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MEDIATING BETWEEN THE MEDIUMS: THE CHANGING SHAKESPEAREAN WORLD

Rebecca Ewert

Does a man live when others also live? -- Thomas Mann

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape. -- Harold Bloom

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been described as "poetry, ritual, ballet, and circus rolled into one" (Bryden 17). Encompassing so many different mediums of performance and human experience, these various levels incorporated the realms of words, music, movement, and spectacle as integral parts of Shakespeare's production. Music was, of course, by the sixteenth century an accepted addition to the spoken language of the plays. Louis Elson, for example, writes that "[a]ll performances of [Shakespeare's] epoch were preceded by three flourishes of the trumpets," and it was only after the third flourish that the curtain was drawn and the prologue spoken (318). In addition to boasting the inclusion of such incidental music which, admittedly, played a decidedly subservient role to the action on stage, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* dignified the role of music by incorporating it directly within the drama. Where incidental music occurred as background effects (i.e., fanfares or dance music), as entertainment between scenes, or as a postlude to the play itself, stage directions within Shakespeare's play specified the need for music to be performed in conjunction with the action on stage, to reflect the actual text.

The implementation of music was perhaps more easily achieved because musicians and actors were one and the same in most theatrical groups within Shakespeare's time. Musical occurrences soon gathered as much importance as signifying action and/or the emotion behind the event as did the action itself. In this way, then, the actors contributed not only to the deliberate action of the plot, but also to the atmosphere surrounding that action, to the mindsets governing and contributing to the action as a compelling force. Yet because the text spoken by the actors was intended to be performed with an awareness of that music, its incorporation into the Shakespearean arts has been maintained and, in some cases, magnified through the years. It is the subtle and perhaps undefinable relationship conjured by the powerfully presented cohesion of music and text that affects audiences. This power is proved through the simple fact that, unlike many pieces of literature, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was not consigned to obscurity. Its universal themes, characters, and ideals have persisted through the years, proving its ability to endure, constituting both a tribute to the play and its creator.

In using the two different yet comparable media of music and text, however, Shakespeare's model provided intriguing interpretative choices for all subsequent composers and playwrights. The question posed for contemporary artists, then, is whether they can conceive as ageless piece which may survive the transference of audience, values, and ideals through the years. Can modern composers, directors, and playwrights display for their audiences themes at once accessible to the modern age and yet retaining a universality of sorts so as to be understood in the years to come? Shakespeare could, and his genius lives on through his play and serves as an affecting model to contemporary artists of all kinds. The

repercussions of this model, however, have not completely been beneficial and have created, in truth, an anxiety of sorts for modern writers.

According to Nietzsche,

[this] fear of the ancestor and his power and the consciousness of indebtedness increase in direct proportion as the power of the tribe itself increases, as it becomes more successful we arrive at a situation in which the ancestors of the most powerful tribes have become so fearful to the imagination that they have receded at last into a numinous shadow: the ancestor becomes a god. (Bloom, *Anxiety*, 118)

Implicit, however, in the analyzing of such a revered ancestor as Shakespeare, whose influence is said to have been "exerted upon composers of three centuries and of all the civilised countries of the earth" (Elson 330), is the need to delineate between the facts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fears engulfing artists after Shakespeare, and the legends associated with the play and its author.

The phenomenon of what Harold Bloom terms "poetic influence" and the evolution of older works advertising older traditions into newer renditions graced with modernized ideals is a natural and expected process of literary history. And in fact,

. . . the strong poets keep returning from the dead, and only through the quasi-willing mediumship of other strong poets. *How* they return is the decisive matter, for if they return intact, then the return impoverishes the later poets, dooming them to be remembered -- if at all -- as having ended in poverty, in an imaginative need they could not themselves gratify. (Bloom 140-141)

It is this anxiety, then, that plagues modern artists: feeling forced to represent the intentions of the original work, they nevertheless desire to add their creative impulse. Under this influence, composers of all media find that in order to escape from that pervasive shadow, they must necessarily implement their own ideals to achieve a new masterpiece of their own making. By manipulating the two media, text and music, of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Peter Brook as the director of the play, *The Dream*, and Benjamin Britten as composer of the opera, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both resolved their anxieties over modernizing a revered ancestor by retaining Shakespeare's text, while handling the portrayal of that text in a way as to make the pieces their own.

The awareness of the phenomenon of Poetic Influence, the "amazing, agonizing, delighting [sense] of other poets" (Bloom 26) and the uncertainty of how, as well as what, to write after Shakespeare, can inhibit composers and writers of this modern day. For Brook and Britten, the awareness of Shakespeare's legendary reputation forced a self-consciousness regarding their own writing, whether working with the stage and the spoken language or the stage and a musical language. Britten articulated the fears resulting from the fanaticism commanded at times by the awareness of Poetic Influence:

Working at [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*], one was very conscious that one must not let through one ill-considered phrase because it would be matched to such great poetry.
(Britten 178)

Brook, too, understood and asserted within his own practices the value of the Shakespearean text to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the possible

implications of adhering closely to Shakespeare and his example. As one critic observed of Brook's directives to his actors,

it is the text not the theatre, which is holy. Indeed, I can see today more clearly that it is precisely the inordinate respect for the written words of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which, day after day, invests [the actors] with their almost mystical significance. Rightly or wrongly, there is attributed to them near-unfathomable depths (Selbourne 65-67)

The most striking similarity between the three works, whether Brook's, Britten's, or Shakespeare's, is achieved simply through the retention of the original Shakespearean text. The significance of this text is, however, somewhat distorted by the contemporary artists. For while both Brook and Britten chose to basically retain Shakespeare's text, their works strove as well to underscore its importance, portraying the significance of that text as they individually interpreted it through selected Shakespearean themes.

According to most sources, Shakespeare originally intended *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "for a marriage celebration either in a great country house or at court" (Young 5). So the play is often interpreted as a reflection of that happy occasion, surrounded by its festivity (16) and intentionally aligned with the merriment of the Midsummer Eve holiday, a celebration articulating the associations between humans, magic, and the processes of nature (20-21).

"Can anyone read the opening scene, or the closing speech of Theseus and doubt that the occasion was a wedding?" ask the editors of the New Cambridge Shakespeare (Siegel 227). And certainly at a superficial level, the marital relations between the lovers and the societal dictates concerning Athenian marriage (i.e., the father must approve the groom)

proffer the basis for the play's thematic movement. As John Mebane asserts,

a wedding prompts reflection upon the order within the human world itself, where marriage is an institution which guides and controls our creative energies and which permits us to contribute through procreation to the process of orderly change.(263)

However, when the issue of marriage is in and of itself examined, it is not marriage that is of thematic value, but instead the issue of desires, either fulfilled or forgotten, within relationships. Whether it is Hermia's desire to abort her father's influence by claiming Lysander as a husband, Lysander's desire for Hermia's sexual compliance to his wishes, Helena's blind desire for Demetrius, Oberon's desire to obtain the changeling (thereby controlling the whole of nature including Titania), Titania's magically-induced desire for Bottom, or the mechanicals' desire to impress the nobles with their play of *Pyramus and Thisby*, it is clear that desire constitutes a definite focal point of the play.

Yet still, from the title of the play, it would seem that other issues are at least as prominent as the issue of desire, if not more so. According to Wilfrid Mellers, the basis of the play-within-the-play-within-the-play structure is the relationship between the reality of the Athenian society set against the fairies' supernatural world of dreams and magic. She therefore classifies the action as

[functioning] on three planes: the conscious, or would-be conscious, world of the sophisticated young Athenians; the preconscious world of the fairies; and the world of the "rude mechanicals" which is halfway between the two, human yet

brutish, and therefore intuitively in touch with natural and supernatural worlds. (Mellers 182)

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* straddles these two worlds, though the title characterizes it as a "dream" and the action seems to revolve around the issues of love, marriage, and desire. Additional issues work to conceal the primary themes of the play, and few readers/viewers realize that "the menace of death hovers over [the action] from the very beginning" (Kott 55). As Jan Kott proceeds to indicate in a word-for-word analysis of the play,

The words "death" and "dead" are uttered twenty-eight times; "dying" and "die" occur fourteen times . . . The frequency of "kill" and "killing" is thirteen, and "sick" and "sickness" occur six times. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which has often been called a happy comedy of love, "kiss" and "kissing" occur only six times, always within the context of the burlesque; "joy" occurs eight times, "happy" six times, and "happiness" none . . . the change of partners during a single night and the mating with a "monster" on the eve of a marriage of convenience do not appear to be the most appropriate themes for wedding entertainment. (55-56)

It is the something lurking behind the surface action of the play, whether the force of the wood or the vitality of the imagination, that allows both Brook and Britten to achieve a work so different from Shakespeare's, and yet so similar. The interpretation of how to portray the underlying elements of fear, reproach, and death suffuses each work with its own intensity and power.

Peter Brook chose to reproduce Shakespeare's text word for word, with each minute nuance surviving the transformation from the Elizabethan days to Brook and his modern ideas and images. This ability to implement Shakespeare's age-old lines in a new context while still closely reflecting the original play and its intentions struck many critics as a supreme accomplishment. As Clive Barnes, reviewing Brook's production, commented,

[Brook] has taken this script and staged it with regard for nothing but its sense and meaning. He has collaborated with Shakespeare, not twisted his arm or blinded his sense, not tried to be superior, but just helped him out to get this strange play on the stage. (Loney 13)

That Brook reconstructed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a completely foreign environment, with a barren white square replacing the lush greenness of the Shakespearean wood and with strange new effects and movement, seems to have made little difference to some critics. Like Barnes, Charles Marowitz maintains that Brook's production, even with all its appeal to modernism, achieved the necessary tie to the honored Shakespearean work. This link was accomplished through the implementation of a text that cannot die and lose its meaning, even when placed in a different setting:

[u]ltimately, [it was not] that Brook had either transcended the material or reconstituted it into something different . . . the production was *The Dream* still saying what *The Dream* always says, but in a flashier context. (12)

Benjamin Britten, too, asserted the importance of the Shakespearean text by crafting his operatic lines with the original words. The result of

his work was well received by a critical audience. In W. Moelwyn Merchant's words,

[t]he whole production had at once the frightening clarity of a nightmare and the blurred edges of a dream. [The opera is] the richest and most faithful interpretation of Shakespeare's intentions in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that the stage has seen in our generation (Price 182-183).

Though perceived as a "faithful interpretation of Shakespeare's intentions," however, Britten's opera presents itself with rather large discrepancies from the Shakespearean edition and, perhaps more importantly, does not faithfully adhere to the Shakespearean text.

To achieve the manageable length required by the operatic genre, Britten performed several omissions, including the editing out of Act I and what he saw as nonessential dialogue between parallel character structures (for instance, the lovers). Through the deletion of Act I, where the established order, dictates, and relationships of the Athenian society are realized, Britten chose instead to emphasize the dream world and its powers on mortal creatures. The wood, then, becomes much more of an important thematic concept than in Shakespeare's play. And in replacing character dialogue (however inessential), Britten exerted his musical influence by inserting musical motifs, much in the tradition of Wagnerian leitmotifs, to symbolize, signal, and assert the meaning and/or presence of a character. In this way, then, Britten asserted his own influence on the otherwise holy Shakespearean text by eliminating portions he determined unnecessary and by inserting his own additions. But where musical motifs proved plentifully added, textual additions, incidentally, were limited to one line: "Compelling thee to marry with Demetrius" (Britten 178).

Brook followed the Shakespearean musicmaking tradition by declaring it vital that the actors themselves were immediate participants in the musicmaking process. Thus the actors received an opportunity to derive from that musical experience something to carry back over into the theatrical production, making it that much more than it had otherwise been. When it came time for Richard Peaslee to compose music for *The Dream*, he found that since "[the actors had] been improvising melodies . . . [all] he had to do [was] take the feeling and the character of that, develop it, and write it down so [the] had something fixed to rehearse" (Peaslee 67). The unity of music and spoken language proved so vital a force to the production that musicmaking was employed where it had not been supposed in Shakespeare:

we took bits of text with no indication that they should be sung, and we set them. We made songs where there had never been songs before. I think Peter's feeling was that he wanted dialogue to carry over into song very naturally. There are places where it would be quite natural to break into song.
(70-71)

The implication here, whether given by Peaslee, Brook, or the actors themselves, is that music achieved a greater effect beyond that of the words alone. And whereas Shakespeare used music to signal moments of importance or merely to fill in between pauses, both Britten and Brook employed music to greater affect their audiences. Music in their productions, whether play or opera, by nature of their forms grew into an integral part of what each piece says, and how it begins to communicate those emotions, themes, and ideals. This change in the importance of

words and music distinguishes and validates the contemporary pieces from their older model.

Peter Brook, too, while he does indeed adhere to the Shakespearean text, creatively maneuvers it to achieve his own effects. Though he guided his actors into having "respect for [Shakespeare's] words as magical elements" (Selbourne 99), at the same time he voiced his belief that "words don't communicate, they don't express much, and most of the time they fail abysmally to define" (xx). This conflict between what words can say, do, and mean was then further complicated with the examination of the different ways in which each group of characters speaks. Through this "verbal cubism" (xx), 'it becomes clear that the rustics employ a rougher version of what the upper class articulates, the lovers' language greatly differs from that of Theseus, and Titania's dream-induced sexuality is verbalized in ways different even to her prior mode of speaking. Words cannot be taken at face value, it seems: rather it is the something behind the words which must be grasped. To achieve this unusual disparagement between words and meaning, Brook enlightened the actors with his philosophy regarding the role of actors in general:

You must act as a medium for the words. If you consciously colour them, you're wasting your time. The words must be able to colour you. (Bryden 57)

But how could each actor individually arrive at a conclusion which worked not only with Brook's conception of what the words signified, but also matched the collective interpretation of the entire cast? Conscious of this possible conflict, Brook utilized a style of oratory declamation once popularized by Joshua Steele. The process consisted of singing the words in an improvisatory fashion to reach a point where the unity of music and

spoken language would reveal a greater depth of meaning. Brook's rehearsals were then characterized by a constant musicmaking which accompanied the spoken lines. As David Selbourne recorded, "[Brook] . . . even called for music in order to invoke tender feelings where neither words, nor the circumstances, nor the actors' skills could themselves evoke them" (89). Lines were recited with rhythms pounded out on a drum or on cymbals (133), chanted in a singsong voice, or sung, sometimes by candlelight and always to achieve emotion. The effects were quite powerful. As one listener records his interpretation of the involuntary improvisation within a verbal medium,

The sounds the actors make are now multiplied; become choral and contrapuntal. But at a pause in the sung sound, the spell is once more broken. An actor suggests that a guitarist should be used. A celebrant has broken wind at Holy Communion. Brook is appalled. "The music must be provided by the cast," he says testily. "It is a completely different thing if someone is imported to do it." (105)

According to Brook, the power that words possess is not one of lyricism, of beauty, or even of communicative value, but is instead the heartfelt, resounding, and controlling power of rhythm. Brook asserted this within his rehearsals, stating simply that "[t]he rhythms of the play are deeper than the words Shakespeare is able to use" (11). Deeper than even Shakespeare's words, the rhythms discovered within Brook's rehearsals penetrated the dark recesses of meaning, attitude, and character relations. When the actors had difficulty in understanding a particular passage within the play and/or were unable to meet Brook's own specific interpretations for the passage, Brook instructed them to use the

rhythms of the words as the foundation for their thought. As he told his actors, "Hearing the rhythm of each other's words [will] set up a preparedness for response, [will] draw one on to the next stage of understanding meaning" (11). It was the rhythms, and those specifically discovered within the rehearsal setting, that characterized Brook's production of *The Dream*, and not the Shakespearean text.

In music, too, the structure of rhythm appears as an essential force to the composition as a whole, for it is through that rhythm that the music, its motifs and its text, will be perceived. These perceptions are articulated by the composer in a variety of ways, whether in the notational scoring of words in terms of their actual rhythm, in terms of phrase lengths, or in terms of orchestral counterpoint.

Though occasionally asserting his own anxiety over changing what much of the world sees as the untouchable beauty of Shakespeare's text, Britten at other times manipulated the written line to fit into the appropriate vocal musical phrase length. As Christina Burrridge writes, "the effect of this redistribution in conjunction with the musical setting is a dramatic and musical shorthand" (158). With the lovers, for instance, Britten represents their obsessions with their respective counterparts by deriving almost all their music from one four-bar phrase, Lysander's "The course of true love never did run smooth" (see example 1).

The score is for Lysander's song "The course of true love never did run smooth" from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a forte (f) dynamic and ends with a diminuendo (dim.) dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic motif of eighth notes. The lyrics are in English and German.

English lyrics:
 The course of true love
 ne - ver did run smooth,

German lyrics:
 Wie treu - e Lie - be
 sich mit Un - bill paart!

It is important to consider the intriguing tension Britten sets for himself and his audience, as can be seen even from this short example. The syllabic setting of the text with the music, one note to each syllable, asserts its congruence with Britten's overall ideal of compactness, whether in the operatic genre or in the text. Yet in the attending to each syllable as equally important ("never:" "ver" is designated just as important as the normally accented "ne" in measure three), there is an implicit denial of the text in the elimination of durational textual stress, although the second beat of the bar is traditionally unaccented. Britten at the same time, however, attempts to give the text meaning by painting it and shaping it in completely musical terms. Written in a high tessitura (traditionally known as commanding emotion), words are interpreted, signified, emoted, and thereby defined from a musical standpoint. The meaning of a phrase is shown through the manipulation of a single operative word. "Course," for instance is designated in the traversing of a complete octave (G to G) while the rough path of love is shown through the maneuvering of chromatics, sharps, naturals, and flats.

This conflict in Britten's intentions for the interpretation of his music necessitates the kind of performer able to perform his opera. The singer simply must be able to interpret Britten in the most difficult of terms, understanding the depth of his compositional techniques and conveying those to an audience who, for the same reasons, is appealed to through a sophistication in musical knowledge. The music of Britten in all its nuances and implications is not, therefore, immediately accessible, but demands an exposure to the traditions of music: musical styles, tastes, abilities, historical practices, and compositional techniques. Indeed, an explicit understanding of the opera stems not only from the exposure to

this ideal, but also from the willingness to adhere and support that body of musical knowledge, a vote of confidence which is then effectively transmitted to an audience.

But because that transmission from performer to a listening audience is a vital link in the successful communication of the opera itself, Britten's audiences, too, need to operate from a background of sophisticated musical knowledge. Meaning which extends far beyond the words themselves is implicit within each musical nuance in Britten's score. When an audience is able to receive those additional comments from Britten's writing, they can exact a richer and much more satisfying interpretation of the opera as a whole. Writing in modes is just one example of the intricate compositional techniques employed by Britten and intended to reach only the learned.

Acceding to the methods of composition stemming from the days of Plato and Aristotle, Britten employed modes to signify the "otherworld" as a separate plane of existence, very different from the world of the lovers, for instance. Established in the days of antiquity, modes were designed to affect listeners and bring them to very specific emotions and behaviors. It is, of course, significant that this affecting was accomplished without the listener's notice, unless the listener boasted musical training. And it was in order to protect oneself against this conscious ability of composers to manipulate emotion that persons were to educate themselves properly. As recorded by Plato,

education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them

and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary . . . (8)

Britten's choice to use modes reflects again the need for his listeners and performers to be knowledgeable in music theory. His use of the Lydian mode to designate the "otherworld" gathers its force from antiquity, which labelled it as denoting combat, warfare, and secularism (5), as both decorous (24), and intense (5). Britten operated from this knowledge, working with the Lydian mode on G (with hints of D and F#) in which a raised fourth scale degree created a tritone ("interval of the devil"). The outcome supplied a mysterious and disturbing context for the opera: a foreign world, very different from the world of society, full of conflict and strangeness, magic and brooding intensity. With the use of modes in addition to his other composition techniques, Britten achieved the communication of slight atmospheric effects noticeable, however, only to those who had studied the work in great detail.

Britten's demands upon his performers and audiences reflect his adherence to the ideal of music furthering meaning in the text. In many cases, for instance, Britten used instruments to designate certain emotions to either a character or a situation. Oberon, for instance, is characterized by the celesta and unusual percussive instruments (see example 2), as are the moments of magical transformation (celesta = celestial = heavenly).

②

Example 2 is a musical score for a vocal and piano ensemble. The vocal line is in G Lydian mode. The piano accompaniment features a celesta and a violin solo. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "Hast thou the flower there?" and "Hast du die Blume da?". The piano accompaniment includes a celesta part and a violin solo. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

Instrumental effects such as horn fanfares designate either the earthly society or a courtly life, and appear at the beginning of the play (example 3A) and at the end, when the characters return to the court (example 3B).

3A

Example 3A is a musical score for piano and horn. The first system consists of two staves. The piano part (left) features a series of eighth-note chords, while the horn part (right) plays a fanfare of eighth notes. The second system continues this pattern, with the piano part playing a more complex rhythmic figure and the horn part playing a fanfare. Dynamic markings include *louder* and *f*. The key signature is one flat, and the time signature is 2/4.

3B

Example 3B is a musical score for piano and horn. The first system consists of two staves. The piano part (left) features a series of eighth-note chords, while the horn part (right) plays a fanfare of eighth notes. The second system continues this pattern, with the piano part playing a more complex rhythmic figure and the horn part playing a fanfare. Dynamic markings include *f*. The key signature is one flat, and the time signature is 2/4.

Britten does not, however, limit himself to working strictly within the art of instrumentation. As an additional means intended to convey the significance of the text, Britten employs media other than song, namely the use of voices, to achieve thematic meaning. In the music sung by the fairies, for instance,

Although it is sung by children, the music is sharp, almost acid; their innocence, being preconscious, carries a threat, if only because it is beyond our would-be civilized awareness [and/or the adult realm of experience]. This is explicit in the figure of Puck, a sprite who, linking mortals with immortals, is indeed beyond good and evil. Britten indicates his moral neutrality by having him played by a boy acrobat who speaks rather than sings. His instrument is a trumpet. (Britten 183)

Halfway between the real and supernatural worlds, Puck's instrument can achieve the earthly effect of fanfares (attributed here to the horns) and, at the same time, because his songs are characterized by a simple rhythmic pattern performed in a monotone voice, he resembles Oberon, who speaks in a similar rhythm and with a limited degree of movement (compare two examples of Oberon (4) and Puck(5-next page).

④

true-love's sight:
 Mann ge - scheln.
 A-bout the wood, go swi-fter than the wind,
 Streif durch den Wald be - hen-der als der Wind,

⑤

(No beat)

Puck

Gen - tles, do not re - pre - hend.
Freun - de, ihr sollt uns nicht schmähn,

sfp *pp*

(No beat)

Puck

If you par-don, we will mend; Else the Puck a li-ar call.
Wird's doch näch-stens bes-ser gehn, Sonst soll Puck ein Lüg-ner sein.

sfp *pp*

Puck's ability to easily maneuver between the two worlds of humans and fairies is made even more explicit when his characteristic rhythm melts into an incantatory style over the fairy wood glissandi (see example 6).

⑥

slowly (without tempo) (*lento, liberamente*)

Puck

Churl, up - on thine eyes I throw All
Auf dich - Fle - gel, gress ich aus Al -

slow cresc.

Characters like Puck, who easily interact between the realms of reality and fantasy, raise the question of the actual subject in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Is it, indeed, an examination of elements of reality superimposed on a backdrop of supernatural occurrences?

Benjamin Britten seems to have interpreted the play in this manner. With the elimination of Act I, he forces an unabashed consideration of human relations within a fairy world as each lover grasps for the remnants of control in an attempt to understand with Athenian ideology an atmosphere concentrated by magical whimsicality and indulgement. Britten's opera has much in common with Shakespeare's play, yet because he chose to figure the wood as dominating every aspect of the play, whether by forming the backdrop to the action, by providing the characters with a place they can satisfy and induce desires, or as an actual character, encouraging characters to achieve their impulses, his *Dream* is of a different kind. At once enriched by the presence of the wood as "a living, breathing entity that affects all who enter it" (Burridge 151), the thematic effect of contrasting the wood with the Athenian society so potent in

Shakespeare's play is lost by Britten's exclusion of the impinging societal elements in Act I, its orders and yen for control over its citizens. And yet his characterization of the wood as a powerful force is indeed reminiscent of Shakespeare himself and is, moreover, compounded with the energy and expressive strength of the musical idiom.

Britten uses the wood as a device to achieve unification between elements within his opera. Because the characters never escape from the wood and its influence, it is rightly communicated as being both pervasive and intense. Musical motives to be identified with the wood therefore appear throughout the opera, occurring in the opening music and between scenes in Act I and in the prelude, interlude, and postlude of Act II. The primacy of the wood is established, however, not only through its repetition, but also through an identification with the supernatural. Whereas often the simplicity of the mechanicals is communicated through frequent I-V-I cadences, the complexity and vibrant, encompassing nature of the wood is shown through its ties to the otherworld in glissandi, scalar movement and harp triads, and an ambiguity between G and F# (Evans 239). The passage titled example 7 (refer to next page), in addition to the obvious harp glissandi, shows the distinctive steps of the Circle of fifths as the fairy entrance is accompanied by a methodical movement through the scales.

⑦ C#M A#M C#M G#M D#^{Eb} C B^b F B G

(vivace)

cresc.

f

Enter fairies, first group with Cobweb and Mustardseed.
Die erste Elfengruppe mit SPINNWEB und SENFSAMEN tritt ein.

Harp

f

dim.

F#

G

The most prevalent key the fairies employ, F#, intricately connects them to the wood. A key repeatedly used in the singing of their lullabies, each time at the command of a supernatural leader, Titania or Oberon (Long 87), it serves as a leitmotif, both unifying the wood with the fairies and, perhaps more importantly, separating the fairies from the complex chromaticisms of the humans. This, too, acts as a leitmotif as in example 8 the fairy idiom shown is relatively free from the chromaticism so prevalent in later examples of Lysander and Hermia (refer to examples 9 and 10).

⑧ Solo Fairies Solo Elfen

Newts and blind - - worms do no wrong, Come not near - our
Dass ihr eu - - er Gift nicht bringt In der Kö - - ni -

Even the effect of voice colors is given consideration in Britten's production and the nature of each voice is geared to express a higher meaning:

Like the fairy children, Oberon and Tytania . . . are separated from normal [twentieth-century] operatic convention in that he is a counter-tenor and she a coloratura soprano. She is closer to normality and more capable of "human" emotion than seraphic counter-tenor or children . . . (Britten 183)

In his composition, Britten aimed to reflect with musical nuances the meaning of the text. Lysander's bewitchment, then, is further emphasized with his switch from the chromatic to the diatonic idiom, a switch which separates him from the chromatic inflections so prevalent in Hermia smoothly-contoured lines (see example 9) and markedly resembles Puck's lines. (see examples 10 and 11 - next page).

⑨

Her.

eat my heart a - way, And you sat smi - - - ling at his
Schlange fräss' mein Herz Und du sähst lä - - - cheind mei - nen

mf

⑩

76 Very quietly $\text{♩} = 52$
(molto tranquillo)

Her. *ppp*

end. *ppp*

LYSANDER *ppp*

A - men, a - men, to that fair prayer, say
A - men, so hol - der Bit - te. stimm' ich

Vc. Solos *ppp*

muted Brass *sim.*

B. & H. 18707

⑪

L.

That through thy bo-som — makes me see — thy
Dass sicht - barsich dein — Herz im Bu - sen

p cresc.

lively (lebhaft)

L.

heart. Where is De-me-tri-us? Oh how fit a word Is
hebt. Wo ist De-me-tri-us, der Euch so be-tört? Ver -

sf *pp*

For Britten, however, this idea of leitmotif, affixing meaning in the text through the instrumentation, distances his production from Shakespeare's by changing the role of the audience within the play. As Burridge notes,

Britten finds literal equivalences for the text [especially where the rustics are involved]: hence such jokes as Flute/Thisby's flute, the trombone lion, and the percussion chink in the cello/double-bass wall. These touches are all very appropriate as well as being amusing, for this relationship between representation and reality is one that the Rustics in both Shakespeare and Britten insist on interpreting in a singularly literal way. (158)

But while this is indeed so, and lends greater emphasis to the literalism on which the mechanicals (especially Bottom) insist, it nevertheless distorts the text. The effects of this small detail are not small themselves. When the theater/opera audience is involved in such a joke, it is placed in a somewhat superior position to the characters, thus the tenuous balance between reality and illusion, actor, stage audience, and literal audience is forever destroyed:

Where in Shakespeare the effect is one of delicately poised irony, in Britten the reduction in the moral stature of Theseus (who becomes a rather one-dimensional figure imposing a solution that Oberon has already decreed) and the consequent omission of Theseus and Hippolyta's "'Tis strange" dialog mean that there is no counterpoise to the shallowness of the stage audience. So we can do nothing more than laugh at Britten's comic invention, and the whole complex structure of the

various levels of reality and illusion that has involved the audience as well breaks down. (158-159)

With the changing of the relations between the audience offstage and its counterparts on stage, a difference in overall effect is achieved. No longer able to identify in part with the mechanicals except at a superficially comic level, the modern audience is left distanced, not only from the characters, but also from the play as a whole.

In contrast, Brook viewed his audience as a derivation of Shakespeare's audience experience. Stressing the need for language and its subtleties (action, rhythm, sound, words) to reach an audience of whatever type, Brook chose to "experiment with playing before different kinds of audiences: children, boulevardiers, workmen, people who shared no language with the actors" (Bryden 17). The audience generally attending Shakespearean productions was of the same sort, as one account from Sir John Davies reveals in no uncertain terms: "A thousand townsemen, gentlemen, and whores, / Porters and serving-men together throng" (Gurr 60), and as Stephen Gosson recorded in 1582, "the common people which resorte to Theatres [were] but an assemblie of Tailors, Tinkers, Cordwayners, Saylers, olde Men, yong Men, women, boyes, Girles, and such like" (117). This varied gathering, one in which both the young, the old, the rich, and the poor met, was the source of as much social scandal as it was education and/or entertainment. Because the play productions conflicted with the afternoon church services (33), lines were regularly drawn by the puritanical citizens denouncing playgoing as a respectable form of entertainment. This vehement condemnation of the theater thus may account for the branding of women who attended plays as prostitutes (56). Contributing widely to the atrocious fame of the theater and its patrons

were the excessive drinking, smoking, and stealing which frequently made their home in the playhouses (37,39). As one particularly emphatic writer contends,

Whosoever shal visit the chappel of Satan, I meane the Theater, shal finde there no want of yong ruffins, nor lacke of harlots, utterlie past al shame: who presse to the fore-front of the scaffoldes, to the end to showe their impudencie, and to be as an object to al mens eies. (56)

In light of all this denunciation, however, playgoing was a popular pastime. With the birth of the new middle class in England, people desired the means to spend their wealth and preferred ways reminiscent of aristocratic pleasures, as plays indeed were. Playgoing served the new class and its every need by providing its constituents secular entertainment, but was manipulated in turn by those playgoers themselves who would determine the sorts of subjects deemed appropriate for this new mode of entertainment:

[M]otivated exclusively by the pleasure they expected for their pennies, [t]heir taste in pleasure meant that they preferred to swallow the fantasies of romantic knight-errantry on stage which they were already familiar with in print. The Vice of the morality plays turned into a clown entertaining through foolery. The moral requirement faded as the commercial incentive grew. (117)

The needs to be met by plays, however, were not to be of a completely commercial (and therefore superficial) nature. While early audiences expected their entertainment to be an amusing distraction -- playgoing was clearly seen as a recreational activity -- the subject

matter and the way it was to be presented was not to be insulting to the learned audience member. As Samuel Pepys revealed in a diary entry (September, 1662):

[We went to] the King's Theatre, where we saw Midsummer nights dreame, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure . . . (Price 208)

Frank Sidgwick further comments on the play, maintaining that

[t]he characters are mostly puppets, and scarcely any except Bottom has the least psychological interest for the reader . . . The main plot is sentimental, the secondary plot is sheer buffoonery: while the story of Titania's jealousy and Oberon's method of curing it can scarcely be dignified by the title of plot at all. The threads which bind together these three tales, however ingeniously fastened, are fragile . . . (47)

These early playgoers, vociferously consumed with obtaining adequate compensation in entertainment for their money, were the source of great scorn for some poets and scholars of the day. As Andrew Gurr relates,

[Poets and playwrights of Shakespeare's time] valued their poetry much more than the "shows" of the common stage, and consequently rated hearing far above seeing as the vital sense for the playgoer. Every time Jonson called his audience "spectators", as he almost invariably did, he was covertly sneering at the debased preference for stage spectacle rather

than the poetic "soul" of the play, which he claimed they could only find by listening to his words. (85)

The issue of "audience" versus "spectator" was an inflammatory one. Nearly every poet agreed that there were two categories of playgoers, divided according to the priority of eye or ear (93), and an elitist consciousness regarding the role of the audience was subsequently formed as a result. As such, audience as a thematic concern regularly appeared in a variety of works, including Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Constructing much of the play, including parts of its thematic foundation, around the play-within-the-play-within-the-play-within-the-play structure, Shakespeare simultaneously presents three sharply delineated groups of characters (the rustics, the fairies, the lovers/citizens) which alternated as audiences to each other. And whether it is the court audience for which the mechanicals rehearse their play, the easily frightened aristocratic ladies, the mechanicals themselves as Bottom appears grossly transformed, or the literal outside audience to which Puck seems to address his closing lines, audiences of all kinds figure as important actors, related to and included within the actual plot line, the thematic statements, and articulated character expressions. As such, Shakespeare seems to have been intending certain conclusions regarding audience. As Alvin Kernan suggests,

It may be that Shakespeare found that he could make his points about audience response and responsibility by showing what an audience should not be, which would, of course, make an audience more self-conscious than would the presentation of an ideal audience, with which we would easily and instantaneously identify, and consequently not become self-

conscious about the role the audience has to play if theater is to succeed. (Kernan 145)

A self-conscious audience was the ideal for which many theaters in early England strived. As the prologue of the Blackfriars' production of *Sapho and Phao* read in 1587, "Our intent was at this time to move inward delight, not outward lightnesse, and to breede, (if it might bee) soft smiling, not loude laughing" (Gurr 131). Though perhaps not limited to such a docile response as "soft smiling," Shakespeare encouraged his audiences to identify with the different and changing audiences of the play, realizing, accepting, and working just as the characters did. As one critic realized through the example of the rustics,

there is much more happening now than a mere exchange of actors' jokes and spectators' laughter. The mechanicals are in fact confiding in the audience. (Selbourne 295)

Indeed, the success of the play depends on the willingness of the audience to recognize and perform its role. When we begin to understand that the mechanicals "are human beings, not merely clowns" (Warren 37), we are freed to look past the stifling and self-conscious acting performed to the functioning minds and bodies of the characters themselves. Thus they become more real. Anne Barton writes that "[a]s the play proceeds, tolerance ripens into geniality, into an unforced accord between actors and spectators based upon considerations far more complex than anything articulated by Theseus" (Bloom, Critical Interpretations, 10). Kernan agrees, stating that

[s]ome humility about our own deficiencies as players of our own self-chosen heroic roles in life, Shakespeare seems to be saying, ought to form a sympathetic bond between audiences

and players, no matter how bad. We are all players . . . and the theater is the place where we come face to face with our own theatrical selves. (144)

Peter Brook, too, includes audience as an important theme by insisting that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is "a celebration of the theme of theatre: the play-within-the-play-within-the-play-within-the-play" (Drama Desk 24). The actors within this structure maintain, as always, the progression of the play and its action, but the audience's role is to respond to that display: "A theatrical event is not an event, Brook insists, until it is seen; not by experts or aficionados, but by people" (Bryden 20). Brook hoped to reach people who would respond to the proceedings and the players with an honest reaction, unprejudiced by any sort of education, motivation, or value system that would inhibit either their imagination and their ability to suspend reality in favor of a theatrical supplantation or their willingness to eagerly be swept up into that "new" reality to which they are exposed. His audiences, then, much like his plays serve as a partner to the action, active participants resembling those patrons of Shakespeare's day, and in direct opposition to the formally staid, pretentious, dull recipients of other productions.

Britten's characteristic audience, "listening spectators," while however excited and involved with the music, are further distanced from the play and its effects than are either Brook's or Shakespeare's collaborators simply because opera is, for its audience, a rather passive medium in which the audience listens, observes, and registers an emotion which, regardless of its intensity, cannot be demonstrated except at the appropriate and well-designated time, for instance, an intermission.

Brook's audience, in contrast, is able to more freely laugh, object, and applaud the on stage entertainment simply due to the nature of the theater and the ways in which Brook's actors conduct themselves: openly addressing the audience with questions, speeches, and shared facial expressions, surrounding them and including them as vital counterparts within the action (literally standing around the theater and holding their hands, for instance). Britten's audience, distanced both by the theatrical space, the customs of the operatic genre, and by the tactics used within the opera itself (for example, the literalizing of the mechanicals' statements with instruments) separates the audience from the play in a way which differs from the path chosen by both Shakespeare and Brook.

And yet, Brook's concept of details within *A Midsummer Night's Dream* achieves in a way the same sort of distancing as with Britten. Concerned that his modern audience, exposed each day to a plethora of exciting, fantastical, and incredible effects, would not be able to manage the same shock, surprise, wonder, and awe that Shakespeare's audience could, untouched as yet by technology and relatively new to the art of staging and its effects, Britten modernized his play. Working in conjunction with set designer Sally Jacobs, they sought together to achieve the appropriate balance between the enforced reality of the stage and the potential illusory world of the woods and of imagination. As Jacobs reveals,

We were . . . absolutely certain that to be able to get that beautiful shock of catching your breath, we couldn't produce the magic in the way that it has always been produced. That the familiar would kill the magic. There's no such thing as the Magic Flower. We've already seen it too many times on stage.

It's not magic: we know it's only a prop. So what to replace such objects with? (Bryden 47-48)

Using Shakespeare's text and Shakespeare's themes, ideals, and characters, Brook and Jacobs nevertheless avoided all traditional means of props, set, lighting, and staging. Spinning plates on poles served as the Magic Flower, wire coils big enough to encase a person represented forest trees. Muscular fairies alternately juggled plates, flags, yo-yos and even interrupted the actors to physically move them to a different place (Selbourne 73). Tiered scaffolding and trapezes provided room for action on three separate levels (189) and the overall set conception was designed, according to Brook,

to eliminate something. On a nothingness, moment by moment, something can be conjured up -- and then made to disappear . . . The nearest thing [Brook and Jacobs] could find to something completely neutral which said nothing -- and yet had an element of joy and excitement which correspond to a celebration -- was a brilliant white. (Bryden 25)

The radiance of the solid white set was furthered by the lighting. Lit in such a way as to illumine the whiteness of the stage without casting shadows, the set transcended what were previously assumed barriers of theatrical productions. Gone were the traditional means of determining time and space on a stage; there was no recognized sense of a confining space to even constitute a stage or of a constricting reality enforcing its will upon that often idealized stage, its characters, and its events. This same sense was sought in the design of the costumes. As Jacobs explains,

My basic idea was to find something absolutely timeless, so that all that tradition of Elizabethan costume and pantomime

fairies would vanish. Then we would be able to deal with the real elements of the play, the world of the males and females in love, the other-world of the fairies, and the world of the Mechanicals. (50)

The result of these attempts to strip away the "reality" of the time period and of the stage itself "[looked] like a white squash-court or gymnasium" (Selbourne 43). As Charles Marowitz marvelled while reviewing Brook's *The Dream* for the New York Times,

this is a defoliated *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Gone from the Royal Shakespeare Company's production are the terpsichorean fairies, the glades, the mischievous woods. In their place: a white, gymnasium-styled quadrangle hung with swings and ropes and surmounted by a metal catwalk from which hovering actors emit sounds, throw confetti, burble, heckle, kibitz, and brood. (Loney 11)

Limited to Shakespeare's words, Brook's actors operated freely, though contained in their rather antiseptic and stark stage. Able to move on a variety of levels, they could interfere with the action, move, and sing completely at their will. They worked, quite simply, in ways which delighted, marvelled, and stupefied their modern audience. But was this Shakespeare's conception of audience-actor relations? More importantly, although Brook retained Shakespeare's text, did he use it to reflect Shakespeare's themes?

It would appear that by concentrating so heavily on amazing his audience and enticing their imaginations, Brook sought to enliven the actual Shakespearean issues by adding delightful and awe-striking scenery and actions. Every facet incorporated within the drama therefore

advocated the need for an imagination untouched by modernized cynicism which has "seen it all." And in fact, major issues of Shakespeare's play found their way into the production only when, where, and if they could add to this "need for imagination/imagination is essential" idea. As Brook himself stated,

the thing [to be] interested in was to engage each individual's imagination. [The actors] were to find out what the play was for them, because this would be the most powerful sort of investment in terms of how long the audience could be engaged by a single individual on the stage. (Bryden 38)

Imagination, and not the other Shakespearean themes, reigned supreme in Brook's production. But with their imaginations at once challenged and abundantly stimulated, audience members found themselves oddly not intrigued by the issue at hand. Swept up by the strangeness of the entire extravaganza and unable to keep from recognizing their own separateness from the wildness of the set, the play, and even some of the actors, Brook's audience was forcibly distanced from the play through an amazing array of technological and circuslike splendor even though Brook seemed to aim only to create emotions similar to those evoked in the Shakespearean production.

Yet because the interpretations of both Brook and Britten considerably differ from that of Shakespeare, are they to be slighted and thought less of a masterpiece? Here lies one answer to the riddle of intertextuality fears: perhaps the necessity of maneuvering around Poetic Influence is as natural as the formation of ideas themselves. Cognizant of prior works, their ideals, and their communicated dictates, a contemporary artist has many more conceptions with which to deal, to gauge around, and

to compare his/her own work. Why should s/he, coming from that awareness, be limited to including only those details present within the original work? Why should modern day artists not revel in their modernization and their opportunity to decide for or against the inclusion of similar patterns, themes, or characters in their own works? As Goethe admirably rages,

Do not all the achievements of a poet's predecessors and contemporaries rightfully belong to him? Why should he shrink from picking flowers where he finds them? Only by making the riches of the others our own do we bring anything great into being. [Or, as he complained to Eckermann,] There is all this talk about originality, but what does it amount to? As soon as we are born the world begins to influence us, and this goes on till we die. And anyway, what can we in fact call our own except the energy, the force, the will! (Bloom, Anxiety, 52)

The history of all the arts, whether literary, musical, or dramatic, stems from a tradition of building upon that which has gone before. It is the evolution of society, of cultures and their appropriated values and beliefs, which at certain monumental points in time undergo a re-evaluation of valued traditions. These evaluations, then, determine whether or not past standards still apply and can effectively exhibit the particular associations deemed desirable to maintain by the people. It is therefore to be expected that the revitalizing of a sixteenth-century play such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* should experience some effects of this process of change. And, in that whole process of change, it is impossible that change might occur without necessitating a redefinition of sorts, not only of the play and its events, but also of the author and his

intentions. As Harold Bloom states, "The strong poet fails to beget himself -- he must wait for his Son, who will define him even as he has defined his own Poetic Father. To beget here means to usurp" (Anxiety, 37). Taking the place of the author in their contemporary works, Brook and Britten sought to define their own artistic identities alongside of William Shakespeare.

And if, in that establishing of identity, an interpretative choice is made thereby changing the original in all its previous glory, that, too, is to be regarded as a natural construct of artistic evolution. According to Harold Bloom, author of The Anxiety of Poetic Influence, the phenomenon of poetic influence, where two creatively strong and original writers are concerned, "always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation" (30). It is this "misinterpretation" which so characterizes and classifies the subsequent writer and his/her own creative ideals and abilities. As such, it is not so much of a mistake as an artistic statement (43), separate, whole, and belonging to the originality of the latter creator and rightfully made distinct from the work of the original composer/creator. Both Brook and Britten admirably demonstrate their individual wholeness as artists within their own works while at the same time proving their analytical awareness of the work of Shakespeare, his ideas and his details. That they were able to consider the many facets to Shakespeare's play, assimilating those characteristics deemed beneficial and in accordance with their own ideals while at the same time bolstering those ideas with their own to produce works that in no way completely parrot back Shakespeare's own intentions, proves further their abilities as receptive and creative composers.

If it were possible for Britten and Brook to merely reproduce Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, mirroring perfectly his every intention, they would not have arrived at their own creations. With this achievement both contemporary composers reached a new and heightened level of interacting between the original text and their current ideals for productions: the combination of music and spoken language. As Britten himself stated,

Some opera-goers seem to prefer singers who cannot act: there is a curious inverted snobbery current . . . which even prefers operatic acting to be as bad as possible . . . For my part, I want singers who can act. (Britten 179-180)

No one medium, either music or speech, was to be the sole focus of concentration in either Brook or Britten's production. They therefore surpassed their fears regarding poetic influence, however unvoiced, and dealt with the Shakespearean legend by commanding a new combination of influences into being, the combination of music and speech as equal counterparts. The mediating between the two mediums of music and language was therefore accomplished by each artist's refusal to deny that which he termed as important elements to any drama. By willing to step out onto that limb, they achieved original masterpieces deserving of respect even in light of the revered Shakespeare. Shakespeare created a masterpiece, but Brook and Britten separately created, from selected pieces of the master, their own works, completely and astonishingly distinct from Shakespeare's rendition.

Artaud once commanded:

Let the dead poets make way for others. Then we might even come to see that it is our veneration for what has already been created . . . that petrifies us . . .

and critic Harold Bloom responded to his words with this summary of poetic influence and its potential strength:

The precursors flood us, and our imaginations can die by drowning in them, but no imaginative life is possible if such inundation is wholly evaded. (Anxiety, 154)

It is the willingness to accept the challenge of working against the barricade of past traditions to impose one's own that so makes writing an expiation of all that is oneself, yet it is that very willingness to do so that characterizes the great artist, the great creation, and the great man/woman. How fortunate to find, even in this day and age, that in Peter Brook and Benjamin Britten the legacy of original composition in the face of the masters has admirably continued.

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