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The study of the social dimensions of Shakespeare's art is represented by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, C.L. Barber, Robert Weimann, Edward Berry, and Michael Bristol. Their work analyzes the background in Elizabethan social practices and popular dramatic traditions that contribute to the form, structure, and meaning of Shakespeare's comedies. The purpose of this study is to review the work of these authors, apply their insights into three productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream, and suggest further implications of their work.

A review of these authors' major premises provides the context for analysis of three productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream: those of Max Reinhardt, Peter Hall, and Joseph Papp. This study suggests that the popular festive tradition created a dialogic mode in Shakespeare's art and accounts for important features of our aesthetic experience of the plays.

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The Social Dimension of Shakespeare's Art:  
A Midsummer Night's Dream

by

Mimi Schaefer

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THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SHAKESPEARE'S ART:  
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

To separate . . . what for Shakespeare was inseparable--the native theater from humanist inspired poetry, Tarleton's heritage from the literary legacy of Terence--is justifiable only for the purposes of analysis: and even then only with the understanding that the popular tradition itself assimilated wholly disparate elements (including classical, courtly, and humanist materials) until it became part of a vastly larger cultural and aesthetic synthesis: the "mingle-mangle" of which John Lyly spoke when he noted that "the whole worlde is become an Hodge-Podge."  
Robert Wiemann Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater xviii.

Introduction

The Dionysian Festival that frames Greek drama was a unique experience of social ordering. It combined ceremonial ritual with farce and satire, and alternated comedy with tragedy for the purpose of dramatizing civic perspectives. Likewise, Shakespeare's "mingle-mangle" evident in plays such as Twelfth Night and A Midsummer Night's Dream, King Lear and Hamlet is characterized by structures, themes, and language which were derived from ritual, farce, satire, ceremony, festival, liturgy and myth. In his plays Shakespeare mixed professional and popular forms, alternating poetic voices with festive inversion, popular dramatic traditions with mythic themes, and civic concerns with religious perspectives.

Shakespeare's ties with the Old Comedy of Aristophanes and the Dionysian Festival are not limited to themes, but

have in common the relationship between the audience, the actors, and the playwright that is characteristic of ritual and the mimetic tradition. Robert Wiemann, in Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater notes that while the Dionysian Festival can be said to have been an "instrument of propaganda" with its authors labelled as "state dependents," the important relationship between Aristophanes, the audience, and actors was first practiced by the Greek **mimos** (4). The popular player was associated with both the "disenchanted" potential of imitation and the "enchanted" power of ritual miming that came to be associated with burlesque and parody (Wiemann 5). Allardyce Nicoll points out that the parody at ceremonial church festivals and the anti-Christian miming of the Middle Ages in no way differs from this earlier pagan treatment of burlesque (Wiemann 6). The connection between the autonomous method of **mimesis** and the burlesque treatment of the cultic is maintained through the parodies of the Middle Ages in the "context of processions and irreverent festivals of the medieval church" (Wiemann 6). Through these festive celebrations, myth and ritual, because they were no longer embodied but simply acted, "deteriorated into a spirited topsy-turvydom" which "re-emerged as key elements of dramatic speech, structure, and stagecraft in the popular tradition of drama" (Wiemann 6).

The popular traditions represent the "low" in contrast

with the "high" dominant ideological positions that are associated with Renaissance topsy-turvydom. Shakespeare's comedies have a rhythm that is founded on the popular traditions of the "low" culture associated with the mimetic tradition, popular festival and ceremonial practices. The comedies often gain their momentum and rhythm through a confrontation between mythic idealism and popular realism which is mediated by the art of the plays themselves. Thus Shakespeare keeps alive the dramatic tradition of inspiration, the "poetic truth," that resists any simple explanation of the plays based on contrast alone. The complex nature of this confrontation of art, realism, and ideology contributes to one's experience of the plays. It engenders a few questions: What cultural and dramatic traditions inform Shakespeare's perspective?; How does Shakespeare capture these elements, art, realism and mythic idealism in creating a play that mimics life itself? This paper explores the social dimensions of carnival and festive practice in order to attempt to answer these questions.

The social dimension of Shakespeare's comedy is addressed in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, C.L. Barber, Robert Weimann, Edward Berry, and Michael Bristol. Their work provides a rich background for understanding the festive practices and the dramatic forms which Shakespeare incorporated into his plays. Each of these authors argues that Shakespeare tapped into a world of meaning that was

age-old, familiar, and dynamic. By incorporating popular dramatic traditions and holiday practices into his plays, Shakespeare transformed the popular theater into a new art form and into an institution that mediated social change.

The language and structures of popular traditions provide the means by which Shakespeare's art becomes accessible to each generation. They continue to contribute to one's aesthetic appreciation of the plays by providing the comic relief that allows the dramas to unfold, and by providing rhythms and structures that imitate the vitality of individual life. Shakespeare's plays endure because they vibrate beyond their productions, and like words in a line of verse, they take their meaning from a complex and infinite set of social and linguistic relations. The aesthetic experience of Shakespeare's comedies is directly related to their structure, which these authors argue is patterned on the important eruption of folk customs, traditions and popular dramatic practices already present in Elizabethan society. Studies of holiday customs and the forms of merry-making that were associated with them, validate the place of social practice in the development of Shakespeare's theater. These studies underscore the dynamic importance of folk practices as part of the social fabric of the time. By examining the historical origins of popular folk practices in the ceremony and drama, we begin to notice how they develop over time. The play *Pyramus and Thisbe* in

A Midsummer Night's Dream chronicles the evolution of Quince's production for court; it begins with a mythic tale, is translated into poetic verse, then dramatized first in the dumb show, then in language, then in Shakespeare's own play. In just such a way, Shakespeare continues to translate festive patterns, practices, rhythms, and communal significations onto his stage. Ceremonial and ritual practices and popular festive celebrations were steeped in age-old ways of interpreting and making meaning of the human experience. By using these forms in plays, Shakespeare captured their rhythms, their soul, and their signification. Part of the dynamic vitality of the Elizabethan theatre is directly related to his translation of these popular ways of making meaning, of understanding the human experience.

From this perspective, Shakespeare's plays can be seen as the contested site where the vitality, the dynamics of social practices again spill out into the society. The plays themselves comment on the changes in society in their themes and subjects through festive inversions and clarifications; whenever the structure of the plays mimicked ceremonial practice, or incorporated masque, pageant and entertainment in the play, audiences recognized age-old celebratory patterns, releasing memory and associations. When the patterns were transmitted to the stage they mirrored social change, invited comparison between the practices of the "old days" and the present moment. For

today's audiences the festive practices are recognizable forms of human behavior, linking us to the past, enabling a recreation of the central experience of clarification--no matter if princes kill kings, or shadows haunt our lives, we must find a way to go on. Laughter, carnival, and festive celebrations of marriage, birth and even death are ways we reinvigorate our societies and our individual lives in the face of overwhelming historical change.

Although each of these scholars investigates different facets of popular social traditions, they each point to the necessary place of popular language, dramatic traditions, and carnival eruptions in Shakespeare's drama. Their scholarship suggests popular ceremonial performance, games, and holiday entertainments effected Shakespeare's art and the development of his theater as a social institution. Popular customs of merry-making, burgomask, mummings, and masques were enacted on the stage, recreating festive experiences, again taking them out of the hands of the church and nature, putting them into the realm of art and daily experience.

Shakespeare also created characters and used settings which "played" on common understandings derived again from myth, ritual, popular holiday and ceremonial practices. Puck, from A Midsummer Night's Dream, is just such a character. Addressed as Robin Goodfellow, he is a bit of jester, a bit of a shapeshifter, and much of a goblin. The



wood, "a league without the town" from the same play, resided in the common understanding as the imaginative space of ritual, of the greenwood (1.1.165). The Globe and the Swan, like festival space itself was found "outside" the city limits of London, "outside" of the natural order. Bankside, where people gathered for bull-baiting, archery and other leisure pastimes, became the theatre's home (Weimann 170).

The greenwood, Bankside, and The Globe, existing outside the city limits, occupy a physical space that mirrors the carnival facets of festive speech in Shakespeare's dramas. Bakhtin shows "carnival" to be a way of understanding the relations between high and low discourse that mirror and invert the relations between popular and established order. His definitions of carnival and dialogism provide useful ways of looking at the social dimensions of Shakespeare's art. The work of Barber, Berry, Weimann, Bristol and others have led me to believe that an understanding of the popular dramatic traditions, the festive social practices of holiday and ritual are important for three reasons. First, their critical work points to the important place of folk culture in Elizabethan society of the 1500's. The medieval drama, especially the mystery and morality plays, holiday performances and festive customs were essential, vital elements in a culture that was slowly becoming literate. Consequently, by deliberately including

elements of the folk in his plays, Shakespeare had clear intentions. When he included the bellows-mender, the joiner, the tailor, the carpenter, the weaver, and the tinker he was including a dynamic social class, language patterns, and festive misrule that was every bit as important as the Duke, the Queen, and the King. Second, directors, by understanding of Elizabethan popular language, popular dramatic traditions, and festive practices can produce plays which create for contemporary audiences something of the same experience Shakespeare offered audiences at the Globe. For example, the antics of the rustics in A Midsummer Night's Dream lend themselves to contemporary interpretations that can break or assert our common assumptions. When they are cast as Texas "good old boys" as in the Charlotte Headrick production in Livingstone, Texas, we know something different about the bias of the working class that we don't see in Romantic productions of the play. Third, Elizabethan ceremonial practice, folk traditions, and post-feudal dramatic conventions are one part of the dialogic nature of the play. Bakhtin's dialogism is characterized by a multiplicity of voices in a single, unified voice. Dialogical understanding depends on the interactions between distinct others and Bakhtin notes that this necessity is central to our experience of great literature, indeed to life. Bakhtin's dialogism seems essential to understanding Elizabethan ways

of knowing the world and our place in it; it reveals the key to Shakespeare's popularity. In every culture, Elizabethan or Post-Modern, there is always the voice of the other to contend with, to accomodate, to recognize and finally to integrate.

In the first chapter I will summarize the critical theories of Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival, C. L. Barber on the relation of Shakespeare's dramatic form to social custom, Edward Berry on the relation of initiation rituals to the structure of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, Robert Weimann on popular dramatic traditions, and Michael Bristol on the dimension of carnival in a theater understood both as art and social institution. In the second chapter I will apply some of these critical viewpoints to three productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream. By focusing on the popular dramatic and festive dimensions evidenced in the three productions, I will show how these festive practices enable audiences to "get into" the play by breaking down the barriers between the stage and the audience, between the world of the play and the world beyond it. In conclusion, I suggest that Shakespeare's use of festive forms of merry-making, carnival language, and popular dramatic forms aligns his plays with Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. The dialogic structure of the plays pushes popular language and festive practice into existing social norms usually created by an elite, educated, royal class. The result is a play that

speaks to the tension inherent in every age--we have a social reality that appears to be static, controlled by our mythic and ideological understanding, yet is conflicting; it calls us into the conflict. In addition, there is the individual impulse to live. To live means to change, to question, to engage in reconciling the shifting social norms with our individual needs. The plays mirror life by conducting a dramatic exploration of this tension by admitting to the complexity of the human condition. For example, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare gives voice to the various social dimensions of love: the institution of marriage, the good of the state, economic stability, social harmony, and the maintenance of authority. He contrasts these ideological positions with the mythic imaginings of dream, desire, and ritual connections focusing on the romantic, erotic, popular practices associated with love. The play suggests a way of seeing the world of the dream (of desire and imagination) and Athens (of convention and social order) through a recognition of their conflicting claims. The play reaches a climax when Bottom, a monstrous ass and Titania, a Fairy Queen come together reenacting the rites of May. Shakespeare suggests that the tension of Athens and the dream expresses a conflict between "duty and desire," between our individual impulse and our social reality, between new ideas of authority and older claims. His open text resists both extremes and asserts that it is

the carnival experience that propels us to our most important insight: we must always negotiate the tension. We, like Hermia, must see "with parted eye" and act accordingly, balancing duty and desire while resisting total submission to either.

### The Theoretical Tradition

No rest period or breathing spell can be rendered festive per se; something must be added from the spiritual and ideological dimension. They must be sanctioned not by the world of practical conditions but by the highest aims of human existence, that is, by the world of ideals. Without this sanction there can be no festivity. Helene Iswolsky  
 "Introduction" Rabelais and His World 849.

Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas have influenced thinking in literary studies, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and social theory. In Rabelais and His World, published in English in 1968, Bakhtin explored the genre of the novel, the effects of language on meaning, and the idea of carnival. This work has influenced the study of Shakespeare's dramatic form and its relation to social custom. For Bakhtin, the idea of carnival is related to his general theory of art.

In the "Forward" to Rabelais, Krystyna Pomorska notes that "the inherent features of carnival that he underscores are its emphatic and purposeful 'heteroglossia'. . . and its multiplicity of styles" (X). Bakhtin's dialogism reflects his philosophy. Pomorska continues:

The carnival principle corresponds to and is indeed a part of the novelistic principle itself. One may say that just as dialogization is the **sine qua non** for the novel structure, so carnivalization is the condition for the ultimate "structure of life" that is formed by "behavior and cognition" (X).

The traditional role of Socratic dialogue is to unmask or reveal the truth of a situation, an idea or a perspective.

Bakhtin's dialogic view, so conceived, is a way of making meaning that is opposed to the "authoritative word" in the same way that carnival is opposed to official culture.

Carnival laughter then, is the linguistic form that contrasts with official language which at a certain point in the "gradual rigidification of class structure, banished laughter to the nonofficial and the low" (Latimer 301). The "nonofficial" and the "low" define the arena of the carnivalesque: the language of the body which references both death and resurrection. Bakhtin's Soviet state rejected free-satire and certain forms of ironic writing, and in Rabelais he comments on the similarity between these repressions and the situation that prevailed during the Reformation. Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel and Bakhtin's study of the work reflect similar reactions to their social situations. "In defiance of this prohibition, both Rabelais and Bakhtin cultivated laughter, aware that laughter, like language, is uniquely characteristic of the human species" (Bakhtin xi). Bakhtin's definition and exploration of carnival, festive laughter, and dialogism introduced in Rabelais, provide a theoretical framework for many critical analyses of the relationship of social custom and popular dramatic tradition in Shakespeare's comedies.

Although removed from Bakhtin by a span of nearly sixty years, Michael Bristol's Carnival and Theater argues for the importance of historicizing dramatic texts. Bristol reacted

to the New Critics who gave priority to textual meanings derived entirely from written language and divorced from any social context. His argument revolves around the central definition of the theater as both art and social institution. He asserts that "the critical intensification of collective life" as "represented and experienced in the theater" creates a possibility "for action and initiative" (Bristol 3). Bristol's argument for historicizing dramatic texts was informed by the materialist theories of Walter Benjamin and the sociology of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim proposed "that social harmony must be periodically renewed by the ritual intensification of collective experience" (Bristol 25). Both Bristol and Bakhtin examine the political and ideological impact of popular social practice on Shakespeare's theater by analyzing the society, common festive practices, and the texts of the plays.

C.L. Barber's Shakespeare's Festive Comedy was written before and after World War II. In an attempt to further an historical understanding of Shakespeare, and to distance himself from the Romantics, he focused on Elizabethan celebratory practices and their contributions to the dramatic form of festive comedy in A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and Henry IV. Barber's seminal work exposes the historical interplay of social and artistic forms in the structure and the meaning of Shakespeare's



comedy. Of the relation of festive practices to Elizabethan theater, he notes "we can see here, with more clarity of outline and detail than is usually possible, how art develops underlying configurations in the social life of a culture" (Barber 4-5).

Barber's important work catalogues specific Elizabethan holiday traditions as they relate to Shakespeare's comic form, a form that Barber notes is characterized by a movement from "release to clarification" of man's position in the cycles of Nature. He notes the cyclical and communal nature of the human experience and concludes that the structure of Shakespeare's comedy originated in the common impulse already present and celebrated on occasions of festive misrule.

Like Barber's understanding of the historical interplay between holiday and comedy, Edward Berry's Shakespeare's Comic Rites written in 1984, focused on the relationship between the dramatic form of Shakespeare's romantic comedies and initiation rites as the Elizabethan's experienced them. Both of these authors document the historical social practices that drive Shakespeare's comedies. Barber examined festive occasions, and Berry examined primary and residual initiation patterns. Berry asserts that in Shakespeare's romantic comedies, adolescent lovers move through transitional, liminal states of confusion before reaching a psychological moment characterized by a sense of

individuation, followed by the assumption of public roles which are sealed by marriage. He argues Shakespeare's comic rhythm copied the patterns of estrangement, disorientation, and reintegration common to Elizabethan audiences. Berry notes that the initiatory pattern provided the infinitely variable structure which shaped the Elizabethan's experience of the plays.

Robert Weimann investigates popular dramatic traditions and their relation to Shakespeare's plays in Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater. Weimann traces their origins in ritual and mime to their fullest expression on the Elizabethan stage. Weimann, like Barber and Berry, is interested in breaking out of Romantic interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. Weimann noted in 1978 that the contributions made by Barber and Berry were still overshadowed by "centuries of subjective criticism which, with its polemical view of the social and theatrical characteristics of Shakespeare's stage, devalued as 'vulgar' all popular connections" (Weimann xix). Weimann suggests that Shakespeare's aesthetic was inherited from the pattern of allegorical farce orchestrated by the figure of Vice but not limited to that traditional perspective. Shakespeare's modern representatives of evil, such as Gloucester, are tempered by the characters such as "Poor Tom and the Fool in King Lear, [who] are brought in to enunciate a complementary vision of the main theme" (Weimann 158). The dramatic

function of these fools involves them with the audience, creating the special relationship which gives rise to the "countervoices" existing in the culture (Weimann 158).

Shakespeare's porters, rustics, and fools embody

counterperspective of self-expressed interest and truth, a naive and joyous, or bitter, sense of freedom from the burden of ruling ideologies and concepts of honor, love, ambition, and revenge. In this sense the ritual sources of popular disenchantment and the Vice's irreverence, suffer a sea-change. The power of negation is turned against the representatives of the **vicious world** itself: the negation of negation dialectically gives them a positive structural function (Wiemann 158).

Shakespeare's popular social traditions give his characters a positive structural function in his new dramaturgy which is similar to the way his theater affected individual and social perspectives. Elizabethan theater created a mirrored stage whereby familiar rituals, characters, language patterns, and dramatic traditions were reworked for a society in the midst of change. Shakespeare offered a dramatic experience whereby audiences gained a distance from the conflicting ideologies of court, church, and the rising bourgeoisie. A closer look at these theories will reveal Shakespeare's comic pattern as an integration of folk practice which strives to hold its own against new forms of language, politics, economics, ethics, and rhetoric.

## Mikhail Bakhtin

Mikhail Bakhtin describes carnival as an eruption of folk culture which was characterized by an atmosphere of "misrule." The seasons of misrule, May Day, the Feast of Fools, bringing in the bridal, stood in direct contrast to the order of official cult forms and ceremonials; carnival celebrates the "extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (Bakhtin 6). Carnival is a period of licensed inversion where popular discourse enters the mainstream with a force that nearly equals that of church and state. Although the impulse to carnival was plebeian and popular, all people recognized and were drawn into carnival celebrations.

During Mardi Gras, Summer Rule, the feasts of Robin and Marian, Medieval and early Renaissance yeomen, peasants, and priests celebrated the green world, a second life outside legal categories characterized by language that outstripped daily usage. These feasts disrupted not only the language but the patterns of civic culture; "large medieval cities devoted an average of three months a year to these festivities" (Bakhtin 13). During Carnival hierarchies were overturned, the serious was mocked, and the grotesque was made visible. It was a time when the people entered the "utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance" in contrast to the strictly ordered patterns of daily life (Bakhtin 9). During the carnival feasts the

voice of the people was heard over and above the official language of church and state. Bakhtin characterizes the voice of the people as that of "Easter" laughter sanctioned by "protocol and ritual," engendered by age-old practices that were "sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials" (Bakhtin 5).

Carnival laughter is unique because it is "festive" in nature, not an individual reaction to some isolated event, but primarily a communal recognition of the human condition. It is "the laughter of all the people" (Bakhtin 11). A second characteristic of carnival laughter is its universality: it is laughter directed at all and everyone, including carnival's participants. Thirdly, carnival laughter does not destroy; it is ambivalent, double: asserting and denying, burying and reviving (Bakhtin 12). These definitions of laughter are useful in understanding comedy and theatre, especially when applied to Shakespeare's assimilation of the "language of the folk" into his plays.

According to Bakhtin, carnival laughter has three distinct characteristics. First, it is occasioned by ritual and spectacle, arising from the pageant and comic shows of the marketplace. Second, carnival laughter is engendered by oral, written, Latin, and vernacular forms of parody. Third, laughter is occasioned by various genres of billingsgate including curses, oaths, and popular blazons

(Bakhtin 5). Shakespeare incorporated all of these devices in his plays, translating them to serve his own dramatic purpose.

At the conclusion of Rabelais, Bakhtin connects Shakespeare's understanding of carnival with his own:

The analysis we have applied to Rabelais would also help us to discover the essential carnival element in the organization of Shakespeare's drama. This does not merely concern the secondary, clownish motives of his plays. The logic of crownings and uncrownings, in direct or indirect form, organizes the serious elements also. And first of all this "belief in the possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life" determines Shakespeare's fearless, sober (yet not cynical) realism and absence of dogmatism. The pathos of radical changes and renewals is the essence of Shakespeare's world consciousness. It made him see the great epoch-making changes taking place around him and yet recognize their limitations (Bakhtin 275).

Shakespeare's drama is full of the carnival laughter occasioned by inversion of social order through carnival characters subverting dominant ideologies by their very existence. Fools and near-fools, Feste and Falstaff, become agents for Shakespeare's comic examination of our social condition. In addition, Shakespeare transposed traditional festive occasions on to the stage. By doing so, he was able to draw on their communal and individual associations, adding a new dramatic force to the theater.

## C. L. Barber

Bakhtin noted in the 1940's that "Renaissance literature still needs special study in the light of correctly understood popular-festive forms" (275). C.L. Barber's Shakespeare's Festive Comedy is just such a study of dramatic form and its relation to social custom. Barber's important work examines A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and Henry IV. Barber's work built upon Northrup Frye's A Natural Perspective, where he suggests that Shakespeare's comic structure parallels three phases of seasonal ritual: a winter of somber and gloomy preparation; a spring of license; and a summer of festivity. Perhaps aware of Bakhtin's suggestion and stimulated by Frye's perspectives, Barber examined Elizabethan holiday practices, noting that Shakespeare transferred "holiday" practices to the "everyday" of his theater. Shakespeare's comic form follows a pattern which organizes experience through an operation of "inversion, statement and counterstatement" (Barber 4). The basic structure of the comedies moves from the incorporation of holiday, through festive "release to clarification" of man's position in Nature (Barber 4).

The idyllic comedies achieve release by making the whole experience of the play like that of a revel where nature reigns. Clarification is achieved through a heightened awareness of the relation between man and nature.

The essential nature of man celebrated on holiday focused on seasonal and communal experiences of love, life, death, and renewal. These festive celebrations hinge on the Elizabethan understanding of the correspondences between man and nature. Central to this way of knowing was the belief that the human experience could be explained and understood by a close examination of nature.

Carnival, like the Dionysian festival, like Roman Saturnalia, celebrates human vitality, fertility, and love through springtime celebrations of seasonal renewal. Holiday festival incorporated into Shakespeare's comedies shows that love belongs to the springtime of the year as well as the springtime of our lives, and that we live and die in each moment. Comic release of festive mirth and laughter "reconciles feeling . . . to the clarification conveyed about nature's limitations" giving one an insight about the nature of human limits, about the possibilities of psychological and social renewal (Barber 10). The plays, like feasts of carnival, are characterized by a humor that puts holiday in perspective with life as a whole; not every day is holiday, yet holiday returns through the cycles of the year and through the plays themselves.

Barber's interpretation of holiday focuses on Shakespeare's translation of the folk festival from a social form into an artistic one. He notes that Shakespeare's pattern began with A Midsummer Night's Dream where the



dramatic epithalamium is expressed in the experience of the traditional summer holidays. Shakespeare's translation of the holiday custom onto the stage does not merely put "ritual on the scaffold," but reworks older traditions to gain an insight into the present:

In a self-conscious culture, the heritage of cult is kept alive by art which makes it relevant as a mode of perception and expression. The artist gives the ritual pattern aesthetic actuality by discovering expressions of it in the fragmentary and incomplete gestures of daily life. He fulfills these gestures by making them moments in the complete action which is the art form. The form finds meaning in life (Barber 15).

Shakespeare was writing at a moment when the educated class of society was absorbing, modifying, utilizing a ceremonial conception of life to create a newer, historical, psychological conception. Shakespeare's drama was an important agency in the transformation of the Elizabethan consciousness. His drama provided a "theater" where the inadequacies, "the failures of ceremony could be looked at in a place apart and understood as history; it provided new ways of representing relations between language and action so as to express personality" (Barber 15). Prior to the advent of Shakespeare's stage the common understanding of life, of the human condition was occasioned by ceremonial performance and festive release which were no longer valid. When ceremonial performances were incorporated on to the

stage it occasioned a radical new perspective on both the common condition and on the comedy.

Barber notes that "'Merry England' was merry chiefly by virtue of its community observances of periodic sports and feast days" (5). The pastimes of mirth

took form in morris-dances, sword-dances, wassailings, mock ceremonies of summer kings and queens and lords of misrule, mummings, disguisings, masques--and a bewildering variety of improvised speech, games, shows, and pageants (Barber 5).

Custom held that forms of merry making marked celebrations of marriage and wake, of Candlemas (the purification of Mary, 2 February), Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday), Hocktide (Monday and Tuesday after Easter), May Day (1 May), Whitsuntide (Pentecost), Midsummer Eve (the summer solstice, around 21 June), Harvest-home (celebrating the bringing in of the last load of the corn of the harvest), Halloween (31 October) and the twelve days of the Christmas season ending with Twelfth Night (6 January) (Barber 5). These sixteenth-century feasts were occasions of communal celebrations based on older saturnalian patterns of sanctioned misrule and freedom from restraint. This pattern and these occasions found their way into Shakespeare's art.

In noting the similarities between saturnalian and festive patterns, Barber comments that Shakespeare's comedy resembles the Old Comedies of Aristophanes rather than the

contemporary performances of Terence or Plautus that were in vogue throughout Europe in the 1600's. Like Aristophanes' comedies, Shakespeare's dramas affect the society by revealing discontinuities in the older festive patterns. His works gain structure and form through a reformulation of traditional patterns. The insights gained through these dramatic revelations and reformulations are not limited to the space of the theater. Thus, audience perspectives move out into the society.

Barber argues that Shakespeare's comedies are fueled by carnival impulse, by incorporation of rituals of misrule and pleasure into his drama. In a dramatic departure from ritual, Shakespeare's comedies present holiday magic as imagination, and games as expressive transforming gestures. Shakespeare captured customary festive release commonly associated with Saturnalia and brought it to the stage. By doing so he affirmed the human expression of carnival as a "paradoxical human need, problem and resource" (Barber 15). By inserting celebratory rituals and forms into the drama, Shakespeare affirms the popular traditions as a resource to be protected, translated, and fostered in the theater during the time when social patterns were changing.

The social practices of Elizabethan society evolved away from traditional festive patterns. Celebratory performances, merry-making worked within the older rhythms of the agricultural year and did not fit the urban lifestyle

and Puritan sensibilities rising in England during the 16th and early 17th centuries (Barber 16). The rising dichotomies contrasted city and rural lifestyles, puritan and more tolerant traditional religious views, the folk past and the classic revival, and the court and the rising classes. These oppositions created clashing contrasts within the society which resulted in a new historical consciousness.

It became possible for Elizabethans to experience a new sense of history because sections of the population were no longer united with the seasonal celebrations. Criticism of festival came from those who lost contact with the older experiences of nature's bounty and cyclical resurrection celebrated in agricultural and church feasts. The social divisions mirrored a change in perspective: a move from a communal understanding of the correspondences between man and nature to a more objective, distanced sense of individuation. The change in perspective could be seen in the dramatic absorption of holiday, misrule, and pageantry into the professional theater. When Shakespeare puts ceremonial pageantry, festive practices such as bringing in the bridal, and the Maypole on the stage he harnesses their social disruption to highlight ideological discrepancies. By doing so, "he makes comedy out of incongruity between make-believe and reality," by making "the language of the pageant figures themselves betray their dubious status"

(Barber 35). The comedy thus clarifies the limits of the competing world views, natural, theological, or political by butting them up against the natural preoccupations of life traditionally celebrated during holiday. The festive release ordinarily experienced through celebratory performances, misrule, feasts of inversion that were dramatic social developments of early Saturnalian practices came into their own "by virtue of the distinction between the stage and the world" (Barber 37). They were no longer "controlled" by the seasons or the church, the experiences were made available in a new form controlled by choice, Shakespeare's choice, the audience's choice. The Elizabethans were unsure of the distinctions between life and art, the stage and the world; they were making distinctions as ritual and celebratory practices were seen in a new light. When Shakespeare incorporated their social customs on to the stage, they gained a new type of consciousness, about themselves, about theater, about their changing social positions.

Barber's contribution to the understanding of social custom relates to the structure of Shakespeare's comedy. Barber catalogues its varied forms and suggests that the experience of Elizabethan holiday was first a release from normal patterns and social roles; Kings were made fools, and boys were made Bishops. The period of release culminated in a clarification of man's communal nature experienced as

feelings of solidarity and acknowledgement that "every day" cannot be "holiday." Further, Barber suggests that the roots of festive release can be found in Dionysian patterns, connecting Shakespeare with older conceptions of theatre as a social institution. Barber concludes that Shakespeare's comedy brings "a change of season" to the stage, signaling that a new dramatic form has replaced popular festive practices. Shakespeare's theater became the social institution that instigated, controlled, and ordered social change by replacing age-old rituals and celebratory practices. The theater and the drama became the event that enabled spectators to accept their common fate and experience a sense of renewal (Barber 86).

Robert Weimann

In Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater, Robert Weimann argues for the interrelation of Shakespeare's theater and society: the Elizabethan stage was "a potent force that helped to create the specific character and transitional nature" of the society (Weimann xii). While arguing for the essential social character of the Elizabethan drama, he argues against literary or formalist conceptions of dramatic structure that focus on poetics or reduce theater to a mere "reflection" of Elizabethan practices. In Weimann's view, literary criticism often degenerates into simplistic reductionism by focusing on a

single theme in the play without acknowledging that Shakespeare's plays are part of an immediate whole and the record of an historical moment. "It is only when Elizabethan society, theater, and language are seen as interrelated that the structure of Shakespeare's dramatic art emerges as fully functional--that is, as part of a larger, and not only literary, whole" (Weimann xii). Weimann argues for the value of productions that acknowledge the contemporary moment in history at the same time they reflect the fullness of the Elizabethan culture in which the plays are embedded.

As a way of offering the fullness of the Elizabethan culture in relation to the plays, Weimann's scholarly work examines the forms of dramatic speech that found their way into Shakespeare's plays from ritual, folk play, social custom, the mystery cycles, the moralities, and Elizabethan drama. Folk play, sport, mumming, and the evolution of extra-textual elements in the morality plays were vital elements in Shakespeare's drama. They provide associative links to the past by reminding audiences of past experiences of communal solidarity. These forms of dramatic speech embody the ability of language to maintain the past, through their traditional associations, while evolving toward the future by their changing contexts. The popular culture of the folk, the conventions of near-dramatic speech and action were fully developed forms of artistic expression which turn

into the effective conventions of dramatic speech and action in the Elizabethan theater. This process of change illustrates Weimann's dialectic of artistic continuity--Shakespeare's drama is not possible without his connections to the popular traditions. This same process of change illustrates artistic discontinuity--the popular stagecraft that Shakespeare incorporated into his plays were traditions that had reached their fullest potential. When Shakespeare used these popular dramatic conventions in his theater, he dramatized "a meaningful cultural past in the process of its present reawakening, assimilation and change" (xvii). Weimann asserts, "Shakespeare excelled as a playwright precisely because of his ability to relate the dramatic vitality of a still living past to the drama of contemporary life" (xvii).

Weimann explores Shakespeare's ability to relate the literary culture of humanism and the dramatic popular tradition that fused into the poetic drama of the English Renaissance. Weimann defines tradition as a social form of cultural activity--a dynamic, hence dialogic form of interchange. He notes that the source of Shakespeare's art, indeed his greatness, springs from a social center. He summarizes:

Wherever else the manifold elements of Shakespeare's greatness are to be found, it is here that one of the most essential springs of his creative power has its source--at a point in the development of culture and



literature that fostered a newly complex, but nonetheless balanced relationship between individual creativity and communal activities and traditions. From this arose the correlation that retained a contradiction between individual expression and communal taste (Weimann xvii).

This contradiction between "individual expression and communal taste" is in essence a statement noting difference, not an attempt at revolution, but an attempt to clarify.

Weimann argues that Shakespeare achieved dramatic clarifications through his particularly unified view which did not separate "the native theater" characterized by a unity of word and action from "humanist inspired poetry" (Weimann xviii). The assimilation of the "wholly disparate elements" of classical, courtly, popular, and humanist materials, both in language and dramatic themes, result in the "'mingle-mangle'" of which John Lyly spoke when he noted 'the whole worlde is become an Hodge-podge'8" (Weimann xviii). The "Hodge-podge" of Shakespeare's drama is a result of the assimilation of popular forms of dramatic presentation that were available to him in the fluid Elizabethan society.

Weimann traces the continuities and discontinuities in dramatic forms and their functions beginning with the dramatic roots of Dionysian ritual and mime, through the elements of the folk play and social custom, to the mystery cycles, the morality plays, *commedia del'arte* and popular interludes. He charts popular dramatic traditions as they

develop in response to social demands. Shakespeare's theater, according to Weimann's argument, cannot be understood by looking at verbal structures of the isolated dramatic texts, but must be seen in the "dialectical relationship between the theater and verbal art and their functions in society" (Wiemann 245). Further, Wiemann notes that

In Shakespeare the poetic and the theatrical interact; but their interaction is so effective and comprehensive because it reflects the needs and possibilities of a society that for the first time in history brought forth a hitherto unknown variety of social relationships and, with it, that unique wealth of conflict and contrast that characterizes the social context and the dramatic quality of the popular tradition in the Renaissance theater (Weimann 245).

The Elizabethan clown is the representative figure of self-embodiment, the character in whom the age-old contradiction between actor and role survived into Elizabethan society. Like the mimus, the clown expressed the "tension between imitation and expression, between representation and self-realization" that was explored in Shakespeare's plays (Weimann 245). Although the full dramatic scope of Shakespearean multi-dimensionality would have been impossible without the deeply rooted contradictions of the Elizabethan social order, the complementary perspective provided by the mimetic tradition was derived from the popular theater. The clown became the "potent connection between a highly transitional social

structure and the rapidly changing dialectic" (Wiemann 245). Wiemann notes that the clown bridged the gap between the "representation of society and the self-expression of its agents in the theater" (246). The figure of the clown stands in and out of the comedies, at the border where play and imagination thrust itself into the everyday, making the clown the unique means to clarification and the moderator of a communal experience that extends beyond the stage.

Weimann asserts that Shakespeare's drama became the site of a total aesthetic and social unity which moved beyond the cultural dialogue between humanism and customary practice, and beyond the language that characterized either the thought and forms of the rising humanist discourse or those of popular ceremonial traditions (250). Shakespeare's Renaissance style which intentionally moves beyond tradition, involves "history as well as a mode of dramaturgy" (Wiemann 250). As a poet Shakespeare dramatically contrasted the humanist conventions in language and ideology with the more natural expressions and folkways of popular culture in his dramas. In his plays, he contrasted and evaluated the ideals of "service and individualism, honor and property, sophistication and simplicity, cynicism and naivety" (Weimann 251). In an age of conventions and linguistic warfare, Shakespeare responded with the naturalism inherent in the "fully developed techniques and values of a popular theater" (Weimann 251).

It was the popular dramatic traditions which provided the basis for the humanizing quality of Shakespeare's plays, whereby "experience and vision, the image of reality and the consciousness of the imagination were related without loss to each other" (Weimann 252). The humanizing quality of this contrast contributes to Shakespeare's universalizing pattern.

Weimann concludes that Shakespeare's aesthetic reflected the rising consciousness of both the "congruity and the incongruity between the 'mimesis' of society and the expression, no longer the embodiment, of self" (252). Shakespeare's dramas then provide us with a particular aesthetic and linguistic expression of this change in Elizabethan perception.

#### Edward Berry

Like Robert Weimann, Edward Berry associates Shakespeare's drama with the rise and change in Elizabethan consciousness due to new perceptions of society and self. In Shakespeare's Comic Rites, Berry argues that Shakespeare's romantic comedies are structured on patterns of individual initiation which are rituals that define the individual in relation to the society. In The Taming of the Shrew, The Comedy of Errors, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night Shakespeare

uses patterns of initiation to structure the characters and the dramatic action of the plays. Characters in these comedies gain individual and psychological insight by overcoming internal barriers.

These romantic comedies chart the course of "pairs of lovers through courtship to marriage" as they move from one social identity to another (1). Drawing on Arnold van Gennep's anthropological analysis, Berry notes that Shakespeare's lovers, like the initiates in primitive societies, progress through three stages. First, initiates experience a stage of separation. Second, there is a transitional stage where old identities are destroyed or somehow changed, followed by the creation of a new identity. As they move to the third stage of initiation, the young people are reintegrated into society through a ritual ceremony.

Berry documents the Elizabethan practice of sending their children away for years of study, apprenticeship in the guilds, or household service when they were about ten or eleven. This preparation for adulthood ended when they mastered their tasks which usually meant full participation in society and culminated in the rites of marriage. Berry notes that initiation rites mimic the rites of carnival where the ritual movement is dynamic and progressive, occasioning a breakdown of order that creates the "conditions for a more perfect kind of integration" (13).

The aim of initiation rites, marriage rites, is a meaningful change in status for the individuals taking on new roles and for the society that changes with the addition of new members. When Shakespeare appropriated these initiation patterns in his drama he was drawing on a widespread human experience, which Berry argues is an essential factor in Shakespeare's universal appeal.

In rites of passage there is true anxiety in the transitional stage where characters or initiates experience themselves in the chaos of older and newer forms of being or understanding. As opposed to a cyclical return, the pattern of initiatory rites celebrates a single event which results in a permanent change in status. In the comedies this is mirrored as the lovers emerge from an adolescence and romantic love through trials and wanderings to a formalizing of their adult role through marriage. The hopeful expressions that end the plays incorporate Elizabethan social patterns that illuminate the distinctly ritual structure of the romantic comedies that Weimann traced in the popular traditions of the theater. Berry notes that the ritual structure of Shakespeare's comedies is found in many of the rites, customs, and conventions which mark Elizabethan movements from adolescence to adulthood commonly celebrated in customary forms of courtship and marriage.

Berry defines ritual as "an aspect of standardized behavior that serves at least one of the following

functions--expression, communication, and transformation" (20). Ritualism was a part of Elizabethan cultural consciousness, every aspect of daily life was filled with ritual significance. Ceremony accompanied state, church, communal, and individual practices. The year was ordered by the seasons, the agricultural cycles, customary feasts, and the Church year. Daily life was also circumscribed by hierarchical attitudes that were "enforced by custom in the family" and by "guild regulation and law in public" (22). Courtship and marriage were accompanied by elaborate folk customs, as well as civic and church rituals.

Berry looks behind these customs to argue that Shakespeare gave comic form to these elaborate ceremonies by responding to pre-existing comic conventions and ritual tendencies. He notes, "Shakespeare created a pattern distinctively his own, but one in which his age could recognize a displaced and refined image of itself. Such an art combines the mirror and the lamp" (31). Again the point of agreement between Weimann, Barber, Bakhtin, and Berry focuses on Shakespeare's genius in refashioning the popular traditions for the stage, mirroring the unique moment in time while contributing to the construction of the future through his art.

Part of the aesthetic experience of Shakespeare's comedies is that they draw attention to themselves as dramatic play by creating a heightened awareness of the

limits of marriage, idealism, imagination, and the art of theater itself. One of the ways that the plays draw attention to these limits is in the convention of closing a comedy with a song and dance. Berry notes that when Shakespeare's romantic comedies end with the celebration of marriage by an entertainment, the audience experiences a break in the dramatic illusion. Through the inclusion of the dance, song, or ceremonial performance, Shakespeare includes the players and the audience as participants in the same staged event. As a result of this comic communion, the audience gains an increased awareness that "the experience of love," as seen in the play, "like the experience of art, depends upon a disciplined imagination, a willingness to believe and disbelieve at the same time" (Berry 196). As the gap between the actors and the audience closes, all are caught up in a distinct awareness of the constructed, conventional nature of both art and life.

The intimacy between actors and audience produced by recognizable ritual ceremonies end the play, not on a clarification and resolution of the opposing forces of holiday and everyday, but in a moment of comic catharsis. The audience experiences "not only the delight that arises from comic communion but the detachment that accompanies our awareness of its incompleteness and fragility" (Berry 197). Berry argues that this catharsis results in a recognition of the wide gap that exists between the festive occasion that



celebrates ideal love, ideal marriage, transcendent union, and the human reality. The experience of catharsis and recognition of the gap generate inescapable ironies, which point to the discrepancies between what is hoped for and what is possible in love. Thus part of the aesthetic enjoyment of the comedies lies in the fact that they fulfill two strong human desires--"for perfection and for truth. They offer no golden worlds, merely hopeful ones, enclosed in gestures of affection" (Berry 197). By ending the romantic comedies with the moment of comic communion, Shakespeare acts to incorporate the green world into human experience of every age that recognizes festive ceremony.

Berry suggests that Shakespeare's comic vision contributed to the change in marriage practices from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century when love became "increasingly important as a basis for marriage and the right of choice of a partner increasingly available" (31). By contributing to the poetry and drama that celebrated a romantic conception of marriage, Shakespeare developed the myth of romantic marriage that survives today. This cultural value is one of the continuities of Shakespeare's drama. The universal patterns of initiation, of seasonal renewal, and ritualistic understanding of symbol are also part of the continuities that enrich contemporary experiences of Shakespeare.

Berry notes that no one schema will ever unlock Shakespeare: "To apprehend this pattern is not to comprehend Shakespearean comedy; the form is too rich and varied" (32). Although we may discover connections between contemporary culture and the meaning that the Elizabethans made out of plays as experiences of communal solidarity or as mirrors of individual psychological barriers, the richness of Shakespeare's aesthetic is tied to an underlying dramatic form; the form unites "uniqueness and universality," the play and the world, imagination and experience, individual needs and social rules, the carnivalesque and the established order (32). Shakespeare's genius comprehends the whole of the human existential condition in a moment of rapid change. His romantic comedies capture the essence of the past by incorporating carnival rhythms, rituals, and popular traditions into the theater. His plays dramatize social and individual contrasts and as such they become vehicles for a new self-consciousness. The richness of the aesthetic experience created by Shakespeare's whole drama is achieved because he gave expression to the human paradox in a voice that falls in a familiar pattern.

Michael Bristol

Michael Bristol, in Carnival and Theater is interested in the structure of authority, and how the carnivalesque merged in Shakespeare's plays to create the dynamic social

institution of the Elizabethan theater. He probes Shakespeare's plays for textual evidence of the carnival's double-life. His argument hinges on the tradition of carnival eruptions to bury, revise, and revive forms of social authority.

For Bristol, carnival celebrations, their ritual forms and residual modes of expression, carry with them a capacity for creativity and were recognized primarily as actions interrupting official order. This understanding of the fundamental nature of the carnival contrasts with Barber's thesis that the principal effect is solidarity reached by the clarification of our human condition. Bristol argues that popular forms of carnival authority, power, and social institution-making, were ever-present factors in the folk culture. In a departure from the positions of Berry, Weimann, and Barber who examine the popular festive tradition for the purpose of clarifying the structure and form of the romantic comedies, Bristol examines Shakespeare's drama for textual evidence of popular festive forms; he argues that the popular culture had forms of authority that were distinctly carnivalesque, and not usurped by the elite.

Bristol is interested in the political critique of the Elizabethan society that is performed through the expressions of festive misrule incorporated by the Elizabethan theater. According to Bristol, the dramatic

forms of misrule incorporated by Shakespeare's theater critique the existing social and political institutions through a twofold process. First, the negative critique is provided by the carnival demystification or "uncrowning" of power with its accompanying ideology and forms of domination. Second, the positive critique is the festive, or celebratory aspects of the folk that articulate "the capacity of popular culture to resist penetration and control by the power structure" (Bristol 4). When performance traditions, festive life, play, mime, and theatrical spectacle were transferred to the Elizabethan stage, the social purposes of festive tradition, the enjoyment of communal solidarity and neighborly reconciliation transferred with them. The Elizabethan playhouse "must be considered a politically significant 'mise-en-scene,' where the energy and initiative of collective life are forcefully manifested in texts, in performance convention, and in the reception and appreciation of theatrical spectacle" (Bristol 5). The Elizabethan playhouse, Shakespeare's plays, draw to themselves the power for social change that was traditionally reserved for festive misrule. Bristol sees in Shakespeare's incorporation of the carnivalesque, a theater that resists the dominant cultural forms.

Bristol argues for historicizing Shakespeare's plays as a way to reveal the dynamics of carnival and theatre that

were inherent in Elizabethan productions. A historical playing of the works requires a "recognition and recuperation of their initially uncanonical literary and social status" (8). The task becomes one of differentiation, separating the play from pre-existing cultural ideologies. By playing the old works historically their "shape emerges as an old shape" reflecting the impermanence of older ways of life and current social and political conditions (9). The texts, when played historically, uncover the complexity of Shakespeare's vision. When productions rely on one interpretive metaphor or remain influenced by cultural preconceptions they never attain the richness Shakespeare intended.

Examining the plays from this historical perspective, Brecht has noted that Elizabethan dramatists were engaged in "'global experiments' testing social possibilities and mimetically working through abrasive social conflicts" (9). Bristol argues individual and group conflict were very much a part of the early Elizabethan social scene. The conflict is reflected in the art of the time, and Bristol's Marxist interpretation makes explicit that struggle and difference are a constant feature in all periods of history and are reflected in the material production of literature, the site of "active and partisan ideological contestation" (20).

Part of the ideological conflict is carried out through carnival practices in the Elizabethan theater. Bristol

views carnival as an experience with social and anti-social tendencies. Ritual celebrations of carnival periodically renewed social harmony by an intensification of the collective experience; the anti-social tendency of festive misrule is acted out in the language and acts of social protest and the "displacement of the sacred" by pragmatic and political concerns (25). Festive celebrations combined both non-ritual theatrical performance and unplanned, contingent outbreaks of misrule. Bristol notes that riots and social forms of lawlessness were reinforced by carnival traditions in a society. The participants in these acts of violence "often act in accordance with a familiar script" based on experience of holiday release which provides "the actors with a socially derived text which provides form, purpose and narrative resolution to the crisis" (38). Bristol argues that during the sixteenth-century, conflict between the official and the popular culture coexisted with the ritual element of social integration. The expanded sense of the social function of festivity took as a model the forms of festive life available for "appropriation to particular social and political purposes" during Shakespeare's era (39).

Bristol concludes that during the season of carnival, the popular culture appropriated authority that was generally reserved for the official culture. One might say that the popular festive cycles of misrule erupted into the

ordinary time regulated by state and church. Bristol argues that the alternating dialogue between the festive cycles and ordinary time found expression in the war between Carnival and Lent. Bristol argues that cyclical discontinuity and festive disruption acted as an ordering principle, a political force that regulated social norms both within and between the collective society and the ruling elite in Elizabethan England. Thus, when Shakespeare appropriates festive practice, carnival structures, forms, and language into his plays, his theater becomes the institution that incorporates the "festive agon" normally associated with Carnival. As such, Shakespeare's theater became the site where the ethos of the collective life was "sustained and experimentally renewed" (Bristol, 213).

Like Barber, Bristol hears echoes of Greek Old Theater traditions in the social institution of the Elizabethan theater. Bristol notes how the points of contact between the common people and the elite contribute to the dynamic of Shakespeare's theater--the structure and form of the plays themselves dramatize the give and take that characterized the structuring of authority. The social structure of authority is based on an application of carnival practices to the social and political scene. Bristol defines carnival as a general "refusal to understand any fixed and final allocation of authority. It is--equally a refusal to understand any fixed and final allocation of social wealth"

that is based on any "uncontestable natural order" (213). This refusal arises from the popular knowledge that recognizes the validity of other ways of knowing which arises from the vocabulary and experience of "social and collective life" (213). Bristol concludes that

Clowning, devilment, abusive and summary popular justice, hospitality and entertainment, and the deployment of Carnival artifacts such as masks and giants, are the tactical instruments of a resourceful collectivity with an active and independent will to sustain itself. (213)

As Shakespeare's theater is derived from carnival expressions in the popular culture, it provides a pre-existing site for preservation of the carnival tradition which serves to check the nation-state as the institutional form of authority. Carnival expression inserts into the society a resistance to any tendency to "absolutize authority" or "radicalize social life" by powerful ruling elites by an assertion of communal "knowledge" in the face of elite education. Bristol notes the purpose of popular resistance seen in Shakespeare's play is the protection of collective life. The carnival viewpoint is predicated on the idea that society itself will "sustain each of its members," an assertion that challenges the agenda of the ruling elite (213).



### Three Productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream

But my interest in any form of art is (sic) nothing to do with culture; that doesn't mean anything to me, either. What interests me is that there are channels through which we can come into contact for a limited time with a more intense reality, with heightened perceptions. Therefore, Shakespeare to me doesn't belong to the past. If his material is real, it is real now.

Peter Brook Interview. On Directing Shakespeare by Ralph Berry, 150

### Cultural Traditions and the Productions

C.L. Barber notes that Shakespeare was writing at a moment when the educated elite were absorbing, modifying, and utilizing the older ceremonial conception of life to create a historical, psychological conception (15). Barber comments:

In a self-conscious culture, the heritage of cult is kept alive by art which makes it relevant as a mode of perception and expression. The artist gives the ritual pattern aesthetic actuality by discovering expressions of it in the fragmentary and incomplete gestures of daily life. He fulfills these gestures by making them moments in the complete action which is the art form. The form finds meaning in life (15).

Popular ceremonial performance, games, holiday entertainments were the channels by which the older heritage of festive celebration found their way into Shakespeare's plays; the impulses of seasonal renewal which had been celebrated in ceremonial performances remained an essential human experience. The "fragmentary and incomplete gestures

of daily life" which Barber alludes to are experiences of birth, death, marriage, as well as social and customary practices. They seem fragmentary and incomplete because it is difficult to see them objectively. Subjective perceptions are enhanced by art. Shakespeare arranges these individual and social fragments in his plays. Thus mimicking life, he creates art that heightens individual perceptions.

For A Midsummer Night's Dream Shakespeare created his own troop of fairies, not quite classical yet not quite common. Beyond mimicking life, Shakespeare followed the dramatic tradition of transforming social practices to suit his own purposes. One could ask, what are Shakespeare's fairies? Are they dramatic personifications like Vice and Mercie in the morality plays? What "life-fragment" do they represent? Perhaps as Peter Brook notes, fairies suggest our "living values," our active and independent will to sustain ourselves (Directing 151). Shakespeare intentionally weaves older practices, stories, and dramatic conventions into his plays because he and his society were especially alert to human patterns of creating new meanings out of old. Insights, knowledge and change can only arise from what is already present. The incorporation of carnival and holiday practices is essential to his plays because they are essential human expressions of our common experiences in life--birth, death, renewal.

In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare creates an imaginative dream space and explores the underlayers of human impulse, human passion, in ceremonial terms. Elizabethans understood the power of ceremonial language, ritual and performance to touch and interpret the human experience. Shakespeare's play gives voice to his cultural understanding of the relationship between passion and love, society and the individual, and the ability of language and art to voice those experiences we apprehend but do not yet comprehend. By translating celebratory practices and the language of the folk into his plays Shakespeare kept alive the dialectic way of knowing that was age-old. Carnival affected society by providing a check on official power, official ideology and official language by inversion and disclosure of their conventional nature.

Carnival is at the heart of Shakespeare's form and meaning in A Midsummer Night's Dream. By comparing three productions of the play one gets a better sense of how the carnivalesque contributes to contemporary experience of the play in much the same way as it did for Elizabethan audiences. By looking at the productions of Max Reinhardt, Peter Hall, and Joseph Papp one gains a better understanding of how the festive dynamic contributes to individual productions of the play.

The Max Reinhardt production of the play was filmed by Warner Brothers in 1935. It is vintage Hollywood,

reminiscent of nineteen thirties musicals with an all-star cast: Olivia de Havilland, Jean Muir, Dick Powell, Jimmy Cagney, Joe E. Brown, Mickey Rooney. The production alternates between the burlesque of the Athenians and the darker lyrics of the wood. Peter Hall used the Royal Shakespeare Company when producing his 1969 version of the "Dream." This interpretation stars Ian Richardson as Oberon, Judi Dench as Titania, Diana Rigg as Helena, Helen Mirren as Hermia, and Paul Rogers as Bottom. Here we note how carnivalesque works by inversion, providing a critique of existing conventions. The Hall "Dream," because of its faithful rendition of the text, conducts an expose of the nature of authority and the power of Shakespeare's language to integrate dreams and reality. In contrast to the classic Hall production, Joseph Papp stages his 1982 "Dream" in New York's Central Park with William Hurt as Oberon and Jeffrey DeMann as Bottom. The production is video-taped and opens with long shots of the audience, the park and the stage. It provides a peek at the tendency of Elizabethan plays to not only mirror festive practices, but to become festive events. The bawdy thrust of the production makes it the most accessible of the three, emphasizing how broad comedy, burlesque, satire, and parody can expose priggish convention, romantic idealism, and self deception.

### The Max Reinhardt Production

Max Reinhardt's 1935 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream is first and last a spectacular performance, a combination of Hollywood splash and European theatrical tradition. His illusionistic film frames Athens and the court with massive pillars, and art deco ornament; it enwraps the wood in darkly spangled gauze. His set designs heighten our sense of "play" and theater drawing our attention to the relationship between art and life; at the same time they foreshadow the film's highly stylized exploration of imagination and art through the agency of language and ritual to order individual human impulses and society.

E. K. Chambers, Harold Brooks and others speculate that A Midsummer Night's Dream was composed during the winter of 1595 to celebrate the marriage of Elizabeth Carey and Thomas, the son of Henry, Lord Berkeley, on February 19, 1596 (Brooks, lvi). Following the custom of celebrating marriage with entertainments, the play does more than celebrate a marriage, it is an incorporation of the festive ritual into dramatic form. C.L. Barber notes that in creating this "dramatic epithalamium, Shakespeare expressed with full imaginative resonance the experience of the traditional summer holidays" (11). The Reinhardt production captures the sense of pageantry and aristocratic entertainment that characterized Renaissance celebratory

performances at the same time it remembers midsummer customs. Reinhardt's spectacular production numbers and the use of carts, Oberon's wagons, and floats, the passage of hoards following Oberon and Theseus recall the medieval pageantry of this production.

The roles of men as rulers and women as subjects controls both the world of the Dream and the world of Athens. Men and women thrust and parry, but it is Oberon who controls the match, punishing Titania because "she has a lovely boy stolen from the King," applying potent magic charms, dominating the shrieking Puck, drawing the lovers into the wood, and triumphing over Nature by sheer will-power. Reinhardt's Oberon is the King of Shadows. His batmen-minions are shadows of himself, ominous and threatening, seductive and beautiful, his psychological dark side. Because this potent Oberon stands at the center of the play (in direct contrast to Bottom), the changeling boy, Demetrius and Lysander, and Theseus appear as characters representative of the journey to manhood. The changeling boy becomes Oberon's squire, sharing his horned headdress, riding his black stallion; he is a novice, learning the ways of men. Demetrius and Lysander are first seen as soldiers in Theseus' army, edging their way to full manhood against the aging Egeus and the law. Reinhardt's production draws attention to the predicament of young men, caught between "duty and desire." Demetrius is willing to play the mating

game for gain because he has indulged his desire; Lysander plays for love, and must be brought to some understanding of the responsibilities of adult love. Both young men are further in their initiation than the changeling boy, and their shenanigans in the wood seem like a final teenage romp. Theseus seems an Athenian shadow of Oberon, conquering, yet full of marriage plans designed to channel virility with ritualized conventions. And Bottom? Bottom and the players represent Shakespeare's folk men, actors on the stage of life, unconscious yet fully functioning, they provide the "low" contrast to Theseus' "high" and Oberon's unbridled power. In a typically Shakespearean move, Bottom becomes the catalyst who enacts, who bespeaks the "most rare vision" that stands at the center of the play.

On the other hand, the women in this film seem to be shadows of the same woman, the vanquished madonna. In a provocative production switch, it is Hippolyta not Titania, who is the most vital female character. The shimmering Titania resembles Glenda the Good, all tinkle and girlish charm. Hippolyta wears the snake coiled around her Renaissance dress, and in a double-image, Hermia cries out from her dream that a "serpent" ate her heart away; the women are encoiled by their rising sexuality. Helena and Titania on the other hand, are receptive to their own sexuality and the men that "draw" them; Lysander has already "won Helena's soul"; she "dotes in idolatry" because

she is already seduced. Titania becomes a sleeping victim of Oberon's magic powers, becoming a fool for an ass. If any manifestation of the "triple Hecate," this Titania is the moon goddess Artemis associated with fertility, but it is Hippolyta who suggests Diana, the huntress. Titania is the Queen of the Fairies to Oberon's King of Shadows, and while this suggests their relationship is that of a couple, she seems untouched by any sexual drive of her own. In this production, the character of Titania mirrors Shakespeare's Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. Titania's punishment, marriage to a beast, seems reprehensible, a comment on Elizabeth's statement that England alone would be her husband. Here the relationship between art and political commentary is especially visible.

Reinhardt's production resembles a dream of dionysian enchantment where myth and medieval dramatic traditions meld with contemporary actors and film imagery to involve the audience in an experience that is as unsettling as it is entertaining. Like medieval audiences who recognized their neighbors as Mercie, Myscheff, and Age, the casting of major Hollywood stars as the principal players creates much of the same experience. Joe E. Brown as Flute, Hugh Herbert as Snout, James Cagney as Bottom are actors rooted in circus, vaudeville and burlesque. As popular vaudevillians, their casting as the rustics in film of A Midsummer Night's Dream is the kind of theatrical doubleness that Shakespeare would



recognize. Reinhardt's grasp of Shakespeare's underlying carnival structure shows up in details like this where he elaborates and builds upon Shakespeare's own aesthetic principles. The film, like Shakespeare's play, is about the interpenetration of art and society, of the play and the people watching the play. Filmgoers share a moment with Elizabethan audiences when the actor of Bottom is Jimmy Cagney and the actor of Pyramus is Bottom when he dashes out of his role and addresses the wedding party.

The character of Robin Goodfellow was well-known in the early Renaissance. Robert Weimann in Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater notes that he was, like the fairies, a creature of the "lower mythology" who was nearly banished by the advent of new natural philosophies and reformation ideologies when Shakespeare created Puck (192-193). His very creation was a cross-fertilization of the general revival of interest in classical mythology and Shakespeare's knowledge of the "country devil" Robin Goodfellow. When Reinhardt cast the demon child-actor Mickey Rooney as Puck, he performed his own cross-fertilization. Reinhardt, following Shakespeare's own penchant for creating roles to fit his comic stars, gives us a Puck who takes on the characteristics of Rooney the child-actor-brat whose screaming, shrieking, mischief-making was a legend at Warner Brothers, who like Oberon, found him useful.

The Reinhardt version of A Midsummer Night's Dream was accompanied by Mendelssohn's 1843 score (Rothwell 191). The music and the singers, coupled with the dances of the fairies and Oberon's hoards replace the lyric cadences of Shakespeare's text. Music, song, and dance, like vaudeville, burlesque and circus performances have more than the touch of popular culture to them, especially in the 1930's when opera broadcasts were a regular feature of radio programs, and the ballet still the classic dance form. The music and dance changed from staged production numbers in the opening scenes to rather dark and troublesome sequences in the woods. The dwarfish musicians, midgets, evidence of "blots of nature" have been criticized as remnants from Disney's Silly Symphonies. Their appearance throughout the production reminds 1990's viewers that such blatant "sideshow" casting is no longer appropriate. This is an example of film's ability to chronicle practices that have changed over time, something that Shakespeare's plays constantly remind us of. As musicians their rather grotesque appearance lends a touch of medieval gargoyle to the comic theme, especially as the action moves further and further into the gothic woods.

Titania's shimmering fairies, and Oberon's vampire hoards according to Shakespeare, occupy a different space from the ghouls and devils of black magic. In Reinhardt's woods the fairies are distinctly feminine and seem, like

Titania, benign. Oberon's minions thrust and parry, and while they may not be medieval devils, they are potent. Reinhardt's creations are not strictly contained by Shakespeare's text, they are representations of sexual drives. In a contrast of dark and light, the erotic climax of Act IV occurs when Oberon's henchman, Night, woos Titania's Moonlight fairy. In an elaborate ballet, Moonlight attempts to escape Night, spinning further and further away from the fairy train. Forced into the corner, Night throws his cape over her effectively separating her from the others and overcomes her. The near-rape scene unleashes Oberon's triumph; he and his band overrun the fairies and their shadows pass over Helena and Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander presumably adding the nightmare of fear to their dreams of love. The scene draws its power from the combination of magical music, dance, revelry, and highly stylized eroticism, all characteristics of pagan ceremonial practices associated with May Day, Midsummer, and fertility rites. The psychological exploration of sexuality engendered by Freud is played out in the darker themes of vitality, force, and resistance. But they are recognizable in the film; they are personified by the fairies and Oberon's followers. Like Egeus, a personification of Age, Reinhardt again, utilizes the medieval dramatic traditions to move the drama forward.

Closing the scene in the woods with the ominous overshadowing of the lovers, Reinhardt moves to Bottom's radiant awakening. After the darkness of the forest, Cagney's voice comes as comic relief, breaking the tension. His hee-haw laughter frightens him until he sees his reflection in the stream. The contrasting scenes illustrate the carnival movement: before Oberon and Titania are reunited there is a moment of near-death, which is resolved in Bottom's reawakening, like the lovers themselves. Robert Weimann notes that Bottom's "most rare vision" speech makes possible the dramatic transition between the "fairy-tale world of Puck's popular mythology and the newly recovered ordinary world" of the lovers, the tinker and Athens (40). In this production, Cagney himself, as well as the language signals a comic turn of events. The audience in the movie house welcomes Cagney after Oberon with the same enthusiasm as the Athenians who cheer the marriages. Both look forward to an end of the darkness of the dream through the action of the play. When Pyramus and Thisbe take the screen, we're ready for the festive entertainment.

The play within the play is a unique glimpse at how traditional dramatic elements were incorporated into the professional theater. Shakespeare, familiar with the Mummers play which used inverted language patterns, dogs, and mimesis, has the character of Moonshine display all three. Reinhardt, with his cast of vaudevillians, doubles

the double nature of Shakespeare's original scene in language, casting, and audience recognition. When the pirouetting Joe E. Brown-Thisbe turns into the curtain to prepare the burgomask the audience is fully involved in the laughter, ready for more. When Reinhardt has Theseus, the court, and the lovers ascend the stairs, the audience is as bewildered as Cagney and his cohorts who are left alone. What statement could Reinhardt be making? He seems to be highlighting the separation of the classes, the "high" from the "low" which is a twist on C.L.Barber's idea of communal solidarity, and clarification of man's place in nature which arises from festive release. Is Reinhardt suggesting that this time-honored experience is no longer possible because the "high" is so removed in sensibility from the "low"? His ending calls attention to festive release by its absence from this production. If he is suggesting that communal solidarity is no longer possible because of pronounced class differences, he doesn't leave it there. In the Reinhardt production Puck, the irrepressible and unpredictable Rooney, delivers the epilogue and disappears into Theseus' bedroom, suggesting that nature itself disorders order and will surely renew all things in her topsy-turvy pattern.

#### The Peter Hall Production

The Reinhardt production takes an especially Freudian look at the themes of death and rebirth that are associated

with sexuality. The production achieves its aesthetic ends by interpreting Shakespeare's text through music, dance, and Hollywood extravaganza. The broadly comic vaudevillians and the overtly Hollywood court scenes are dramatically compared with Oberon's dark forest of dream accompanied by Mendelssohn's score and the corps de ballet. In contrast, the Peter Hall production is a distinctly theatrical rendition of A Midsummer Night's Dream where film techniques reinforce, rather than replace, the text.

Peter Hall, interviewed by Ralph Berry in On Directing Shakespeare, noted that Shakespeare's poetic language, like ritual language and song, is a form of organization, an "artificial means of shaping naturalistic behavior and speech . . . which enables us to deal with emotions and attitudes and responses" (209). Shakespeare practiced a style of prose, verse, and rhyme which served to help him translate life; a rhyming couplet signalling closure, an extra couplet signalling a question mark (On Directing 209). Hall notes that Shakespeare's drama was a "rhetorical form to wrap your tongue around; it was meant to be relished," and Hall makes use of every poetic nuance in his production of the play (209). Shakespeare's mix of festive language characterized by the rustics and his mastery of the poetic forms accounts for this production's vitality. Drawing on the medieval "cult of folly" with its focus on language inversions, Shakespeare mixed ceremonial speech, festive

speech, and classic poetic forms liberating language from familiar associations which revitalized theater, language, and Elizabethan society. In this production, dramatic language is the magic force which acts as the charm, the agency, for the interpenetration of the world of the dream and the world of Athens.

In Act I, Bottom closes the scene with a folk idiom "cut bowstrings," the exact meaning of which is lost, but which even contemporary audiences "get" because it is embedded in plain speech: "Enough. Hold or cut bowstrings" (1.1.102). The word "Bowstrings" is an example of a word which illustrates Brooks' observation that Shakespeare "created an enormous skein of interrelated words" which vibrate beyond a single usage within each play and within the thirty-nine plays he wrote (Berry 133). "Bowstrings," coming from Bottom, connects him, his class, and his language with Helena's allusion to the "boy love," in the play, to Cupid and his arrows which Oberon notes created the lovejuice. Bowstrings, Oberon, and lovejuice connect the world of the play with Elizabeth and the historic entertainments at Kenilworth in 1591 where Triton appeared upon a swimming mermaid (Brooks lxviii). "Bowstrings" resonates forward and backward, in and out of the text, illustrating how language can contain many meanings. This example shows how Shakespeare is intent on releasing language from strictly noble, classical, or even textual

connotation--Bottom is speaking this resonant word. He has access to language. And it is through language that the carnival inversions take place and reveal the conventional nature of all social order.

Michael Bristol notes how carnival language disrupts and questions the existing order. For Bristol, the conflicting voices in Shakespeare's text are "resourceful structures that function best in a **mise-en-scene** where they are traversed, or 'contaminated', by other 'texts' inscribed in the social life of the audience" (160). Bristol argues that popular festive forms and carnival language are concerned with "subverting or rupturing the integrity of literary structures in favor of a more immediate . . . interrogation of elementary political relationships" (160). Carnival language forces a dramatic text, such as the Hall "Dream," to speak up for "the interests of its own times" (160). Hall's production with its intense hold on the text, reproduces Shakespeare's interrogation of authority. Bottom's "bowstrings" initiates just such an inquiry that is explored by exposing the nature of social and individual agendas in love and marriage.

In Elizabethan society, marriage is a public matter of law and property. It is an institution which ensures the health and the continuity of the society as well as the health and happiness of the couple. Egeus' demands in this production introduce Elizabethan understandings about the



conflicting claims of individual desire and the communal need for stability in marriage. The same is true for the discord of the seasons, Oberon and Titania are creating disharmony on a universal scale. Conflict between men and women is personified in the relationship between Hippolyta, the Amazon Queen and Duke Theseus, the rational leader of that highly rhetorical society, Athens. In a society that saw marriage as a complex social institution, questions of marriage were too important to be settled by desire or romantic love (Bristol, 162).

Lysander, Hermia's desired suitor is rejected by her father, Egeus who favors Demetrius. Theseus reminds Hermia that her "father should be as a god"--it is her duty to obey him. If she does not, she must face death or enforced virginity (1.1.48). Since both suitors are wealthy, Egeus seems to be invoking the power of communal law to assert his authority over Hermia. From the point of view of the lovers, Egeus is misusing the law to arbitrarily assert his parental rights. From the point of view of the community, he is upholding important social traditions that ensure harmony and stability. By setting up this contrast in Act I, the Hall production enacts the rival values between self and community.

The full ambiguity of Shakespeare's text is complimented by Hall's directing. The play opens with no words at all; the credits roll over the scenes of the

natural world of England, suffering seasonal extremes. Shots alternate between rain, ice, snow, sunny meadows, fall leaves in dark ponds, and bright breezy summer skies. The silent "disharmonies of nature" are soon contrasted with the voices in this Athenian court. The camera lingers on the figure of Philostrate, Theseus' master of the revels, suggesting the pivotal place of revelry in the play at the same time it introduces the incongruity of a master of revels dressed in gray serge. From the shot of the cold Philostrate, the camera cuts quickly to the court where the voices of Hippolyta and Theseus barely murmur. The camera moves abruptly, focusing on Egeus' angry face as his words interrupt, galvanize, and command attention.

In a rigidly controlled exchange, Theseus' demeanor suggests that he and Egeus, the authorities, will exact the letter of the law against Hermia and Lysander. In a flat unemotional exchange, Theseus makes clear his stand against Hermia:

For you, fair Hermia, **look you arm yourself**  
 To fit your fancies to your father's will;  
 Or else the law of Athens **yields you up**  
**(Which by no means we can extenuate)**  
**To death, or to a vow of single life.**  
 (1.1.117-127, emphasis added)

Through the language and austerity of the sets, Hall suggests that a strict attention to order has sapped this court of spontaneity. This circumscribed society is as unresponsive to desire as it is to the power of language.

Our first impression is that Athens is as repressive as the emotions that never flicker across a face.

As the interchange between Egeus, Theseus, and Hermia is taking place, Helena is seen through the window. She appears like an Ophelia, drifting in the background at the moment Theseus admits that he has heard of her seduction by Demetrius. The incongruity here is between Demetrius' words of love for Hermia and his acts with Helena. This suggestion introduces the idea that words can reveal as well as hide the truth.

When Helena addresses the audience at the end of Act I, audiences focus on her face. This characteristic shot focuses one's attention on her words, the actual text of her speech. Hall's camera jumps from one angle to another as Helena reaches the ends of her lines, accenting the phrases of her speech: "Things base and vile, holding no quantity, Love can transpose to form and dignity: Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind," (1.1.233-234) and again, "So the boy Love is perjur'd everywhere" (1.1.240) and again at "But herein mean I to enrich my pain" (1.1. 250). Helena's words deceive her and the audience. Although she appears slightly mad, in her "doteage," she speaks wondrous sense (love looks with the mind). Yet, her actions betray the fact that young love looks with desire not reason. While Helena is reciting her last line, "To have his sight thither and back again" Hall's camera follows a bird, and in an

abrupt scene change, the bird vanishes, and the camera settles on the tableaux with Quince and his friends.

The rustic's language is again mirrored in Hall's filming techniques. Hall suggests through his camera, that the language of the rustics is full of natural vitality. This association is brought to bear throughout the production when Quince and the rustics are first seen in their earthy shed. Later in the wood the lovers in the wood get dirtier and dirtier as they journey on, suggesting that their "civilized" behaviors, signified by their clothing, are being worn down. The inference here is that by coming closer to the world of nature, the world of the earthy shed, will enable them to gain an insight into the nature of their love. In Quince's shed, the camera abandons its close-up method, and we note the whole scene. The shadowy darkness of the shed fills the frame and one hears Quince's stammering rendition of the mythic story, Pyramus and Thisbe, Bottom's bombast, and Snug's gentle prose. Quince's misplaced accents when reading, "Marry, our play is 'The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe,'" provide the audience with a needed laugh at the same time they prepare them for the parody of this "comical tragedie" which is carried out at the end of the play (1.2.11-12).

Brian Gibbons, in Shakespeare and Multiplicity, notes that Shakespeare accepted the "challenge of bringing both

Petrarchan love-idealism and romance-narrative home to the London audiences in direct, convincing terms" through the integration of the "vital elements of burlesque, mockery and parody" (207). These forms of carnival language were essential components in Shakespeare's dramatic presentation used as tools or forms "to prepare an audience's receptivity and to develop a dialectic in which an extreme ideal is confronted by rival energies, rival ideas, and rival senses of experience" (207). The voices of Quince, Bottom, and their friends are the voices Gibbons refers to when he notes that Shakespeare was determined to bring the themes of romantic love and Petrarchan idealism to his London audiences in "direct and convincing terms." The scene in Quince's shed parallels the scenes of Pyramus and Thisbe later in the play. The scenes in Act I provide comic relief from the legalistic prose of the court and the rhyming couplets of Hermia, Lysander and Helena, just as the scenes in Act II provide relief from the tense hours between dreaming of marriage and its actual consummation. The rustics close Act I with a riot of plain speech which provides both dramatic and real relief to the audience.

When Bottom awakes at the close of Act IV, the camera's lens focuses on his face which is bathed in such a bright light that his features fade with his radiance. His dream experience has been "beyond the wit of man to say," and Hall again uses film techniques to heighten the meaning of the

words. If individual senses cannot express his "rare vision," Bottom knows where to turn--to the song, to the ballad, to poetry. Like Shakespeare, Bottom is intent upon turning his experience of the dream into a work of art in order to express it, see it, understand it. When the lovers are discovered at the edge of the wood, it is morning. They are unsure of what happened, but are aware of a change in both individual and social status. Helena and Demetrius are restored to each other. Theseus, filled with the "nimble spirit of mirth" which for three days and nights has engaged him and Hippolyta in pre-marital celebration, overrules the law and grants Hermia to Lysander. Of course, as the world of Athens corresponds with the world of the Dream, it can be said that the reconciliation of Oberon and Titania is announced by Theseus' action. Theseus' perspective has been changed by his festive preparations for marriage, thus bringing his love relation to bear on the real world of Athens, an interpretation that is consistent with the action that follows.

Hall continues to work with images of candlelight, flame, and brightness to accent the theme of individual integration followed by social renewal. Theseus' conversation with Hippolyta about the nature of madmen, lovers, and poets takes place on the balcony, suggesting that he is in some liminal zone, not quite transformed. His tirade against madmen, poets and lovers is backlit with a

chandelier ablaze with candles. The camera changes to a close-up shot and the chandeliers become radiant as he articulates the part imagination plays in ordering our dreams, our perceptions:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;  
That is the madman: the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
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 (5.1.7-17).

Theseus begins to grasp the "great constancy" of the lovers story by having gained a bit of their clarification for himself. As the scene advances, Theseus overturns pale Philostrate's recommendations for entertainment, and in a generous and expansive gesture suggests that the rustic's play, which he assumes is given out of a modest sense of "fearful duty" is to be preferred over empty pomp. Theseus' words bespeak his mood. He is inclined to love: "Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity/In least speak most, to my capacity." Theseus mimics Bottom in "tongue-tied" verse, preparing the audience for the realization that Pyramus and Thisbe is more than a burlesque "comical tragedie"; it is the ceremonial performance that connects the court of Athens with the lovers' experience in the forest. Through the shared experience of the play, the

interchange of banter between the audience and the players, the applause engendered by Bottom's astonishing grasp of alliteration, and the riotous laughter (which Hall's theater audiences share) the barriers between the world of the dream and the world of Athens are broken. At the end of the performance, when the court and the lovers clap in time with the rustics burgomask, there is no barrier between the worlds (Jorgens 258).

Hall films Puck's final epilogue with a close-up shot of his round, slightly green face while his red lips enunciate:

If we shadows have offended,  
 Think but this, and all is mended,  
 That you have but slumber'd here  
 While these visions did appear.  
 And this weak and idle theme,  
 No more yielding but a dream,  
 Gentles, do not reprehend:  
 If you pardon, we will mend.  
 And, as I am an honest Puck,  
 If we have unearned luck  
 Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue  
 We will make amends ere long;  
 Else the Puck a liar call.  
 So, goodnight unto you all.  
 Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
 And Robin shall restore amends (5.5.409-424).

Puck's final words are hypnotic. They recall nursery rhymes and magic incantations even to contemporary audiences. The age-old tradition of the clown standing between two worlds, addressing the audience is maintained and reinterpreted in the Hall production through a cinematic technique. When



Puck recites his lines the screen is dark. The moment it ends, he claps his hands (applauds himself), literally withdrawing the friendly invitation he just gave to the audience. At the same moment, the screen is flooded with light and the play ends with a shot of the grey manor house in a renewed spring. Hall startles us out of the reverie induced by Puck's words, induced by the end of the play, yet with a clap of his hands, Puck restores us to reality, daylight, the manor house, the end of the play, and initiates the audiences' return to daily life. Here again the film techniques are congruent with Shakespeare's words, and, although we are far from Elizabethan sensibilities, the dramatic effect is the same.

Hall's attention to Shakespeare's text, supplemented by his close-up camera work, give audiences a unique experience of the fullness of Shakespeare's art enhanced by film techniques. Hall's *Pyramus and Thisbe* demonstrates Shakespeare's command of popular dramatic traditions, as well as his understanding of the effects of ceremonial performance. The play within the play captures our imagination in the same way it captures that of Theseus' court. It rivets our attention on the players who are the festive catalysts for the whole of Shakespeare's play and our contemporary experience of it.

### The Joseph Papp Production

The Joseph Papp production of A Midsummer Night's Dream is a recording of the 1982 stage play in New York City's Central Park. This innovative production surpasses both the Reinhardt and the Hall plays in capturing the festive experience of the Elizabethan theater by drawing attention to the play as an imaginative game, a festive sport, designed to "frame the mind to mirth" (Barber 12). This production captures the correspondence between the contemporary festive occasion (the play given on a warm summer night in New York City) and the performance of the play itself (a celebration of individual and social renewal). This important correspondence captures some of the Elizabethan experience of the play for contemporary audiences. A Midsummer Night's Dream, probably written as a celebratory performance for a royal marriage feast, corresponded to the feast itself in theme and movement. Hence both audiences experience the holiday occasion of the play, recognizing that the comedy offers a "parallel manifestation" of a way of coping with life through laughter that simultaneously disarms and reveals (Barber 6).

Laughter is Bakhtin's "voice of the people," and laughter in the Papp production abounds (Bakhtin 11). The release provided by this production makes the whole of the play like a revel. This effect is achieved through a near burlesque treatment of sexuality under the guise of romantic

young love. The play works its dramatic effects by an overt attention to audience: the court audience in Athens, the audience of Oberon and Puck in the wood, the fairies who watch Titania and Bottom, the servants, noblemen and women and the Central Park audience who together enjoy Pyramus and Thisbe. In the opening scenes, Papp's camera often swings through the crowd in Central Park before settling on the stage. In one scene, Oberon announces "I am invisible," sits down under a tree like the ones that overhang the audience in the park, scrutinizes Helena and Demetrius while they argue. His observation of the pair turns comic when he hands Helena her purse as she prepares to scramble after Demetrius. She takes the purse, raises her eyebrows at the audience, and continues her soliloquy without dropping a syllable. Scenes such as this underscore this production's comment on the power of theater to reach in and mysteriously effect action. Papp's focus on the audience both in and out of the play, creates a certain self-conscious awareness of the nature of "play," engendering comparisons between the play, life, and the evening's entertainment.

Like all exciting games, this production has an element of risk, a darker side. The Papp fairies are reminiscent of Jan Kott's sniffing, lascivious imps; they speak in shared voices, disorienting the audience, creating an ambiguous wood where all is not quite as it seems. Puck, like his fairy comrades, can throw his voice, using his skill to lead

Lysander and Demetrius "Up and down, up and down" in the wood (3.2.396). The Papp Puck is an androgynous antic imp, not immune to Oberon's psychic torture. Oberon, played by William Hurt, seems hardly civilized; dressed like a neo-caveman, he can hardly speak, suggesting his barely restrained potency. Titania is not immune from her animal nature; Michele Shay plays her as a wanton queen in heat, consumed by a passion for both her vot'ress, her changeling boy, and Bottom. When the fairies cover the copulating pair, they settle in with a satisfied smile, spreading their skirts, scratching and sniffing like contented beasts. The wood is dangerous. Because of the suggestion of potency associated with this liminal dream space, violence is near the surface, suggesting that passions need some rational, perhaps even imaginative control to satisfy human needs.

In this production Papp has given distinct and vibrant personalities to the characters who travel in and out of the wood. Quince, Bottom, and the rustics are played as New York hard-hats. They carry lunch buckets, punctuate their speech with superstitious gestures, and seem hard-working good guys. Helena is a fastidious Southern belle, who is not above chasing after her man, using her sharp wit, or her purse to defend herself. Papp's Hermia, is a strident Midwesterner, a no-nonsense woman who prefers to "see" with her good sense, rather than believe her eyes, or her

experience. Demetrius and Lysander are played as fraternity men given to brawling, arguing, and mauling women.

Here too, the seasons are out of joint because of jealousy over each partners' advancing wantonness. The changeling boy becomes the issue over which the Fair Queen and her Oberon split. Papp's changeling boy is a gleeful child who romps across the park-stage with wild abandon, creating an instant sympathy between the audience and the play. In this production there is also a hint of bi-sexuality in Titania. Her love of the vot'ress has made her a mother, and as such she prefers her adopted son over her husband, Oberon, and like many mothers she is loathe to see his childhood end. The question of initiation into manhood, as well as Oedipal concerns are hinted at in the opening exchange between Titania and Oberon. When Titania spurns his request for the boy, Shay's accent of the "my" in her speech nuances her assertion of her individual power as a woman, a mother, and a queen which revolve around Shay's highly accented phrase "**my order**":

Set your heart at rest:  
 The fairly land buys not the child of me.  
 His mother was a votress of **my order**;  
 And in the spiced Indian air, **by night**  
 Full often hath she gossip'd by **my side**  
 Marking th'embarked traders on the flood:  
 When **we** have laugh'd to see the sails  
     **conceive**  
 And grow **big-bellied** with the wanton wind;  
 Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait  
 Following (her womb then rich with **my young**  
     **squire**)  
 Would imitate, and sail upon the land

To fetch me trifles, and return again  
 As from a voyage rich with merchandise.  
 But she, being mortal of that boy did die;  
 And for her sake do I rear up her boy;  
 And for her sake I will not part with him.  
 (2.1.122-137, emphasis added)

Hurt's Oberon believes Titania's sexual appetites and her pride are out of control. Her resistance and matronly assertions make him furious. Titania has taken her sexuality in her own hands, appearing not to desire him, not to need him, preferring the "son" to the husband. When he vows to torment her, we are assured it will a punishment, designed to bring her under his control, "Well, go thy way; thou shalt not from this grove/Till I torment thee for this injury" (2.1.146-147).

Like the lovers, Titania herself experiences a transition from Oberon's queen to the leman of an ass. Papp's practical Bottom shows that he is not about to pass up a chance to couple with a queen, the most unlikely prospect for a New York hardhat. H.R. Coursen in Shakespearean Performance as Interpretation notes that Titania's experience, examining the underside of her passions, is the central comic theme of the play. "She has rejected her lover, experienced a vicarious pregnancy through her vot'ress, and has transferred her affections to the child. Her punishment is to explore the bestial undernature--the "bottom she has created by repressing her natural instincts. Or--if conception is not possible for a

fairy demi-goddess--the punishment results from her hubris in becoming emotionally mortal" (6). Unlike Hermia and Helena, who must give up their girlish company for love, Titania attempts to have love, intimacy, and sexual fruition outside of the natural coupling of husband and wife. For this she is drugged with Cupid's lovejuice and becomes "enamour'd of an ass" (4.1.76)

Unlike Titania, Bottom appears, at least on the outside, to be an opposite of his mate, yet his vanity is well-known. When Puck changes Bottom into an ass, his outward appearance becomes congruent with his egotistical assertions. The ass in the medieval tradition was associated with potent sexuality; when the fairies prepare Papp's Bottom for Titania's bower, they do it not by weaving a cobweb veil as in the Reinhardt production; they prepare him by stripping him down to his polka-dot boxers and hoisting his rigid frame aloft before thrusting down on the waiting Titania. The animal nature of the fairies takes over as they bury the coupling pair under their own bodies. This scene portrays Bottom and Titania enacting the fertility rites of spring, observing the rites of May. This ritual scene brings no joy, highlighting the barrenness of ceremony when it is no longer congruent with social practice. Contemporary audiences cannot miss Papp's suggestion at the immorality of sex removed from relationship.

Coursen suggests that Titania's dream experience provides her with "a useful regression . . . because it presses her toward a reintegration with her psyche and a recognition of conscious intention toward which she gropes even while seeking favors for Bottom" (7). Through her dream regression she explores the underworld of her repressed natural instincts, her repressed sexuality, caused by her quarrel with Oberon. By settling on this interpretation of the play, Coursen distances Titania from the grotesque reality of intercourse with a beast, and moves the drama from the literal to a psychological interpretation. If Titania explores the underside of her animal nature in her relationship with Bottom as Coursen suggests, then Bottom, a child of nature, might be expected to explore his imaginative nature in Titania's bower, a supposition which is proven during Bottom's performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

When Puck releases Bottom, he can find no words to accommodate his dream,

Man is but an ass if he go about to expound his dream. Methought I was--there is no man can tell what. Methought I was--and methought I had--but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had (4.1.205-209).

Bottom knows the difference between what an "ass" and "patched fool" might attempt to express. The wordplay suggests that there has been a change in his self-



perception. What he imagines he was would be better expressed in a poetic ballad, "Bottom's Dream," than in some windy exposition. Bottom's change in perception, like Titania's, like that of Hermia and Helena hinges on a new understanding about the "nature" of life brought about by chaotic dreamlike experience. Bottom's resolution, indeed that of the play, suggests that individual experiences in life and love while understood can often only be expressed in art.

In the Reinhardt and Hall productions, the court represents the order of the educated elite. When Theseus and Hippolyta have their exchange about the nature of imagination in Act V, we are sure that it is the imagination of the audience that they are speaking about. In the Papp production, Wall recites his rhymed couplets in continuous round, highlighting the oral nature of poetry and giving the audience in Central Park an outrageous belly-laugh that any burlesque would be proud to evoke. Following Shakespeare's tendency toward double-ness, Snout's wall hints at the dramatic fourth wall between the audience and the actors which has been bridged by the laughter in the court, the players, and the audience in Central Park. Snout's continuous round also accents the social and linguistic walls that divide the language of "high" culture from that of the "low." Hippolyta and Theseus comment on the nature of the player's interpretation of dramatic language:

Hippolyta: This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.  
 Theseus: The best in this kind are but shadows;  
 and the worst are not worse if  
 imagination amend them.  
 Hippolyta: It must be your imagination then, and  
 not theirs.  
 Theseus: If we imagine no worse of them than  
 they of themselves, they may pass for  
 excellent men. Here come two noble  
 beasts in, a man and a lion (5.1.207-213).

When Lion and Moonshine appear, a sympathetic banter occurs between the players and the audience followed by the entrance of Bottom as Pyramus extolling the moon in a forced, flat, recitation. In the midst of the play, Papp has Titania dart between the trees on the stage, a movement which catches Bottom's eye. In a dramatic change of voice and presentation, Bottom is transformed into a Shakespearean actor, able to create the imaginative experience in the hushed chamber as he recites:

O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame,  
 Since lion vile hath here deflower'd my dear?  
 Which is--no, no--which was the fairest dame  
 That liv'd, that lov'd, that lik'd, that look'd  
 with cheer.  
 Come tears, confound! (5.1.280-28)

The Papp performance adds to our understanding of Bottom's dream by highlighting the capacity of dreams and ideals to change our individual self-perception. This production complicates the ideas of the folk by acknowledging the need for something beyond drudgery to feed the soul. The production points to art as an important

channel for expressing and evoking those insights that lie just below the surface of our consciousness.

Titania's dream initiation into the responsibilities inherent in being Queen of the fairies is carried out in the parallel action between the pairs of young lovers. The theme of initiation into adulthood is the underlying pattern for this production which is acted out by Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, who enter the wood unaware of the dangers of unbridled passion, untempered by either experience, knowledge, or reason. In Edward Berry's Comic Rites, primitive initiation rites aim toward negotiating a meaningful change in status for the individual which will result in the social renewal of the community. An Elizabethan wedding, for example, may be "viewed as a series of rites of passage--with separations, transitions, and incorporations" (2). It was common practice in Shakespeare's day for a couple to move from the bride's house to the church where they were officially married, then move from the church back to the bride's house, where they were feasted, and finally move from the banquet to the bridal chamber, where the marriage was consummated (Berry 2). In Shakespeare's Dream the lovers are separated from their Athenian traditions by the onslaught of romantic love, they experience a severe loss of identity by which they cross into the boundary of the wood which unleashes a physical and mental ordeal that prepares them for a reincorporation into

the society of Athens at the play's end. This progression ends, like most Elizabethan wedding feasts, with dancing and singing provided by the rustics antic burgomask.

Rites of passage release true anxieties in the transitional stages where the initiates experience themselves in the chaos of older and newer forms of being or understanding (Berry 14). The release of anxieties provide the comic moments in the Papp production. As night falls in the wood, the constant Lysander and Hermia argue back and forth about where he should sleep. Papp has Lysander lie confidently in Hermia's arms before she gets the courage to ask him to lie further off. After traveling a bit downhill, he slithers up where she is sleeping and begins to climb on top of her as she pushes him off and he rolls downhill. After Puck streaks his eyes with the lovejuice, Lysander is up and at it with Helena, ripping off her belt, and smiling in sweet anticipation of a romp with her. His inconstancy is as funny as it is disturbing, linking his lusty appetite with Oberon's later satirical glee about Titania's coupling with an ass.

In this production it is not only the men who are filled with passion. Helena is not above chasing her man, attempting to seduce Demetrius with a picnic lunch, a checkered table-cloth, a bottle of wine, and herself, shedding her sweater, her hat, and her gloves. While Oberon watches, Helena begs Demetrius to treat her as his spaniel.

Oberon raises his eyebrows at the kinky suggestion, and decides to punish Demetrius for his disdain of such an devoted slave. When Helena has to contend with both Lysander and Demetrius' passion, Papp has her standing downstage delivering her lines while on either side her suitors alternately smother her with kisses, attempt to peel off her clothes and bat at each other. The scene is a riotous expose of lust gone public.

The anxieties, passions, and conflicting "dreams" of love, and "realities" of love that are brought out in the production culminate in the name-calling battle between Hermia and Helena, and the duel orchestrated by Puck. These scenes in Act IV, seem problematic in a production that has heretofore focused on the individual nature of these characters' struggle to adulthood. As they each attempt to leave the wood after their ordeal, Puck steps in to control the events with his or her mimetic magic, charming them to sleep in gestures that draw them to their beds and closing the scene with a country proverb, "Jack shall have Jill, Nought shall go ill; The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well" (3.2.461-463). Berry recognizes that Shakespeare's major contribution to the evolution of the drama is a recognition of the individual psychological nature of his characters. In contrast to C.L. Barber who stresses the communal clarification brought about by festive release, Berry stresses the individual clarification which

is reached as Shakespeare's characters experience a triumph over their "internal and self-imposed" obstacles (Berry 9).

In many respects Barber's idea of the festive release occasioned by seasonal rites are complementary with Berry's thoughts on rites of passage. Seasonal rites have the same rhythms that characterize rites of passage. The structure of Elizabethan rites of May follow a pattern of separation--movement into the woods, transition--the gathering in of the hawthorn and playing courting games, and incorporation--decking the church and the halls with the greens and dancing around the Maypole (Berry 14). In seasonal rites, groups as well as individuals, separate, reunite, change form and condition, in effect dying to older identities, "unseasonal" practice to be reborn, mimicking the spring and new life. At the close of Act IV, sleeping under the Duke's Oak, the lovers seem to lose some of their individuality, the communal nature of their status is alluded to later as Hippolyta remarks on "all their minds transfigur'd so together, More witnesseth than fancy's images, And grows to something of great constancy" (5.1.23-26). Thus the theme of initiation of distinct individuals takes place as they act out their anxieties, learn their lessons, and undergo the trials of the transitional zone. After Theseus and Hippolyta have been reconciled, the lovers experience a social integration that places them squarely in Barber's

more seasonal interpretation of the play's movement, signalled by Puck's speech at the end of Act IV.

The wood in the Papp production is ambiguous; it is both a stage setting and a continuation of Central Park where the audience is seated on the ground. The wind that blows William Hurt's hair back in the later acts of the play, is the same wind that ruffles through the crowd. In just such a way, this production brings the audience into the play. The dream-wood of the play connects with the very real, contemporary setting for the evening's entertainment, making the breakdown in the wood a commentary on the violence that occurs in Central Park. One of Berry's arguments is that "Shakespeare created a pattern distinctively his own [in the play's incorporation of initiation patterns] but one in which his age could recognize a displaced and refined image of itself. Such an art combines the mirror and the lamp" (31). Papp has recreated such an experience, not only in the setting, but in the violence of his characters' unbridled passions, and in the comic resolution.

### Shakespeare: Complementarity and Dialogism

By literary most of us do not mean literature in the sense of a set of texts we must admire, texts written by geniuses unlike us, an unattainable sacred canon. By literature we are talking about a concrete way of knowing, a form of inquiry--concrete and dramatic, grounded in a self--a way of knowing that we think should be taught to our students (Anderson xix).

Shakespeare's view of the world is framed by his society which Allardyce Nicoll describes as dominated by "conflicts, contraries" and "extremes" which induced surprising resolutions (Elizabethans 1). Norman Rabkin in Shakespeare and the Common Understanding explores Shakespeare's "complementary" aesthetic, a term he borrows from physics to express the double nature of human truth. Rabkin identifies this contrary duality as "complementarity" and defines it as a pattern of opposition that can be seen in Shakespeare's drama:

Shakespeare tends to structure his imitations in terms of polar opposites--reason and passion in Hamlet, for instance, or reason and faith, reason and love, reason and imagination; Realpolitik and the traditional political order, Realpolitik and political idealism. . . . Always the dramatic structure set up the opposed elements as equally valid, equally desirable, and equally destructive, so that the choice the play forces the reader to make becomes impossible (Rabkin 12).

Complementarity is a mode of awareness, an option for a certain and essential kind of openness to human experience. "It is not a final dogma" (27). If it suggests on one level



that the nature of the beloved can be known through the eyes of desire, it can suggest on another level that the nature of the beloved can be best seen with eyes of duty and reason. Complementarity accounts for the simultaneity of the double truth: we view the world through the lens of our imagination and desire which are conditioned by our society and the dominant cultural ideology. At the same time, we are often forced to "see" through our experiences which temper our dreams, bringing us face to face with the demands of society and our individual limits. The question then becomes, knowing what we know about the limits of our individual perceptions and our social orientation or ideological conditioning, how are we to behave in the world?

Rabkin's "complementarity" was well articulated by the Elizabethans themselves. Allardyce Nicoll in The Elizabethans records Vicissitudo rerum, a poem written by John Norden in 1600 which celebrates the cunning and curious "harmonies" or resolutions that come out of experiences of discord:

Can discord then (so much dispraised) be  
     The mean to keep things by their contraries?  
 Can enmity have such equal degree  
     As may make union in qualities?  
     Hath sad contention such sweet faculties  
 As may support in true tranquility  
 The bodies wherein is disunity?  
 Nothing appears, or can be said the thing,  
     without the contrary: dark from the light,  
 Sickness from health, cold winter from the spring,  
 True peace from war, sweet love from foul  
     despite,

Just from unjust, truth from the thing unright,  
 None can distinguish but by qualities  
 That are discover'd by their contraries (Nicoll 2).

Norden's poem seems an articulation of Elizabethan practice of discerning the meaning of events, ideas, social and individual expressions of human nature through a dialogical understanding that is somewhat distanced from contemporary biases which privileges knowledge derived from authoritative sources.

"Conflicts and contraries" dominate the Elizabethan era, and were responsible for the dramatic "resolutions" that powered Shakespeare's drama, resolutions that resist closure (Nicoll 1). Nicoll notes that the inner core of Shakespeare's strength comes from the "paradox and the enigma" of the age characterized by the extremes present in all areas of the culture, and I would add all areas of language (1). The social and verbal continuities and discontinuities between Carnival and ordinary time are evidenced in the art of the period, in literature, and in drama. The richness of expression and form, the resonance of Shakespeare's language, points to a culture that was organized by layers of contrast, with complementary ways of knowing truth.

Shakespeare's genius captures the brilliance of Elizabethan extremes in his themes, his dramatic structure, and his language (Nicoll Elizabethans 1). By dramatizing competing ideologies, Shakespeare's theater became a mirror

reflecting and creating social change. By reflecting the controversies, his stage became a means, a way of seeing, or of cultivating a new perspective. When Shakespeare includes ceremonial practices, popular language, conventions and characters in his plays, they express a well-known viewpoint, a popular perspective which comments on conflicting standards and attitudes that characterized Elizabeth's age.

Shakespeare's incorporation of the complexities of social, dramatic, and language forms connects his work with that of Mikhail Bakhtin. In "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Bakhtin states:

Every type of intentional stylistic hybrid is more or less dialogized. This means that the languages that are crossed in it relate to each other as do rejoinders in a dialogue; there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language. But it is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense; rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other (Dialogic 76).

Shakespeare in his own "mingle-mangle" of popular and elite discourse, popular and elite dramatic practice, displays a Bakhtin's dialogism in his plays. His use of parody, double-voiced discourse, and distinct dialogic strategies in both the structure and the nature of his plays make his work a unique site for uncovering this literary way of looking at the world. The audience, while experiencing Shakespeare's plays, becomes an emotional and imaginative participant in

the drama; they experience the ambiguous relations between the self and the other by recognition and resistance to the plays as drama and to the themes Shakespeare explores.

Scholars have noted that we know little about Shakespeare's own world view. He can't be tied down by his writing. There is reason to believe that it is the dialogic nature of his genius that accounts for this. By using the term **dialogical**, Bakhtin searches for a way to talk about an authorial presence which "deconstitutes itself" (Schuster 17). In an open dialogical text, multiple voices and a complex form replace a monologic voice. Bakhtin's open, dialogic text is characterized by contrasting voices, by open-ended ideological speculations submerged within a textual framework, by the presentation of consciousness as multiple and ceaselessly contrastive (Schuster 17). Shakespeare's conflation of popular and elite ceremonial practices and language, character and occasion demonstrate this quality. Shakespeare's authorial voice merges with that of his characters until the author, like Puck, is at once shapeshifter, human advocate, and purposeful provocateur, characterized only by multiple poses, voices, and languages.

Shakespeare refuses to separate imagination from daily reality. Shakespeare looks at the world with a literary perspective, and his dramas argue for the necessity of such a perspective for a complete understanding of the human

experience. Literature is after all, not a set of texts we must admire because of their listing in some cultural canon. By literature we are talking about "a concrete way of knowing, a form of inquiry--dramatic, grounded in a self--a way of knowing" that resists singular ideological interpretations (Anderson 331).

Shakespeare's language incorporates words from traditional roundelays, morality plays, burlesque, and poetry, which resonate around each other contributing to his unique dynamic. Bakhtin describes this particular form of resonance:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group; and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (Dialogism 276).

The dialogic nature of Shakespeare's aesthetic demonstrates a literary way of knowing the world which, in contrast to our historical moment, resists the appearance of any singular truth. Shakespeare's plays reveal a way of knowing that affirms multiplicity of voices, an open-ended "becoming."

Bakhtin understands the term "novel" to contain all literary forms concerned with "becoming," that is with language in the process of recreating itself within any

given form. Bakhtin describes the "novelistic" effect on other genres, an effect that has been noted in this study of the social dimensions in Shakespeare's art:

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally--this is the most important thing--the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present) (Dialogic 7).

The richness of our experience of Shakespeare's dramatic texts, in performance and in critical analysis, is directly related to the "semantic open-endedness" of his work. A continued study of the dialogic nature of Shakespeare's drama would enrich our understanding of a literary way of knowing as a rhetorical form that affirms the liminal zone of the subject, that resists fixed notions of authority and recognizes the complexity of making meaning of human existence. The purpose of such a study would perhaps be to gain some insight into the various ways Shakespeare's society came to know the world.

Robert Weimann suggests that reproduction of past art, Shakespeare's plays, can be a way to bring about a meaningful future (xiv). Great art **is** great because it provides a criteria by which to judge and resee the human experience in every historical period. The continuities and

discontinuities of structure and form that this study has recognized, reveal that one way we make meaning of experiences is through art that gives us a distance and a perspective that imagination or logic alone cannot provide.

Holquist, in Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World, notes

dialogue always implies the simultaneous existence of manifold possibilities, a smaller number of values, and the need for choice. At all the possible levels of conflict between stasis and change, there is always a situated subject whose specific place is defined precisely by its in-between-ness. To be responsible for the site we occupy in the space of nature and the time of history is a mandate we cannot avoid--in the ongoing and open event of existence we have no alibi. (181)

In a world characterized by multiplicity, competing ideologies, accelerated rates of change, violence, and suspicion, individuals must still negotiate their lives. The dialogical nature of Shakespeare's comedies, indeed most of his plays, makes his literature consequential and uniquely insightful. The carnival eruption expresses the vital force of one's individual life. Shakespeare's comedies remind us that there is no resolution, either in the plays, in our society, or in our individual lives without an accommodation of both individual and social forces, an accommodation that can often be enhanced or expressed through art.

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