cases" involve a reversal of judgement in which the accusers themselves end up standing accused. Each judge comes from unexpected quarters, and each uses technical craft to effect a startling turnaround in a seemingly lost case. The irony of Shylock's first invocation of Daniel lies in his own unwitting foreshadowing of what is to come

later in the scene. And the irony of Gratiano's later invocations[59] points up that of Shylock's first. But there is more than irony created here. The allusion to *The Story of Susannah* within the context of this scene sets up another kind of tension, in that while Shylock demands the absolute justice meted out by the apocryphal Daniel, when he himself stands accused, he is granted mercy. So under the surface of this scene also lie conflicting views of mercy and justice that are rooted in the Bible: Shylock invokes Daniel, Portia the covenant of God from Genesis:

> The quality of mercy is not strained;
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. (IV, i, 182)

After the flood, God promises forgiveness to future generations, and never to cause destruction of such magnitude again. As a sign of this covenant he sets a rainbow in the clouds. Thus, the rain that once brought destruction now brings the rainbow as a symbol of mercy.[60] While not a direct quotation, Portia's reference is clear enough within the framework of the scene (including Shylock's reference) to indicate that the "courtroom" scene represents legal affairs that preempt judicial logic and appeal to the potential for mercy enunciated throughout the Bible. Without being preacherly, *The Merchant of Venice* manages to refer to and comment upon a particular issue dealt with in the Bible—in this case, the issue is one of justice and mercy.

Dr. Faustus, hugely popular in its time, is most obviously based on religious subject matter. Its roots spring directly out of earlier liturgical dramas, morality plays and medieval cycles, and it uses devices from each of these kinds of presentation. For the popular audience, *Dr. Faustus* provides colourful spectacle

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[59]Gratiano pokes at Shylock a second time with "A Daniel still say I, a second Daniel!/ I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word" (IV,i, 338).

[60] See *Genesis* 9.13. The linking of rain with mercy occurs elsewhere in the Bible: "Oh, how fair a thing is mercy in the time of anguish and trouble! It is like a cloud of rain, that cometh in the time of a drought" (*Ecclesiasticus* 35.19); "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, and my speach shall still as doeth the dew, as the shower upon the herbs, and as the great rain upon the grass" (*Deuteronomy* 32.2).

with smoke, flames, and elaborate costume to catch and hold the viewer's eye. Devils and angels populate the stage frequently. Faustus himself is presented as a kind of Everyman, and is exposed to choices between good and evil—even to the point of having the seven deadly sins paraded before him (and the audience) as a calculated distraction from his choosing the path of righteousness.

There is much in *Faustus* that is visually compelling, and while it can operate on a simple black-versus-white level, the demonstration of poetic justice is not its only aim. Underlying the play is a complex debate over the nature of salvation. While the scope of the present study is not large enough to encompass a full discussion of the play in relation to theological issues,[61] an examination of its usage of biblical references will be useful. Of particular interest here is the way in which they operate, depending entirely on the audience's knowledge of the references and their biblical contexts in order to give them their full ironic edge.

The direct biblical references in *Faustus* act as a kind of "fill-in-the-blank" game. In the first two references Faustus makes through direct quotation and translation from the Vulgate, he omits verses immediately following that counter the justification he seeks for his choices:

> '*Stipendium peccati mors est.*' Ha!
> The reward of sin is death. That's hard.
> '*Si pecasse negamus, fallimur*
> *Et nulla est in nobis veritas.*'
> If we say that we have no sin,
> We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.
> Why then belike we must sin,
> And so consequently die. (I,i, 39-47)

John Faustus finds no hope for salvation in his Bible. From his perspective, mankind is predestined to sin and therefore struggle against it is pointless. However, the course of the play demonstrates throughout that his actions are the

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[61] See the introduction in David Bevington, et. al., eds.,*Christopher Marlowe: Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* (Oxford, Clarendon P, 1995).

result of his own choice—though the question of whether he is predestined to choose evil remains ambiguous. Perhaps Marlowe is characterizing Faustus as predestined to sin, despite the choices that are presented to him time and again. This would be the Calvinists' argument. As a reprobate, he has no choice in the matter. On the other hand, Marlowe might be illustrating the mistakes that can be made in a universe governed by the free choice of the individual. Regardless of predestination, the play takes as its starting point Faustus' selection of evil, and this choice is first indicated by glaring omissions from his readings. "The reward of sin is death," he says and then skips to another section. In the Geneva Bible, his quotation from Paul's letter to the Romans reads as:

> For the wages of sin is death;...

Faustus stops short at the semicolon but what follows it is an important caveat:

> but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our lord. (6:23)

To someone familiar with the readings, the skewed nature of Faustus' logic is readily apparent. His next biblical justification for evil equally misses its antithesis. "If we say that we have no sin,/ We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us," he quotes. This translation is lifted almost directly from the Geneva Bible, in which the verse Faustus quotes is immediately followed by:

> If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (*1 John* 1:9)

Of course, Marlowe turns Faustus away from quoting this latter phrase in order to avoid his getting into any kind of rhetorical discussion on the point of his choice for evil. The main point here is that Faustus is to be shown with his mind already made up. His deliberation on the matter is highlighted for the audience by his glaring omissions. The antitheses for his justifications are there before him, but he has already opted for the side of evil.

At the moment Faustus consigns his soul to Lucifer, he says "*Consummatum est*"(2.1.74). In the Vulgate, these are Jesus' last words on the cross, and the irony here is apparent. Next, he notices on his arm (which he has cut to obtain blood for signing) the inscription "*homo, fuge*" (man, fly), and puzzles as to its meaning. As a learned scholar, he should know that it comes from a passage in the Bible. It appears in the Geneva version as:

> For the desire of money is the root of all evil, which while some lusted after, they erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.
>
> But thou, o man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness.
>
> Fight the good fight of faith: lay hold of eternal life, whereunto thou art also called....
>
> (*1 Timothy* 6:10-12)

In the letting of his own blood to sign the contract with Mephistopholis, in the conscious choosing of evil over good, Faustus has pierced himself through with many sorrows.

The three works just examined are roughly contemporaneous with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and all were performed within a "secular" setting. In each case, the author demonstrates an awareness of scriptural material, and incorporates this material into the framework of his play. These are only three examples, but in many other plays of the English Renaissance can be found biblical references that are effective on one level or another. Political and theological controversy had resulted in the decline of distinctively biblical theatrical presentations since the supression of the Mystery cycles. However, while secular authors were turning away from treating biblical subjects, by the time of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* first performances, biblical dramas were

still being performed, and secular writers were still incorporating Christian themes, images, and allusions into their works:

> ...no literary revolution, however radical, could tear out completely the traditions established on the stage during the previous four hundred years.[62]

Biblical themes and references were not unfamiliar to either secular dramatists or their audiences. Some references are more overtly recognizable than others, and affect the play's potential interpretations to varying degrees. Of course, the audience member must first recognize a reference before he can apply any kind of interpretation to it—and the chances are good that an educated Elizabethan audience member, steeped in a lifetime of church attendance, would be apt to understand the implications of a reference within the overall structure of a play. This recognition would happen regardless of how many other sources were drawn upon by the playwright.

Care must be taken, however, in assessing the playwright's motives for including a given reference. For instance, it should not be assumed that Shakespeare was attempting to preach or moralize to his audience when he made reference to Daniel, but rather that this reference adds a great deal of colour and texture to the courtroom scene with as few words as possible. Further, rather than particularizing, biblical references tend more towards universalizing. By connecting a given situation with a biblical passage, the author expands the scope of human interaction to include his audience, and encourages it to examine the situation from a common perspective, using a common language of analysis. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed for a relatively educated court

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[62] Murray Roston, *Biblical Drama in England: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Evanston: Northwestern U P, 1968) 137. Roston's book provides an extensive study of the Bible's influence on drama, using an exhaustive number of plays, both religious and secular, to draw from for examples. Roston also notes that Henslowe's diaries refer to "at least a dozen biblical plays that he was personally responsible for staging...." See page 127.

audience, and it makes use of sophisticated devices that were recognizable to those who were conversant with the literary and cultural background of their time.

Taking the play—or, more specifically, its biblical allusions—seriously does not mean that the play should contain the dire implications of Aristotelian definition. When the word "serious" is brought up in the same breath as the Bible, it often connotes images of hellfire and brimstone (as in *Faustus*); murder, revenge, or soul-threatening situations. Perhaps "serious" in the sense of *Dream* means simply that Shakespeare meant something of import when he conjured St. Paul—that there is something in that conjuring to provoke thought beyond the recognition of a parodic statement. But what kind of thought is provoked? What message of import can be implied through the allusion to Paul in this play? The answers to this lie in the complex way in which *Dream* intermingles imagination and the theatrical experience, and implicates these with Paul's vision of spirit. To explore this further, the following chapter will discuss the concept of imaginative perception in the Renaissance, based on the original perceptual and spiritual context of the phrase Bottom misquotes from *1 Corinthians*.

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SPIRIT AND IMAGINATION

E. M. W. Tillyard argues that Pauline theology was so pervasive in the background of Elizabethan England that it was taken for granted by poets. The scarcity of direct references in literature to Paul is, according to Tillyard, proof that it was familiar ground. Saint Paul's name arises so frequently in sermons, and in Renaissance discussions of theology and philosophy, that it would be impossible to compile a comprehensive list of occurrences. Usually, he appears in analyses and discussions through the use of his writings by way of reinforcement or example, as in "Saint Paul teaches us that there is nothing that conquers evil but good."[63] R. Chris Hassel, Jr. comments:

> Shakespeare would inevitably have turned to St. Paul for immediately recognizable and universally acceptable texts and doctrines. His audience would have just as certainly inherited the scholar's awe and respect. The author of the Epistles and a large proportion of the Book of Common Prayer, and the namesake for churches and place names throughout England, and the persona of organized Christianity was Shakespeare's inevitable choice.[64]

Indeed, it was Paul's epistles upon which Protestant theology stood, and the pattern he imposed on the Christian material, the "orthodox scheme of salvation,"[65] was pervasive in the Elizabethan age. The pattern involved "the

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[63]John Colet qtd.in Charles B. Schmitt, Gen. Ed., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1988) 444.
[64] "Saint Paul and Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies," *Thought* 46 (Autumn 1971) 378.
[65]E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Vintage Books, no date this pub.) 18.

revolt of the bad angels, the creation, the temptation and fall of man, the incarnation, the atonement, and regeneration through Christ."[66] Again and again, it appears as taken for granted by poets and dramatists throughout the period.[67]

The biblical pattern of fall, incarnation, atonement, and regeneration has been well demonstrated as the "standard shape of comedy."[68] Though this aspect of Pauline structure is not the focus of this thesis, it is important to note how pervasive St. Paul is seen to have been in the theological and literary background of Shakespeare's time. While the pattern Paul imposed can be seen demonstrated in this play, I am concerned here with the operation of a different "pattern"—one that seems to operate, in this play's case, on a different level.

Recalling Jan Kott's observation that a quotation enlists the context from which it was taken,[69] it was probably more than just the single verse that Shakespeare meant to evoke from Paul. With an examination of some common themes recurring throughout his writing, in particular *1 Corinthians*, it will become apparent that much of his thought is, in fact, compatible with and comparable to the multi-layered worlds of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the imaginative vision of the poet in general. Discussed in the second chapter of this study is the controversy between knowledge gained through worldly pursuits and that revealed by spiritual revelation. This reflects a conflict in *1 Corinthians* between reason and faith. Paul also deals frequently with sense (particularly that of sight), spirit, and society, often with a turn of phrase that leaves much between

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[66] Tillyard 18.
[67] Tillyard 18. One of Tillyard's example comes from *Measure for Measure*, when Isabella tells Angelo, "Why, all souls that were were forfeit once;/ And He that might the vantage best have took/ Found out the remedy." (II, ii, 74—76) Here, the reference, though slight, "reveals and takes for granted the total Pauline theology of Christ abrogating the enslavement to the old law incurred through the defection of Adam." See page 19.
[68] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1982) 168.
[69] Kott 39.

the lines. There are several passages in *1 Corinthians* that will clearly relate to *Dream*, and the next few pages will be concerned with these.

I have already mentioned that the scriptural basis for the Feast of Fools[70] is found in *1 Corinthians*:

> Where is the wise? Where is the Scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made the wisdom of this world foolishness? (1:20)
>
> And vile things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are. (1:28)
>
> Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him be a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. (3:18-19)

These three passages capture the gist of a particular theme that occurs throughout Paul's epistles, if not the entire Bible: human knowledge and understanding is so limited as to be foolishness to the likes of God, and that something that is perceived as simplistic by our standards may well prove itself wiser than the most elaborate philosophical tract. "The foolishness of preaching" (1. 21) may be a self-deprecating comment on the part of Paul (an accomplished rhetorician), but more likely, it is simply an acknowledgement of his utter puniness in comparison to the rest of the universe, and an understanding that, however broad his knowledge may be, it is still lacking. The most succinct and poetic occurrence of this theme is contained within the verse that Bottom stumbles over:

> ...The things which eye hath not seen, neither ear hath heard, neither came into man's heart, are, which God hath prepared for them that love him. (2:9)

In Paul, as in *Dream*, worldly reason is in conflict with everything that it does not govern—things that "are" versus things that "are not." Bottom says that "reason

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[70]See page 11 of this study.

and love keep little company nowadays" (III, i, 130), and this reflects one mode of this conflict's operation.

In the first chapter of *1 Corinthians*, there is a distinct difference noted between those who possess a certain kind of perception, and those who do not. Or, rather, perhaps, between those who accept that all cannot be explained through rational analysis and those who do not. Paul writes of transcendental wisdom as not being comprehensible to many, especially to those who occupy powerful positions in the world:

> And we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: not the wisdom of this world, neither of the princes of this world, which come to nought.
>
> But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hid wisdom, which God had determined before the world, unto our glory.
>
> Which none of the princes of this world hath known: for had they known it, they would not have crucified ye Lord of glory. (1:6-8)

At the root, what Paul is concerned with is the existence of an other plane of existence, "spirit," shrouded in mystery, beyond what can be shown or understood by reason. The way in which people interact and know one another, the way places *inside* are shared, is likened to or compared with the spirit:

> For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. (*KJ* 2:11, 12)

Knowledge of another is through an intangible connection that is partly a reflection of ourselves, and this in turn is related to "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (2:9). This is both a clarification and a mystification, pointing toward the spirit within while at the same time separating

it from the spirit of God. The spirit sensed inside through, say, love, is *like* the spirit of God, and through it we may at least feel the presence of God's spirit. Knowing "the things of a man" through the spirit is not within the province of a "natural man," whose knowledge rests only on worldly precepts. As an example from *Dream*, Theseus may arguably be representative of a man capable of "spiritual" discernment, telling us of his experience of "great clerks" who, out of fear, were not able to welcome him:

> Out of this silence yet I picked a welcome
> And in the modesty of fearful duty
> I read as much as from the rattling tongue
> Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
> Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
> In least speak most, to my capacity.
> (V, i, 100-105)

In the case he speaks of, Theseus recognizes the clerks' love through their "modesty of fearful duty," and is satisfied even if they are unable to make their speech.

In speaking of the spirit of God, what Paul states ultimately is an acknowledgement of—or, perhaps, an acquiescence to—the idea that the universe does not begin and end with human knowledge, and that there will always be many more questions than there are answers. This unknown, perhaps even unknowable, knowledge occupies the world of the spirit, which is also responsible for discerning things not governed by reason. Some are capable of recognizing its presence; some are not:

> ...the natural man perceiveth not the things of the
> Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him:
> neither can he know them, because they are spiritually
> discerned.
>
> But he that is spiritual, discerneth all things: yet he
> himself is judged of no man.
> (2:14,15)

For Paul, understanding is frequently stated in terms of sensual perception, which is not surprising, given the history of his conversion on the road to Damascus as described in *Acts*. At first a dire enemy of Christianity, he is struck down by a flash of light. Astonished, he submits to Jesus, who tells him he must go into the city. Now blind, he is led to the city where his sight is restored three days later, and he is baptised. Once converted, he becomes as much a zealous Christian as he had been an enemy of that faith. His blindness and confusion on the road before his baptism is analogous in *Acts* to his lack of understanding before he undergoes conversion, and his revelation is expressed in terms of his restoration of sight. The theme of vision and the ability to shift focus pervades Paul's epistles. Vision, to him, is coupled with understanding, and this is nowhere better expressed than in *1 Corinthians*:

> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For we see through a glass darkly; but then shall we see face to face. Now I know in part; but then shall I know even also as I am known. (13:11, 12)

"*For we see through a glass darkly; but then shall we see face to face.*" In this phrase, a turn of understanding is likened to the turn of vision that occurs when someone looks through a darkened piece of glass, then notices his or her own reflection in it. A similar kind of focus shift occurs, to use a more modern example, when one looks at a line-drawing of a cube, turning it front to back through an act of will. An even closer analogy is found in present-day three dimensional computer graphic posters. An image is hidden, seemingly beneath a surface matrix of meaningless patterns. What is required to see the image is a shift of focus beyond the actual surface. The difference between this and Paul's example of the glass is that in his, the shift results in an image of oneself. Spiritual vision, it seems, requires a similar shift of focus that happens within the

individual's mind, is purely subjective, involves the will, and results in a revelatory experience. The "princes of this world," according to Paul, are incapable of making this shift of focus.

As will be discussed further in the following chapter, the theme of vision in its various forms is pervasive in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Within the plot of the play, Bottom, Lysander, Demetrius, and Titania all have their sight altered, and in each case the result is a change towards a resolution of conflict or a revelation. The restoration of "wonted" sight (except in the case of Demetrius, who remains affected by the love-juice) is accompanied by a literal awakening, an opening of eyes, and a readjustment of focus. In a sense, this awakening can be seen as the regenerative stage of comedy's "standard shape" in basic terms of vision, but it also points up an element of the play's underlying connection to *1 Corinthians*, which lies in its association of imaginative vision with the spiritual.

While this is not an exhaustive interpretation of all of the issues in St. Paul's epistles, it identifies those that relate to a reading of *Dream* with regard to imaginative and spiritual vision. Basically, what this examination has gleaned is that according to *1 Corinthians*, human knowledge is incomplete, and worldly wisdom or reason is at odds with the spirit. This is manifested in the different perceptions demonstrated by different people—some discern things spiritually while others discern things "naturally." The sides of the conflict between reason and spirit are thus represented, respectively, by the "spiritual " person and the "natural " person.[71] Also, there is an implication throughout Paul's epistles that transformations of perception are possible, and the recurring theme of vision includes the possibility of its changing focus or altering.

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[71] Of course, in the Bible the word "man" is used, not "person," but the inclusive idiom is my preference.

About the time of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* first production, discussion and controversy around ideas of imaginative vision occupied many, including poets and their critics. A discussion of imagination in the Renaissance will aid in the reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its connection with St. Paul, for there is in fact a recognizable symmetry in the imaginative vision of the poet, as discussed in the works of Elizabethan writers—particularly that of Sidney's *Apology*— and the spiritual vision of St. Paul in *1 Corinthians.* I have used the term "spiritual vision" to describe Paul's manner of understanding. It connotes an ability to see beyond the tangible or worldly, using not the eyes of the body, but those of the mind, or—to tread with some trepidation—the eyes of the soul. The possessor of this kind of vision acknowledges that there is something to "see" beyond what the physical sense is capable of receiving. According to Elizabethan accounts, imagination is instrumental both passively and actively in what the mind apprehends. But where does it fit in in relation to spiritual perception?

William Rossky provides a comprehensive summary of contemporary conceptions of the imagination in "Imagination in the Renaissance: Psychology and Poetic".[72] By his account, what frequently came under scrutiny was the imagination's importance, reliability, and influence on morality. To many, the imagination (or "fantasy"[73]) was a faculty nearly as far as one could get from the soul, and nearly as close as one could get to the outward senses that tied man to the earth. Nevertheless, it did hold sway:

> For *Fantacie* beeing neere the outward *Sences,*

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[72] William Rossky, "Imagination in the Renaissance: Psychology and Poetic," *Studies in the Renaissance* 5 (1958) 49-73.

[73] Imagination and fantasy had once been distinguished from one another on the basis of passive or active function. In Elizabethan times, however "imagination" become interchangable with "fancy" and "fantasy." See Rossky 50.

Allures the *Soule* to love things bodily.[74]

According to the popular psychology of the time, all manner of immoralities and sicknesses of the mind are attributable to a faulty imagination.[75] Being the first of the inner faculties passed through by an outward sensation, imagination is of extreme importance, being responsible for presenting to the higher, incorporeal powers an accurate reflection of the world:

> Knowledges next organ is *Imagination*;
> A Glasse, wherein the object of our sense
> Ought to reflect true height, or declination,
> For understandings cleare intelligence.[76]

But if the imagination breaks down, representations of the outer world presented to the higher faculties are distorted, resulting in inaccurate judgements. Reason, conventionally the instrument by which one distinguishes good from evil, depends for its judgements on the accurate information supplied by a healthy imagination. If the data by which reason makes its assessments is faulty, reason can be led to misjudgement, madness, or immorality. And the imagination is susceptible to all kinds of influences, from an imbalance of humours to the distorting influence of the passions.

On the other hand, from the poet's viewpoint the imagination is not always passive and susceptible. When Theseus says that "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact," his implication is that the imagination of each has been distorted to the point where it does not present its owner with an accurate picture of the world. However, in practically the same breath he marks a

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[74] Rossky 53. The quotation is taken from *The Complete Works of John Davies of Hereford*, ed. Rev. A. B. Grosart (Edinburgh, 1878) I, 9-10.
[75] Rossky notes that the disrepute of the imagination is traceable back to Aristotle.and was tied to the condemnation of the senses. This disrepute is represented in accounts of the conflict between the spirit and animal flesh. 50, 53.
[76] Sir Fulke Greville, qtd. in Rossky 51. The quotation is taken from *A Treatie of Humane Learning: Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (New York: 1945) I, 156.

clear distinction between the poet and the other two. The lunatic "sees more devils than vast hell can hold," and the lover "Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt" (V, i, 9—11). In each of these examples, the subject "sees" whatever it is that his senses are presenting to him through his imagination. For the poet, imagination operates in a different way:

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name. (V, i, 14-17)

The poet's eye, according to Theseus (perhaps an unwitting mouthpiece for Shakespeare), does not react as does that of the lover or the lunatic, but rather it *acts* to discover and then to create something. It sees neither Helen's beauty nor a host of devils, but rather things that the imagination then interprets as "forms of things unknown." Having these, the poet's pen then moves to create these forms into something tangible. But where are these "forms of things unknown" supposed to have originated? Through Theseus, is Shakespeare implying that there is an important connection between the poetic imagination and the spiritual? Glancing "from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven" seems to imply something of this, in that the result of this action is the bodying forth of "the forms of things unknown." Perhaps these unknown things are analagous to Paul"s "things that are not." The "fine frenzy" in which the poet's eye rolls, according to Theseus, implies a kind of madness. In Shakespeare's *milieu*, however, this "frenzy" was really divine inspiration.

Sir Philip Sidney's influential *Defense of Poesy* is arguably the best representative of a body of Renaissance literature vindicating poetry in the face of critics whose disdain for poetry stems, in large measure, from the belief that it moves those who come under its influence to immorality:

> ...it abuses men's wit, training it to wanton sinfulness and lustful love. For indeed that is the principal, if not only, abuse I can hear alleged.[77]

In defending the different forms of poetry, and in comparing the art of poetry to the worldly pursuits of philosophy and history, Sidney also vindicates the particular imagination of the poet by locating it as both under the influence of a higher power, and capable of moving others to an understanding of moral good. *Moving* is the key word here, for Sidney places the poet's power to move above that of the historian and philosopher to teach because:

> ...moving is of a higher degree than teaching,... that it is well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching, for who will be taught if he be not moved with desire to be taught?[78]

Unlike the philospher, the poet can access a deeper region, beyond statements and words, in order to create interest in the learning of moral doctrine. To delight and teach is the function of poetry, with the intent being the "winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue."[79] And learning through the beauty of poetry leads us "to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clay lodgings, can be capable of."[80]

As to the aptness of the poetic imagination (or vision) to lead the understanding astray in moral matters (its being so dangerously close to the senses) Sidney disagrees. The poet's unique ability to create alternate worlds, worlds without flaw, is a sign that the poet's imagination surpasses nature, and that "the Maker of that maker [the poet] set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature... when with the force of a divine breath he brings things forth

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[77] Sir Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesy*, ed. Lewis Soens (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1970) 36.
[78] Sidney 23.
[79] Sidney 24.
[80] Sidney 13.

far surpassing her doings...."[81] Not only can the poet surpass postlapsarian nature in creating beauty, but he can use this ability to create other worlds and other situations in order to "frame his example to that which is most reasonable;" or to "couple the general notion with the particular example... the philosopher bestows but a wordish description which does neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that the other [the poet] does."[82] The poet is not constrained by the imperfections and ambiguities of historical example, as is the historian, but is able to create from the imagination a situation or a story that will perfectly demonstrate a particular message or moral. In this Sidney also recognizes the value of allegory, and he praises the use of it in parables as the stories in which morals that are framed "would more constantly, as it were, inhabit both the memory and judgment ... which by the learned divines are thought not historical acts but instructing parables."[83] Sidney notes that "St. Paul himself" writes in praise of poets,[84] and that ultimately, the poet's gift is a gift from the divine:

> ...poesy must not be drawn by the ears. It must be gently led, or rather it must lead, which was partly the cause that made the ancient learned affirm it was a divine gift and no human skill, since all other knowledges lie ready for any that have strength of wit. A poet, no industry can make, if his own genius be not carried into it, and therefore is it an old proverb, "Orators are made, poets are born."[85]

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[81] Sidney 10.
[82] Sidney 21, 17.
[83] Sidney 18.
[84] "Saint Paul himself, who yet for the credit of poets alleges twice, two poets, and one of them by the name of a prophet, sets a watchword upon philosophy...." Sidney 41.
[85] Sidney 45.

In the end, Sidney sees poetry as emanating from an imagination that, in its association with a "divine gift," is unattainable through human skill alone. In his closing remarks, he invites us

> ...to believe with me that there are many mysteries contained in poetry which of purpose were written darkly lest by profane wits it should be abused; to believe with Landino that they are so beloved of the gods that whatsoever they write proceeds of a divine fury; lastly, to believe themselves when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses.

The "divine fury" of Sidney is the same as the "fine frenzy" of the poet's eye in its glancing between heaven and earth of which Theseus speaks. Though the gods of Landino are pagan and not the God of the Old and New Testaments, the essence of the divine that Sidney points out is the same in both.

Earlier in his argument he refers to the Psalms (with the testimony of "great learned men") as "a heavenly poesy, wherein... he [David] shows himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind only cleared by faith...."[86] David, too, was divinely inspired, and this demonstration of the association of poets with the divine is also an illustration of the poet's imagination being in touch with a higher power. But to Sidney, the direct evocation of "God coming in his majesty"[87] is not always the intent of the divinely inspired, which is evident when he asks us to believe with him (noted above) "that there are many mysteries contained in poetry which of purpose were written darkly lest by profane wits it should be abused." In this we can begin to make comparisons between Sidney's theories and the writings of St. Paul.

In *1 Corinthians* Paul declares that:

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[86] Sidney 8.
[87] Sidney 8.

> ... we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hid *wisdom* , which God had determined before the world, unto our glory. (2:7)

The "mystery" of the Bible is that which is "written darkly" within its poetry, and it is, possibly, directly to Paul that Sidney refers. There are other parallels between Sidney's *Apology* and *1 Corinthians* 2. The conflict in *Corinthians* between the wisdom of this world and that of God or the spirit relates directly to Sidney's argument that the poet, with his divinely inspired imaginative creativity, is superior to both the philosopher and the historian who are chained to worldly wisdom. Sidney describes the historian as "wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be, but to what is... that his example draws no necessary consequence and therefore a less fruitful doctrine...;" whereas the poet "replenishes the memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom which notwithstanding lie dark before the imaginative and judging power if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy."[88] In *1 Corinthians* 2, Paul describes his own manner as a demonstration:

> And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of words, or of wisdom, showing unto you the testimony of God. (2:1)
>
> Neither stood my word, & my preaching in the enticing speech of man's wisdom, but in plain evidence of the Spirit and of power, (2:4)
>
> That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (2:5)

There is a similarity between Paul's thought and Sidney's, in that each downgrades communication in language not framed by demonstration. The worldly language to which Paul refers shows things through the "excellency of words," and uses "testimony;" whereas his own preaching is not in the learned

[88]Sidney 16.

speech of "man's wisdom" (philosophy), but in "plain evidence." This evidence is not just in his manner of presentation and the demonstration of his own experience, but in his choices to teach through the example of demonstration in allegorical stories and parables—"in a mystery."

To conclude, a pattern appears between concepts of the poetic during the Renaissance—as expressed in Sidney's *Apology*—and the spirit enunciated by Paul in *1 Corinthians*. Each is concerned with the human apprehension of the divine, and each attempts to illustrate how their particular medium comprehends it. In *Dream*, the characterization of Theseus appears to denigrate the poet, but at the same time, Shakespeare exonerates him (and therefore, himself) by alluding to his divine inspiration. In this he sides with Sidney. Human reason, represented for Sidney in the philosopher and the historian, is at odds with the divinely inspired imagination of the poet. Implicated in this conflict are flawed nature, and the perfect world the poet is capable of creating. He appears to be following Paul, for in Paul's epistle, earthly reason is counter to the spirit of God, and the "natural" man is pitted against the spiritual. Further, both Paul and Sidney call for a form of communication that involves demonstration and allegory. It appears that the poetic imagination and the spirit are both on the same side, and in conflict with the earthly and with human wisdom. This is what Sidney implies, at least, and likely is going beyond to imply that the imagination can even be a link to the spiritual. Perhaps this is what Shakespeare is also trying to achieve in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but not only is his specific language poetic, but it is also theatrical.

— 4 —

SPIRIT IN IMAGINATION

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's imaginative vision creates several realities which all bear the stamp of plausiblility to the point where an audience can believe and become absorbed in each of them. Through the course of the play, however, he subverts his own illusions by admitting to the audience implicitly, and more and more explicitly towards the end, the reality of the actual theatrical event. This is to say that, rather than allowing the audience to become absorbed only in the action of the play from beginning to end, he uses moments in the text to point up the fact that the audience itself is present and contributing its own participative imagination.[89] The end result of this, paradoxically, is a demonstration of the audience's ability to simultaneously inhabit the intangible world of imagination and the "real" world of everyday life. A parallel can be drawn here with the recollection of dreams, where one can remember the occupation of another existence, while at the same time recognizing its intangibility. Perhaps the imaginative participation of an audience with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or any play for that matter, can be viewed in a similar light. Incorporated into this context of alternate realities is a thematic conflict between reason and love, which extends to include a conflict between reason and imagination. And the vehicle for these conflicts is represented through vision in its various forms. The allusions to St. Paul operate on these levels—that is, they

[89] Shakespeare uses the device of self-reflexivity in many of his plays, but perhaps nowhere else in quite the same way, or on quite the same scale, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

occupy the same kinds of spaces as the play's discourse on the imagination, and its commentary on the theatrical experience. By making the audience aware of its own vision, and its very real participation in the imaginative worlds of the play, Shakespeare demonstrates the "reality" of imagination.[90] What, then, can the incorporation of references to Paul within the same demonstration do? I do not believe that the *Dream's* aim is to preach a sermon. However, I do believe that the inclusion of Pauline references, particularly that of Bottom's misquotation, extends the scope of the play's imaginative discourse.

In the previous chapter, I discussed aspects of *1 Corinthians* that have to do with perception and understanding, relating them to Sidney's discourse on the poetic imagination. On one level, the play creates for the audience a tangible interaction between imagination, with all of the ambiguities it imparts to perception and communication, and Paul's enunciation of the imperfection of human perception with regard to the intangible or even the unfathomable. In this chapter, I will explore the links between *Dream's* discourse on imagination, perception, and its Pauline allusions—what these links are, how they operate, and what their implications might be. What Shakespeare does in this play is precisely what Theseus says poets do—"gives to airy shapes a local habitation and a name." In other words, he attempts to make the intangible tangible, if only for a moment, and part of his method for doing this lies in his dropping of hints to his audience to make them aware that he is doing this. In these terms, the play is complex and interwoven, making an analysis of this element of it a complex task. The reading of the play that follows will trace the lines of vision and imagination through the play on two levels: as it pertains to perception and understanding on a literary

[90] Just as Theseus denies the validity of the imagination, while at the same time praising it, Shakespeare asks the audience to brush off the experience as "No more yielding but a dream" (V, i, 417), while at the same time having just demonstrated his illusive power.

level, and as it operates in relation to the actual audience's participation (implied by clues in the text) in the performed event. In the former case, imagination exists within the text as the imaginative worlds represented, and reflects internally upon the characters represented. In the latter case, dealing with the audience, Shakespeare incorporates into the text a commentary, both direct and inferred, on the act itself of witnessing the play— which indicates a desire on his part to direct the audience's focus back upon its own attention. This being the case, he is attempting to control the vision of his audience, perhaps even in an attempt to "steal the impression of its fantasy" and then give it back again. While these two lines—that of literary imagination and that of, say, "theatrical" imagination—are tied, they are separated enough to create a tension for the audience between being invited into the world of the play, and being encouraged to stand back and be aware of the imaginative participation required of it to do so. Within this tension between the entry into an imaginative world and reflection upon this entry the Pauline elements operate, and my exploration of these elements, and their implications, will be incorporated into the following pages.

Virtually every scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains some reference to the faculty of sight, whether it be to the organs of that sense, the physical action of looking or seeing, or to "sight" or "seeing" as a metaphor for the intangible functions of love, imagination, and understanding. Even within the first scene of the play, each of these senses is expressed: Hippolyta says that the moon shall "behold" the night of her and Theseus' solemnities; Hermia wishes that her father "looked but with my eyes," and Theseus replies, "Rather, your eyes must with his judgement look;" later, with Lysander, Hermia curses the imperative to "choose love by another's eyes." Helena laments Demetrius' "doting on Hermia's eyes," and in questioning the logic of love, says that "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,/ And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind."

Already by the close of the first scene, "vision" has moved from the simple act of witnessing to include imagination, for in her soliloquy, Helena evokes a kind of inner vision, which to her mind is not always in concert with reason. "Things base and vile," as defined by reason, can be transposed by love, a component of inner vision, to things of "form and dignity." The thematic action of the first scene puts reason, as manifested in social custom and law, into conflict with love, which is not governed by worldly empiricism. The ancient privilege Egeus seeks is a reasoned law that would have Hermia alter her "fancies"[91] or face death. With this, a wall is built not only between reason and love, but also between the states of reason and "fancy." This wall does not fall until the final act of the play.

* * *

Helena's soliloquy at the end of the first scene, in defining conflicts between reason and love, also brings in the play's first Pauline allusion. Just prior to this, she equates her state to that of Demetrius:

> And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
> So I, admiring of his qualities. (230-31)

Momentarily angry with herself, Helena equates her "error" of falling in love with Demetrius to Demetrius' erring love for Hermia. But her anger is instantly tempered by the knowledge of her love for him, which is not in her power to control. Her next lines echo St. Paul:

> Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity. (232-33)

If "things base and vile" may be transposed to things of dignity by love, then her love for Demetrius, who is neither base nor vile but who merely scorns her, should

[91] Recall from the previous chapter that "fancy" and "fantasy" are synonymous in the Renaissance with imagination.

not be considered remarkable.[92] As hurt as she is, she can perhaps be forgiven for going to such extremes. Still, these particular lines do jar somewhat, and this at least allows the possibility that they point to something else. A similar phrase is found in *1 Corinthians*:

> And vile things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, & things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. (1:28)

The compelling similarity between Helena's lines and this passage lies in the quality of transformation that both imply. "Love" transposes vile and formless things to things of form and dignity. The things God chooses to make nothing of worldly or rational matters ("things that are") are things that are considered either "vile" by the world, or else they cannot be defined as tangible and therefore rational ("things which are not"). One of these is love. The thematic implication in this correspondence lies in its paralleling of the irrational nature of love in the play with the unfathomable and irrational nature of God in the Bible. The theme of irrational love pervades *Dream*, and Helena's lines prefigure the skewed relationships in the coming scenes—particularly that of Bottom and Titania. Also, if the phrase from Paul is recalled (and if we agree with Jan Kott), then some of its context must accompany it: in the verse preceding the one shown above, not only are vile things, things which are despised, and "things which are not" used by God to counter worldly reason, but also "the foolish things of the world" are used to "confound the wise." Early in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, then, audience members who make the connection to St. Paul are keyed in to thematic elements of *1 Corinthians* as they will relate to the action on the stage. The message of irrational love linked to St. Paul becomes, on a subtle level, a medium for the

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[92] Kott finds nothing in Helena's immediate situation to which these lines can be referring, interpreting them as only prefiguring the relationship between Bottom and Titania. 30-32.

unfathomable spirit (couched in the "foolish things of the world") enunciated in *1 Corinthians.*

Helena's speech is made important, structurally, because of what it is—a soliloquy close to the beginning of the play. As a character, Helena is left alone with her thoughts. But as a representative of the author's vision, the actor serves to communicate directly with the audience inklings of what is to come next. The theatrical form of the soliloquy is such that it breaks the interaction of the characters while at the same time moving the action forward for the audience; and the audience member is drawn imaginatively further into the story (or fable) by the information conveyed, while being forced into a more direct relationship with an "imaginary" being. This alone implies some degree of self-awareness on the part of the spectator. At this point in the play, the curious double vision required of an audience is a commonplace Elizabethan convention. However, with the introduction of the mechanicals and their play-within-a-play it becomes something more, and something more complicated.

At first, the action of the "hard-handed men of Athens'" trying to muddle their way through the process of a rehearsal is an amusing spectacle within the context of the story. As soon as they begin to worry over the effect they will have on the audience, however, a hint of the play's commentary on the act of witnessing a play begins to creep in. Bottom begs the part of the lion, citing his efficacy in roaring, but Peter Quince counters him:

> An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the
> Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and
> that were enough to hang us all. (I, ii, 68-70)

The humour here, obviously, lies in his lack of awareness regarding the ability of an audience to ultimately make the distinction between play and reality that the actual audience, in its easy sophistication and acceptance of convention, can make. If Shakespeare were to dwell on this particular subject at this particular

time, he could be encouraging his audience to believe that his play is about just that. But while Shakespeare will further emphasize the boundaries and the bridges between stage and audience, his purpose for doing this is still under development. So, instead of continuing here to challenge the audience to consider the subtleties involved in being an audience, he rather encourages its deepening imaginative participation. The banter of the mechanicals descends rapidly into bawdy humour ("Some of your French crowns have no hair at all" [I, ii, 87]), and the story continues to unfold behind a kind of fourth wall.

Several worlds or "realities" are represented in *Dream*, and each one is treated with an illusion of plausibility. In other words, in each world, the characters interact using a common language, and the responses of the characters to the situations created (albeit fantastical ones) are measurable and comparable in human terms. And the worlds of the court, the forest, and the fairy kingdom all coexist only within the overall context of the play, the theatre, and the minds of the spectators. The reality that is created through the play is a reality that can only reach its full existence in the imagination. While its disparate elements may have their analogs in nature, they can never plausibly exist together in an empirical universe. The court of Theseus is presented, ostensibly, as the "real" world—the normative world within the play against which is measured the fantastical world of the fairies. Yet in the play, the characters of both worlds are represented as having human qualities and foibles. Jealousy exists for Demetrius, Egeus, and Helena in the apparently rational world of the court; and it also exists for Titania and Oberon in the imaginary world of the fairy kingdom. The dramatic action in each reality, regardless of its setting, is governed by human emotion and thought. To make a somewhat facile statement, it is largely the human element of theatrical art—the interaction of emotional and thoughtful beings—that attracts and encourages engagement and the suspension of disbelief.

It is the continuity of this element in *Dream* which allows the play to move seamlessly from the world of the city to the world of the forest.

With the shift of scene to the forest and the fairy kingdom in Act II, the play leaves behind the *façade* of the "rational" world to enter deeper into the world of the imagination and the inner vision of the poet. The development of the intense conflict between Titania and Oberon continues to draw the audience into the play and out of any judging or self-aware position. Shakespeare is confident enough in his control over the audience's vision that by the time Demetrius and Helena reappear, he can have Oberon become invisible in order to evesdrop on them by simply stating to the audience, "I am invisible." Because Oberon's ability to do this is accepted by the action that follows (to Helena and Demetrius, he does not exist), the audience has no choice but to accept it as well. Further, in doing this, Oberon crosses a boundary into the world of the audience, becoming one with it in its own invisibility to Helena and Demetrius. In terms of the physical staging of this scene, the self-reflexive theatrical illusionism of Oberon's invisibility was perhaps made noticable for the audience by Oberon's occupation of the main stage level with the lovers.[93] Bearing the stage-picture for the audience in mind, the imminent possibility of the lovers' seeing him on the same level prompts him to state his invisibility. One of the ironies of the scene he next witnesses is thus heightened.

Very quickly, Oberon's and the audience's invisibility contributes to a subtle double-irony. Helena, in badgering Demetrius for his attention, tells him:

> It is not night when I do see your face,
> Therefore I think I am not in the night;
> Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
> For you, in my respect, are all the world. (II, i, 221-4)

[93] The stage direction at II, i, 59 reinforces his placement.

Indeed, she is not alone, for unbeknownst to her, Oberon is right there, watching (perhaps even within touching distance). And one of the "worlds" to which Helena unknowingly refers is also the theatre—the stage as a representation of the world is a Renaissance commonplace.[94] So, while the character of Helena means that Demetrius is the world to her, Shakespeare's meaning, perhaps, is to include the audience with Oberon in being spies overhearing her. Once again, the audience's position in the theatre—the focus of its "vision"—has been adjusted by a shift to soliloquy (this time Oberon's), and this has shortly been followed by this subtle textual reference to a theatrical audience. Unlike the reference to the audience in the mechanicals' "casting" scene, this one bears a finer point of implication. Rather than being an intrinsic or internal reference to the act of an imagined audience witnessing a play, this reference acts upon the *actual* audience, and urges its members to further consider its imaginative position in the theatre. Again, however, and just as quickly, the action of the play turns inwards and re-enters its own enclosed world.

At this point, vision as it pertains to the imaginary world of the play comes to the fore again, with Puck's procurement of the "love in idleness" flower. Oberon uses it to cast a spell upon Titania's eyes, admonishing her to "wake when some vile thing is near" (II, ii, 34), recalling Helena's soliloquy. The "things base and vile" to which she had referred will now become "transposed" in Titania's eyes to "something of form and dignity" by the love imparted by Oberon's spell. In the echoing of Helena's speech, the foolishness of St. Paul is also brought along into this comic context. Puck applies the love juice to Lysander's eyes, and it is here the theme of vision and perception in the play includes the controlling of

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[94]Shakespeare later makes use of this device in Jaques' speech on the seven ages of man (*As You Like It*, II, vii, 139), and in *The Tempest* with Prospero's speech: "The solemn temples, the great globe itself,/ Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,/ And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,/ Leave not a rack behind" (IV,i, 153-156).

that vision. [95] An irrational force has acted upon Lysander in the form of Puck and the juice of the flower. Shakespeare does not make an attempt to portray Puck as Cupid; however, the end result of his action seems to be the same as that of "the boy love." Lysander's vision is altered, and he believes what he has been led to see by the action of an intangible yet fallible force. Ironically, he is convinced that it is his faculty of reason that has led him to love Helena when he tells her, "The will of man is by his reason swayed,/ And reason says you are the worthier maid" (II, ii, 115, 16). With this scene, the ambiguity surrounding perception, initiated in the conflict between reason and love, is intensified with the addition theatrically of an element of that perception being controlled by another. Oberon has sought to control the vision/perception of Titania, and has directed Puck to control that of Demetrius. With the reappearance of the mechanicals in the next scene, an implication of Shakespeare's control over his audience's vision appears.

The actor playing Peter Quince steps out onto the stage, and says to his fellow thespian-hopefuls:

> Pat, pat; and here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring house, and we will do it in action as we will do it before the Duke. (III, i, 2-5)

One question here is whether there were any stage properties at all used in this scene. Was there, in fact, a hawthorn brake set out before the actors' entry? In the context of the present discussion of imagination and vision in the play the answer must be no; neither was the stage necessarily painted green, nor Oberon actually invisible to Demetrius and Helena when he claimed to be. Quince's setting of the scene is accepted without demur by his fellows, and the audience

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[95] The first inkling of this actually occurs in the first scene of the play, with Theseus admonishing Hermia to look with her father's judgement.

must accept it too. But the double vision required in the imaginative participation of an audience is highlighted here for the actual audience by the fact that at the same time Quince indicates that the "green plot" will be the stage, his character is represented by an actor standing on a stage. Similarly, the hawthorn-brake-as-tiring house is the actual tiring house. The theatre itself is, indeed, a "marvellous convenient place" for a rehearsal. Through Quince's description, the illusion created by Shakespeare is at the same time undermined, and again the audience is forced into an awareness of its own participation.

The mechanicals, in their first appearance, briefly alluded to the actual audience's capability of suspending its sense of disbelief through their fear of frightening the ladies of the imagined audience with the spectre of a roaring lion. Shakespeare now takes this further. Bottom's solution is to have a prologue written to reassure their audience that not only are the swords and the lion not real, but that he is not really Pyramus but Bottom the weaver, and the lion is really Snug the joiner. Going further still, the trouble they experience grows to include the difficulties presented in representing the moon and a wall:

> ...one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern, and say he comes in to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine. (III, i, 51-53)

They are again plagued with literal-mindedness and unable to comprehend the conventional (Elizabethan) acceptance of the setting being conjured through language in the mind of the spectator (and the moon already has a place in *Dream*, having been introduced in the first lines of the play). Part of the humour and the tremendous irony of this scene is that the actor playing Quince had begun it by peremptorily describing the setting and thus fixing it in the imagination of the audience. Whether each audience member has the same picture of the setting, or any picture at all in his or her mind, is a moot point. Quince describes it and, despite the self-reflexive nature of the actor's reference to the stage and tiring

house, the action of the scene moves forward on a green plot with a hawthorn brake (perhaps a large one, with curtains) in the background. Immediately, though, the conflict emerges for the characters about how to represent the setting in their play. Here, at the same time Shakespeare is controlling his audience's vision, he is allowing and even encouraging it to be aware that he is doing so. After this more extended excursion into the world of the audience's vision, the play's action once again enters its own world, but not before Puck, as Oberon has done before, enters into a conspiracy with the audience. "What, a play toward?" he says, "I'll be an auditor;/ An actor too perhaps, if I see cause" (III, i, 70-72). Here, Puck is not just a character. To the audience the character must become at the same time an actor representing Puck, and an auditor (with the rest of the audience) watching the rehearsal of the play. The action of the mechanicals during their fleeing from the "translated" Bottom and the mischievous Puck brings the audience's attention thoroughly back into the imaginative world of the *Dream*, with the terrified men exiting and entering frantically. As their fears are magnified by Puck's shape-shifting antics (which are soon related through Puck's description of them to Theseus in III, ii), the imaginative space of the theatre is extended to include the off-stage action.

Once Bottom has been transformed, the themes of altered vision and irrational love deepen as he answers Titania's oath of love with, "you should have little reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays. The more the pity that some honest neighbors will not make them friends" (III, i, 129-33). Though he has been altered, Bottom is still much the same character he was before, only now the sensual part of him occupies the world of animals. The only physical manifestations of his transformation that affect his responses have to do with his physical needs: his hairiness causes him to itch, and his appetite ranges to a less than human diet

when he tells of his "great desire to a bottle of hay" (IV, i, 32). He is prone to the same matter-of-factness he was prone to in fully human form, and now he deals with the fairies to whom he is introduced as if they were neighbors newly-met. Peasblossom, Cobweb, and Mustardseed[96] are each taken in stride, and despite the entry of his vision into the world of the fairies, at this point he has no conception of what is happening to him. Bottom's vision has been altered to a dream state that many have experienced, where his own identity and the identities of those around him, though fantastical and far from the reality of the waking world, are not perceived as unusual.

The beginning of Act IV marks the beginning of an extended conflict between the lovers which is dominated by the theme of skewed, controlled (or perhaps out of control) perception:

> Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,
> Made senseless things begin to do them wrong....
> (IV, ii, 27, 8)

Puck is here relating to Oberon the response of the mechanicals to his transformation of Bottom, and his leading them "about a round" (III, i, 96), but his words also foreshadow the action that will come next between the lovers. Indeed, their senses are weakened and their fears strong. Or, rather, the senses of the men are weakened by the love-spell, and their responses create strong fears in Helena and Hermia. Either way, in all four of them perception is muddied by the direct or indirect interference of an irrational force—call it love, Cupid, or Puck. Helena "perceives" that the other three have joined in a confederacy against her (III, ii, 193); Lysander and Demetrius each perceive the other to be a threatening

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[96] Perhaps Shakespeare's choice of "mustardseed" for the name of one of the fairies is inspired in part by its occurence in the Bible: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs..." (KJ, *Matt.* 13:31, 32).

obstacle in their quest for Helena; Demetrius in his taunting "perceives" Lysander to be held by the weak bond of Hermia (267), and Hermia "perceives" Helena as insulting her through comparison of their heights (290). Each of the lovers is convinced, through his or her own reasoning, of the motives of the others, unaware that the entire situation is the product of forces beyond their own control or comprehension.

As the morning begins to draw near, Shakespeare begins the restoration of "normal" vision to most of those who have been affected by the story of the night. Oberon instructs Puck to put the lovers to sleep and to make Lysander's eyes "roll with wonted sight" (369), thus to make the night, to all, seem like a "dream and fruitless vision" (371). Similarly he restores Titania's sight, freeing her from the passion of "Cupid's flower" with the liquor of "Dian's bud." He also has the sleeping Bottom released, and only Demetrius is left under the spell of the flower. With the exit of the fairies and the entrance of Theseus, Hippoyta, and their train, the audience might also feel the control over its own vision being released, especially as the lovers begin to awaken and try to describe the experience of the night. As we shall see, this is not the case. Perhaps on one level, the feelings the lovers try to describe, much like trying to express the feelings experienced in a dream, are similar to those of someone describing the *experience* (not the story) of their imaginative entanglement in a theatrical presentation. Lysander is the first to speak:

> Half sleep, half waking; but as yet, I swear,
> I cannot truly say how I came here. (IV, i, 146, 7)

The character of Lysander is still occupying a place between the waking world and the dreaming world; between the rational and the irrational. Analogous to this is the position of an audience member who occupies a place in the waking, rational

world of the community, but who engages at the same time in the irrational world of imagination. Demetrius states his confusion over his sense of sight:

> These things seem small and indistinguishable,
> Like far off mountains turnèd into clouds. (186, 7)

And Hermia does likewise:

> Methinks I see these things with parted eye,
> When everything seems double. (188, 9)

"These things" of which they both speak is an ambiguous reference. Are they speaking of what has happened the night before, or what has happened on their awakening? For both of them, their vision is caught between inner and outer worlds, much like the audience's, and they cannot entirely trust what their sense tells them. For Demetrius, his focus between concious and unconcious states shifts with the same sensation that occurs when one has a difficult time telling clouds from mountains on the horizon. The statement of Hermia's experience is more pointed towards an analogy to the theatrical experience, particularly to the experience of this play. To this point, the audience has occasionally been made aware of the double vision required of it to engage imaginatively in the action. Seeing with "parted eye" is an apt description for this; for the audience has been led to both follow the line of the story as it unfolds before it, and, once engaged in this, is jarred, even if momentarily, by a conciously-made reference to its own role of participation.

The lovers' awakening takes place within the context of the imaginary situation of the story, separate from the waking world of the audience, and there is no direct reference in Demetrius' or Hermia's confusion to an analogy between dreaming and witnessing a play. For the audience, any likening here to the theatrical setting happens on a subtle level, and rather than being left entirely with a sense of self-awareness, it is also left with the suspense of what will happen between the four lovers, when they leave to recount their identical dreams.

It is at this point that Bottom awakes, alone on the stage, and delivers the play's third soliloquy with the audience as his only hearers. Because of this choice in the staging of Bottom's awakening we must grant that Shakespeare thought that this moment in *Dream* was important; that what Bottom has to say is important in the overall scheme of the play. It is so for several reasons, not the least of which is that through Bottom's words, Shakespeare furthers the play's discourse on vision and its ambiguities begun by Helena in the first scene. At its base, Bottom's speech, like those of the wakened lovers, is an illustration of his confusion over what he thinks he has seen and experienced. Like the lovers, he too cannot fully utter what it is that has happened to him. He recognizes it, however, as a vision, and an important vision at that.[97] As he has Helena do in the first scene, only now on a much stronger level, Shakespeare has Bottom echo the words of St. Paul in *1 Corinthians*:

> The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was.
> (IV, i, 208-11)

Since Helena's allusion to Paul in the first scene, the play's discourse on imagination and vision has grown much more complex. Before this moment, it has included the imaginary world of spirits and fairies; dreams; the "altered" and irrational vision of those in love, and of those in fear. Further, and on another level, the imaginative vision of the poet, the ability of the poet and the theatre to control the "vision" of an audience, and the imaginative activity of the audience itself have also come into play. Now, at this moment in *Dream*, Shakespeare chooses to evoke St. Paul through an overt reference. Since the context of the verse that Bottom misquotes is of ideas surrounding perception and

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[97] It is interesting to note that here, Shakespeare chooses as Bottom's exclamation upon discovering that he is alone the phrase, "God's my life!"— the first and only mention of "God" in the play.

understanding, and since it has been given an important and visible place in the play, we must grant that Shakespeare's intent must be for the audience to notice it, and even to place the lines' biblical context within the context of what is currently happening in the theatre.

Shakespeare, in putting the reference to St. Paul in Bottom's mouth, probably does not intend Bottom's dream to be seen as a religious experience for the character. Certainly, the allusion approaches that level, for just as Bottom is unable to put words to his experience, Paul in *1 Corinthians* expresses the impossibility of words (representing wordly wisdom and understanding) to express the ineffable spirit of God (or for the Neoplatonists, the One Beyond Being). What is important about the reference, and what is important for the reference to do, is to put the audience (or, rather, the audience members familiar with the reference) in mind of Paul's writings while the play continues its "play" upon the spectators' perception and imagination. Shakespeare does not dwell on the implications of including a reference to this particular segment of the Bible in the play's discourse. His having included it is enough to alert the audience to the possibilities it presents, whether its members discover them during the performance or after. Though Bottom is certainly moved upon his awakening, to the point where he wants a ballad to be written, the next scene proves that even a bare description of his dream is impossible. "I am to discourse wonders," he tells his mates. But when they prepare to hear his wonders, his only words on the subject are, "Not a word of me" (IV, ii, 26, 30). He does not speak because he cannot find the words. His experience has been subsumed into the world of apprehension and sense, like the lingering feeling of a dream. With Bottom not being a poet, perhaps Theseus explains the reason he cannot find expression.

Very soon after Bottom's soliloquy, Theseus delivers his famous speech on the imagination, and Shakespeare turns the play's self-reflexivity on himself, the

poet. Theseus at first lumps the poet's imagination in with that of lovers and lunatics. But while presuming to denigrate the poet, he does lend credence to the poet's ability to gain access to alternate realities:

> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of the unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name. (V, i, 14-17)

What is the "airy nothing" to which Shakespeare gives "a local habitation," and the name of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? The imaginary worlds of the court, the forest, and the fairy kingdom? The fairies, or what they represent? Or is it the communal *experience* of being able to engage imaginatively in all of these? There is a similar ambiguity in his following lines:

> Such tricks hath strong imagination
> That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy.... (18-20)

What, precisely, is the "joy" to which he refers? It is obviously not in the fear parlayed into the "bush supposed a bear" that he uses to summarize his speech, though it does make a reasonable analogy to the function of transforming a wordless mood, or emotional sense, into reality. Blind terror leads a person to expect frightening things to happen, and thus induces the imagination to manufacture things frightening to the senses regardless of how distant those things are from the initial emotion (or from reality). In the context of Theseus' speech, this is more of an example of what the "madman" sees. The apprehension of "joy" that the poet experiences perhaps produces in the "bringer of that joy" something as distant from the initial feeling as the bear is to fear, but there is a distinct qualitative difference.

Perhaps Hippolyta's response, though seeming to counter Theseus' speech, serves to clarify it instead:

> But all the story of the night told over,

> And all their minds transfigured so together,
> More witnesseth than fancy's images
> And grows to something of great constancy;
> But howsoever, strange and admirable. (23-27)

"Transfigured so together" has more than one meaning, and Hippolyta's words act both as an aside to the audience and as a comment on the lovers' situation. Within the world acted out on the stage, it signifies the shared transformation of the lovers in the wood. Shared with the audience as an aside, the phrase signifies the audience's state in its entry into the world of the play. "Transfigured so together" is the shared transformation of those who have suspended their disbelief and entered into an irrational, imaginary world or, in the eyes of someone grounded solidly in a state of reason, a world of foolishness. At this time, Bottom's awakening, including his allusion through Paul to the unfathomable in terms of "spirit," still lingers under this scene, helped along for the audience by the suspense of waiting for his performance in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. So, with the inclusion of the audience in Hippolyta's lines, Theseus' "bringer of that joy" can be referring on a subtle level to the performance of the play. In a similar vein, the "joy" that is apprehended by the poet can be in the human ability to sense and experience intangible worlds through imagination. And this tangible experience of intangible worlds is linked through Bottom and St. Paul to the ineffable, unutterable world of the spirit.

The connection to St. Paul helps to establish the play as a demonstration of our ability to see beyond the surface of hard realities into a world that transcends the literal and enters the metaphorical, and through *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the walls between the audience, the play, and the stage begin to crumble. Theseus now demonstrates an ability to see beyond the surface of a given situation when he tells Hippolyta of his reading of love through "tongue tied simplicity" (104), and shows himself to be of particular discernment. As mentioned previously, in

this he may resemble more the spiritual man in *1 Corinthians* 2:15 than the "natural man," who "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him..." (2:14). The story Theseus tells can be seen as a figurative demonstration of perception beyond the tangible that Paul implies.

Once the play-within-the-play begins, the actual audience is faced with what should be an incredible challenge to the imagination, with a scene on the stage of amazing complexity. Now, there are actors on a stage pretending to be spectators, watching actors playing characters who are trying to be actors playing characters. In this scene, the demonstration of the audience's imaginative capacity comes to fruition. The stage audience is not able to suspend its disbelief because the actors of the play will not let them do so, being misaligned with the theatrical conventions to which the real audience is accustomed. Theseus, in his generosity, is willing to humour the performers, though, and tries to calm Hippolyta's frustration with:

> The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst
> are no worse, if imagination amend them. (209, 10)

Hippolyta's view reflects directly on the interaction between the actual stage and audience:

> It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.
> (211, 12)

Here she focuses on the crux of the theatrical situation, with the spectators' imaginations being central to their own experiences of the play. Theseus' line is also self-reflexive, for in speaking of actors as "shadows" he is also referring to all of the players in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Earlier in the play, Puck refers to Oberon as the "king of shadows" (III, ii, 347). Within that context, the connection between fairies and shadows is the same one they share with the night, lurking in the shadows created by darkness. Actors as shadows (and the actor playing Theseus was likely aware of being "the best in this kind') links them with the

shadows of Plato's cave— images cast by the light of an ideal image. Oberon's ability to make himself invisible allows the actor playing his part to also lay claim to being "the best in this kind." Through Theseus' drawing of attention to the unreality of the theatrical situation on the stage, and the need for the audience's imaginative participation in order to "amend" its verisimilar shortcomings, the actor playing Theseus also draws attention the unreality of the situation in the actual theatre. The real audience is still held tenuously in a world of double vision.

By the time Oberon makes his blessing on the house, the wall between stage and audience is barely standing, and is filled with crannies. The blessing he imparts on Theseus' house is also entirely appropriate to that of the couple for whose wedding *Dream* was first performed, and one can imagine the fairies leaving the stage and exiting to carry out Oberon's instructions:

> Every fairy take his gait,
> And each chamber bless,
> Through this palace, with sweet peace.
> (V, i, 405-407)

With Puck's epilogue, the audience is addressed directly, and with this the wall has all but crumbled. The only part of it that is left is that which hides the actor behind a veil of poetry. He begins with:

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this and all is mended—
> That you have but slumb'red here
> While these visions did appear.
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding but a dream,...
> (412-417)

Several themes are intricately interwoven and tied off in the final lines of the play. The theme of imaginative vision crystalizes, and the world of the stage finally confronts the audience directly as an audience. Puck acknowledges the existence

of himself and the other players as the "shadows" of Theseus, and in this he also evokes the audience's imagination in amending their shortcomings. The irony, however, is that the audience was likely not aware of any shortcomings, save those displayed by the mechanicals, and the shadow Puck is merely being modest in his company's skill at conciously playing the audience. For this is what his apology is for, and in fact it is no apology at all because he turns it back on the crowd, reminding its members that it was their own participation which led them into the *Dream* in the first place. In his speech to the audience, Puck *likens* its experience to having had a dream, and in this he evokes the dream of Bottom, and all of the ambiguities that that character had struggled with. And in this evocation is also contained the evocation of St. Paul's spiritual vision, which in Bottom's dream, perhaps, Shakespeare also *likens* to the remembrance of a dream that falls apart in translation to the tangible world—where in the *sense* of the dream, everything is perfectly logical, but upon awakening cannot be described in words. All of this happens within the context of a performed play, where the imaginatively engaged audience is repeatedly jarred into an awareness of its own presence and complicity in the event. Through the stage-audience and Theseus' comments on amending the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the implication of the spectators' self-awareness of their imaginative participation becomes nearly direct. Through Bottom's attempt "to say what dream it was" (IV, i, 204)—in his accurate-enough recollection of *1 Corinthians*—the sense of the imagination has been connected to the sense of the spirit. On one level, perhaps, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a poetic and theatrical interpretation of Paul's vision of the ineffable, in a demonstration of the visionary capabilities of the imagination.

As well, the theme of love in all its irrationality is resolved and linked to the worlds of imagination and spirit. The three couples have all been united and once they have exited, Oberon makes his final blessing on the house, which

includes the space the audience occupies. Here, in his speech to the "house," the visions of love and imagination come together. In the offering of a blessing given by the "King of Shadows," Shakespeare, perhaps, has two meanings. Intrinsic to the story of the play, Oberon's words are at once an incantation and a prayer to guard against physical imperfections in the issue of the three couples, and to ensure that the couples will "Ever true in loving be" (V, i, 397).[98] In another sense, Oberon's words also act upon the imaginative experience of the play, and the blessing is turned towards the imagination itself:

> And the blots of Nature's hand
> Shall not in their issue stand. (398, 399)

"Nature" shall not interfere with the issue of the three couples, for they are not themselves the product of Nature but of something else, perhaps something more. They, along with the love that unites them, belong to the worlds of the imagination and the spirit. At the end of the play, love is shown triumphant in the unity of the couples and the unification of their visions. Where once their perceptions deceived them (whether by circumstances or by the influence of an outside force), and caused chaos, now their perceptions are aligned and harmonious. Perhaps as an example of this, Shakespeare shows none of them able to engage imaginatively in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. The actual audience, however, has engaged in the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and has been witness, "Transfigured so together" in the "story of the night," to a story depicting the ultimate triumph of love. With Shakespeare evoking both spirit and imagination, and demonstrating to the audience its own shared transfiguration, the unity of love depicted on stage is extended to the unity of imagination in the audience. Both of these, through Bottom's recollection of his dream, are connected on a

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98 "With this field-dew consecrate...." (404) curiously links images of nature and Church ceremony— "field-dew consecrate" likens the morning condensation to holy water.

fundamental level to the mysterious function of spirit. Bottom's reference to *1 Corinthians*, though subtle, is no passing fancy. What it does is open a door in the play (at least a crack) to the possibility of the worlds of love, dream, and imagination being linked to the world of spirit. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not a heavy-handed play, and Shakespeare is obviously not intent on preaching or moralizing. Rather, he teases out the mysteries of humanity's intangible experiences and makes them, if only briefly, somehow tangible. And the mysteries of existence, to the foundationally Christian Elizabethan culture, must have been wrapped up in the spirit enunciated "in a mystery"[99] by Saint Paul.

[99] *1 Corinthians* 2:7 (see page 43 of this study).

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