

"Vowing, Swearing, and Superpraising of Parts":
Petrarch and Pyramus in the Woods of Athens

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The performance of "Pyramus and Thisby" staged by Quince and company is an essential ingredient in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,^[1] and it echoes implicitly and explicitly, visually and verbally, throughout the woods of Athens. The Athenian lovers are repeatedly placed in situations which structurally correspond to the legend, producing tableaux which invoke the story even before Quince announces the performance. The Petrarchan idiom of the lovers, which is later amplified into an anti-Petrarchan one by the mechanicals, emphasizes the artificiality of the fairy enchantment, creates aesthetic distance for comic purposes, and heightens the affinities between their sylvan adventures and the tragic performance. The Petrarchan idiom and its associated techniques, especially antithesis, synaesthesia, and "renaturalized" metaphors, are a significant but previously neglected legacy which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may have inherited from *Romeo and Juliet*.^[2]

Pyramus and Thisby were well-known in Elizabethan England, much as their mythic cognates, *Romeo and Juliet*, are in the reign of the second Elizabeth. The story, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was a standard part of the educational curriculum. Shakespeare's original audience would have known "Pyramus and Thisby" not as a lofty tragedy, however, but as a cliché, "a theme for schoolboy exercises and for pretentious poetasters" (Doran 160). As Shakespeare composed *Romeo and Juliet*, he was conscious of Pyramus and Thisby to an extent unparalleled elsewhere in his career.^[3] Apparently the legend was intimately associated with moonlight in his mind, and its appearance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may be either a cause or an effect of the moonlit atmosphere of the entire play. The capacity of "Pyramus and Thisby" to burlesque his own recently-staged love tragedy doubtless also appealed to Shakespeare.^[4]

Specifically, the mechanicals' production of "Pyramus and Thisby" functions in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* much as Mercutio's "Queene Mab" speech does in *Romeo and Juliet* (1.4.53-103).^[5] Mercutio's speech represents a momentary eruption of a comic, fairy-saturated Athenian wood into the tragic world of *Romeo and Juliet*'s Verona, just as, inversely, the mechanicals' production of "Pyramus and Thisby" is a sudden tear in the comic fabric of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, through which the dangerous world of star-crossed lovers is clearly discernible. Significantly, both comedy and tragedy in the alternate context become comic: both episodes burlesque material which is generically irreconcilable in a distinctly bawdy fashion, and both are dismissed in their new environment as trivial, as "nothing."^[6] Romeo's dismissal of Mercutio's raillery is to some extent justified: Queen Mab is irrelevant to his world, and seems disconnected from the play as a whole, and was probably a later authorial insertion (Hemingway 80).^[7] Quince's

production, however, is a highly integrated element in the play as a whole, and is quite literally central to concentric rings of court, fairies, and audience, at the comedy's resolution.

From the moment of Quince's announcement of the playlet in the second scene until its presentation in the final scene, "Pyramus and Thisby" is maintained in the consciousness of the audience. The entire cast of the playlet is brought on stage three times before the playlet proper -- for the assignment of roles (1.2), the rehearsal of lines (3.1), and the curtain call (4.2) -- all designed to heighten the audience's anticipation of the final performance. Even before the explicit announcement, however, structural and verbal allusions have begun to unite the main plot of the Athenian lovers with the legend of Pyramus and Thisby.

In the first scene, Hermia and Lysander are presented as young lovers thwarted by paternal will, forced to contrive a nocturnal rendezvous in the woods outside town. If the audience failed to perceive the legendary allusion, they are hit over the head with it in the ensuing scene, as Quince announces "the most lamentable comedy, and most cruell death of _Pyramus and _Thisby" (1.2.11-12). Moonlight, the primary association of the legend for Shakespeare, soaks the play from its initial lines, and sets the scene for a reenactment of the tragic tale. When Egeus describes Lysander's serenade at Hermia's window (1.1.30), the reference to moonlight, and the verbal image of two lovers communicating through an opening in a wall, echoes popular illustrations of the Pyramus and Thisby legend.[8]

Hermia and Lysander are repeatedly placed in situations which structurally reproduce tableaux from the Pyramus and Thisby legend. Hermia swears a prolix oath that she will meet Lysander in the woods of Athens (1.1.168-78), much as Thisby swears, "Tide life, tyde death, I come without delay" (5.1.201). Lysander replies, "Keepe promise loue" (1.1.179), echoing the sentiment and the words of Pyramus, who will later say, "I fear my _Thisbyes promise is forgot" (5.1.171).[9] In the forest, Hermia is terrified by her nightmare of a crawling serpent (2.2.145), just as Thisby flees from the famous lion (5.1.253).[10] Later, Hermia accuses Demetrius of the murder of Lysander, likening him to a "dog", "curre", "worme," "Adder", and "serpent", though not to a lion (3.2.45-9). In this context, Hermia's "mispris'd mood" is comic, whereas Pyramus' error is tragic in its finality (5.1.280-1). The comedy of these structural allusions is outweighed, however, by their gravity: there remain serious obstacles facing the love of Hermia and Lysander, and the legend of Pyramus and Thisby represents the tragic potentiality of their story.

Helena and Demetrius, on the contrary, perpetually find themselves in predicaments which invert the Pyramus and Thisby legend, subtly parodying it in anticipation of the burlesque of the mechanicals' production. In sharp contrast to the legendary pair of passionate lovers, Demetrius' first words to Helena are "I loue thee not: therefore pursue me not" (2.1.188). Demetrius and Helena hasten to the woods to *prevent* a marriage, rather than to facilitate one. Demetrius threatens to leave Helena "to the mercy of wilde beastes" (2.1.228), himself discharging the role of the lion, much as Hermia later implies. Rather than

being frightened by wild beasts, as are Thisby and Hermia, Helena asserts "I am as vgly as a Beare: / For beastes that meete mee runne away for feare" (2.2.93-4). Moments later, Helena stumbles over Lysander, and asks herself "Dead, or a sleep? I see no blood, no wound..." (2.2.100), anticipating Thisby's question over the lifeless corpse of Pyramus: "A sleep my loue? What, dead my doue?" (5.1.311-2). The legendary parallel is undercut as Lysander immediately awakes, destroying the tragic moment more completely than the conventional mummings' play resurrection of Bottom and Flute at the conclusion of their performance (5.1.336).

The structural allusions to the Pyramus and Thisby legend establish Hermia and Lysander as star-crossed lovers, facing genuine obstacles with potentially tragic consequences. In contrast, the inversion of the legendary structure removes any latent tragedy from the relationship of Helena and Demetrius, making them primarily a catalyst for merriment.[11] Helena encounters the motionless body of Lysander, and also faces a very real threat of physical harm in the woods, but her fear is immediately undercut by the Petrarchan extravagance of Lysander and Demetrius, as they "baite" her.[12] Although Hermia faces fewer physical dangers, she undergoes a trial of her relationships in situations which are psychologically indistinguishable from those faced by Thisby, which have genuine potential for tragedy, and which remain fundamentally serious.

Like the "Pyramus and Thisby" playlet, the experiences of the Athenian lovers are deliberately fictionalized. The legend is a "story," Quince assures us (3.1.59), but so is the lovers' experience: Hippolyta refers to "all the story of the night told ouer" (5.1.23). Snug and Puck both refer to the playlet as "sport" (4.2.17; 3.2.14), but Puck twice calls the lovers' confusion the same (3.2.119; 3.2.353), as Helena thrice decries their "sport" of mocking her (3.2.161; 3.2.194; 3.2.240). Puck delights in heckling the mortals' "fond pageant" (3.2.114), just as, later, the Athenian court enjoys interrupting the mechanicals' performance. This methodical fictionalization of the main plot minimizes the distinction between the play and the play within it.

Remarkably, the Athenian lovers remain oblivious to their kinship with Pyramus and Thisby until the mechanicals' performance in the final scene.[13] For the audience, however, the similarities are too overwhelming to overlook, and both parallel and parody generate laughter primarily by evoking anxiety that a tragic turn may annihilate the comic world. The parallels make the audience uncomfortable, and prompt nervous laughter, while the inversions relieve the tension, in broader comedy. Likewise, much of the laughter and merriment onstage during the playlet is a release of the anxiety generated by the sense of *deus ex machina* which haunts the lovers. Shakespeare recreates this sensation for the audience through numerous verbal echoes of the preceding four acts, subtly but distinctly connecting the amateur performance with the events which preceded it.

It is a critical commonplace that the lovers share much of the diction of the "Pyramus and Thisby" playlet; what has not been previously observed is that most of these echoes are

emphatically Petrarchan in nature.[14] At the height of the sonnet and madrigal vogue of the 1590's (Forster 146), at roughly the same time that Shakespeare was composing his sonnets, he was toying with Petrarchan conventions on stage, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*. [15] Quince's "Pyramus and Thisby," in particular, is saturated with Petrarchanisms, emphasizing the idiom until it becomes conversely anti-Petrarchan in effect.[16] The Athenian lovers share, particularly while enchanted, the Petrarchan idiom of the "Pyramus and Thisby" playlet.

The love-in-idleness potion seems primarily to convert normal discourse to Petrarchan hyperbole and metaphorical superlatives. The victims of Oberon's enchantment awake in parallel scenes of "love at first sight." Lysander awakes from Puck's spell, and is instantly enraptured by the sight of Helena:

And runne through fire, I will for thy sweete sake.
Transparent Helena, nature shewes arte,
That through thy bosome, makes me see thy heart.

(2.2.102-4)

The words are empty, artificially generated by the fairy magic, and so conventional that Helena can ignore them as merely "social small talk" (Forster 62), until twelve lines of elaboration follow. The obsolescence of the Petrarchan idiom and knowledge of Lysander's true affections leads Helena to exclaim, "Wherefore was I to this keene mockery borne? / When, at your hands, did I deserue this scorne?" (2.2.122-3).[17]

In the subsequent scene, the mechanicals rehearse lines which they apparently later cut from their playlet in offstage revision (perhaps in superstitious fear that the fatal words will once again cause Bottom to be "translated" in the Duke's court). The lines produce a calculated effect at this point in the play, however, by emphasizing the artificiality of the Petrarchan idiom, and drawing attention to the language used by the enchanted lovers in the scenes immediately before and after. Pyramus echoes one of the notions of Sonnet 130 when he speaks of "the flowers of odious sauours sweete" in Thisby's breath, and Thisby combines conventional and bizarre metaphors in oxymoronic praise of her beloved:

Most radiant Pyramus, most lillie white of hewe,
Of colour like the red rose, on triumphant bryer,
Most brisky Iuuenall, and eeke most louely Iewe,
As true as truest horse, that yet would neuer tyre[.]

(3.1.88-91)

A few lines later, Titania awakes to see the ass-headed Bottom, and exclaims, "What Angell wakes me from my flowry bed?" (3.1.124). The Petrarchan idiom, though not superficial, has been utterly devalued.[18]

Demetrius is enchanted in the following scene, and in typically comic rhythm the third iteration of the scenario is the

climactic one. Demetrius is finally enamoured of Helena, in fulfillment of the comic pattern and the expectations of the audience, but his language is exaggerated beyond all reasonable bounds:

O _Helen, goddesse, nymph, perfect diuine,
To what, my loue, shall I compare thine eyne!
Christall is muddy. O, how ripe, in showe,
Thy lippes, those kissing cherries, tempting growe!
That pure coniealed white, high _Taurus snow,
Fand with the Easterne winde, turnes to a crowe,
When thou holdst vp thy hand. O, let me kisse
This Princesse of pure white, this seale of blisse.

(3.2.137-44)

In particular, the image of "those kissing cherries" explicitly echoes in Thisby's description of her own lips, which is immediately undercut by the bawdy innuendo in "kist thy stones" (5.1.188),^[19] and her confused catalogue of Pyramus' virtues, which includes "This cherry nose" (5.1.318).^[20] "[T]his seale of blisse" echoes Pyramus' dismay at the wall, "through whome I see no blisse" (5.1.178).^[21]

Once again, the Petrarchan conventions undergo a process of "comic dislocation" (Leggatt 5). The response of the "goddess" and "Princesse" to Demetrius' encomium is shattering to the Petrarchan idiom, and very comic: "O spight! O hell!" she cries (3.2.145), and chastises both men for mocking her. Rather like the courtiers of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Lysander and Demetrius are attempting to express genuine emotion in an obsolescent, artificial idiom, which communicates only mockery and insincerity to their listeners. Helena merely hears them "vowe, and swaere, and superpraise [her] parts" (3.2.153). Likewise, Demetrius' witty wordplay on "murtherer" (3.2.56 ff) goes unnoticed by Hermia, who simply demands, "Whats this to my _Lysander? Where is hee?" (3.2.62). Just as Petrarchan conventions could be used in a sincere or a non-committal manner (Forster 8), the great Petrarchan poets were often also great anti-Petrarchan poets (Forster 66). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare capitalizes on the ambiguity of the idiom: semiotic friction is generated by the interaction of lover's intention and beloved's interpretation, and this interplay of earnest and game produces comic irony.

The diction of the Athenian lovers while enchanted contrasts sharply with their normal discourse, which is anything but Petrarchan. Demetrius initially appears as a suitor concerned only with the "title to my certaine right" to Hermia (1.1.92), and even in the enchantment of the forest he strains the confines of comedy in his brutality to Helena. Lysander and Hermia are passionately in love from the first, but despite their impetuous elopement, their language remains serene and moderate. Lysander's speeches to Hermia are notably free of oxymoron, hyperbole, or empty metaphor: his first words to her in the play are, "How now my loue?" (1.1.128). Even while he is enchanted, Lysander's genuine love has **not** melted as the snow: "Although I hate her, Ile not harme her so" (3.2.270). In Athens, Lysander's retort to Demetrius is cool and deliberate:

"You haue her fathers loue, _Demetrius: / Let me haue
_Hermias: doe you marry him" (1.1.93-4). In contrast, his
response to rivalry for Helena is "Where is _Demetrius? Oh how
fit a word / Is that vile name, to perish on my sworde!" (2.2.105-
6). Demetrius is equally volatile once influenced by the fairy
magic, declaring repeatedly, "Thou shalt aby it[!]" (3.2.334). It
is perhaps an appropriate punishment for the faithless lover to
be left permanently enchanted, permanently trapped within the
Petrarchan idiom.[22]

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare questions
the Petrarchan idiom, but he also uses Petrarchan techniques as
broader structural devices for the play as a whole.[23] The
conventional Petrarchan antithesis of day and night structures
the opposition of the worlds of Theseus and Oberon, much as it
did the worlds of Juliet and Romeo in their play. The confusion
of the senses is fundamental to the theme of perception in the
play, and the synaesthesia which had become a regular part of
the Elizabethan stage clown's repertoire, was an essential
Petrarchan technique:

The hovering balance of opposites appears as
a total loss of self-possession; the senses are
confused, the lover quite literally does not
know whether he is coming or going, even
the sense of individuality is lost.

(Forster 14)

Bottom's "the eye of man hath not heard" speech (4.1.209-12) is
the *locus classicus* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the
motif recurs elsewhere. In rehearsal, Quince explains that
Pyramus "goes but to see a noyse, that he heard" (3.1.86). In
performance, Pyramus declares:

I see a voice: now will I to the chinke,
To spy and I can heare my _Thisbyes face. _Thisby?

(5.1.190-1)

Although the sensory confusion focuses on Bottom, particularly
in his role as Pyramus, it also extends to characters in the main
plot. Hermia's senses have been disturbed by the darkness of
the night in the forest, and she seeks Lysander's voice:

Darke night, that from the eye, his function takes,
The eare more quicke of apprehension makes.
Wherein it doth impaire the seeing sense,
It payes the hearing double recompence.
Thou art not, by myne eye, _Lysander, found:
Mine eare, I thanke it, brought me to thy sound.

(3.2.177-82)

Puck brings still more sensory confusion to the mechanicals as
he counterfeits Bottom's voice (3.1.101 ff), and to the main plot
as he imitates the voices of Demetrius and Lysander to lead
them away from confrontation and towards enchanted sleep

(3.2.400 ff.).

As in the Petrarchan examples Forster describes, sensory confusion leads to loss of "the sense of individuality." Demetrius and Lysander are left unsure of their opponent's whereabouts, and are charmed into somnolence. In the same scene, Hermia likewise questions her own identity: "Am not I _Hermia? Are not you _Lysander?" (3.2.273). In _A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare has achieved the conventional comic loss of identity through the Petrarchan technique of synaesthesia. In the "Pyramus and Thisby" playlet, too, several characters experience distinct crises of identity. Not only do the actors continually lapse out of character, but Wall must perpetually assert his identity, Moonshine abandons his role to paraphrase his part, and Lion and Pyramus are concerned to emphasize their paradoxical identity as simultaneously Snug and Bottom. The lovers of the main plot and the characters of the playlet once again share a Petrarchan convention.

The thematic cornerstone of _A Midsummer Night's Dream is unquestionably the dream.[24] Leonard Forster explains that the dream, too, is a fundamental Petrarchan device (Forster 12), and offers a prose translation of an early poem by Th_odore de B ze (1548):

...Hardly had I said it when suddenly the hateful
light destroyed my dream and took my maiden from
me.

But thou, whoever thou beest, o most
gracious lord of nocturnal thoughts, whether I
should call you Morpheus or Somnus, grant that I
may see waking what I was enabled to see when in
the power of sleep, or, if there is no other way for
you to heal my desire, give me an eternal dream!

(Forster 43)

This Petrarchan device illuminates Oberon's insistence that the lovers will remember the night "[b]ut as the fierce vexation of a dreame" (4.1.68), and in particular sheds new light on Demetrius' confusion:

Are you sure
That we are awake? It seemes to me,
That yet we sleepe, we dreame.

(4.1.191-3)

Demetrius has been granted the wish of the Petrarchan lover, remaining perpetually under the dream-like spell of Oberon, and forever seeing the world through the filter of Petrarchanism.[25]

Quince's "Pyramus and Thisby" is central to Shakespeare's _A Midsummer Night's Dream, resonating throughout in visual tableaux, verbal allusions, and Petrarchan techniques. The situation of Hermia and Lysander parallels the legend, and the allusions elicit nervous laughter from an audience made uncomfortable by potential tragedy. Helena and Demetrius structurally parody the legend, relieving the tension and

producing unrestrained mirth. The deliberate artificiality of the Petrarchan idiom creates much of the aesthetic distancing which makes comedy possible, but simultaneously, it suggests the sincerity of the enchanted lovers, and the amateur players, in a self-consciously literary mode. Much of the humour of the lovers' hyperbolic praise of Helena, and of the mechanicals' playlet (the comic crescendo of the play as a whole), is generated by the ambiguity of hollow Petrarchan conventions which are naively intended to have meaning. For Quince the carpenter-playwright, the Petrarchan idiom serves as an established framework to which he can nail his cardboard characters. Simultaneously, however, Shakespeare the sonneteer-playwright saturates Quince's playlet with so many Petrarchan conventions that the idiom and technique turn on themselves, amplifying themselves into anti-Petrarchanism.

Shakespeare's use of the "Pyramus and Thisby" legend parallels his use of Petrarchan conventions: serious and parodic perspectives are enigmatically fused. The humour of structural parody in the main plot relies on the interaction of the tragic legend and its comic context. In the mechanicals' playlet, the friction of the actors' sincerity and Shakespeare's irony generates the linguistic comedy. The ambiguity is more than a comic technique, however. The Petrarchan idiom is paradoxically serious and frivolous, and likewise the "Pyramus and Thisby" legend is both the source of much merriment and a reminder of latent tragedy.

Shakespeare's paradoxical, oxymoronic treatment of the Petrarchan idiom and the Pyramus legend is one of the fundamental structuring mechanisms of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and produces much of the high comedy. Just as Shakespeare appears to have developed "unmetaphoring" from the Petrarchan device of "renaturalizing the metaphor," it would appear that the later Shakespearean "complementarity" (Rabkin 22) owes something to Petrarchan antithesis, paradox, and oxymoron. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, like the other lyric plays of the 1590's, was the proving ground in which Shakespeare learned to bring the sonneteer's magic onto the stage.

E N D N O T E S

- [1] All quotations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are taken from the facsimile of the 1600 first quarto in Allen & Muir. Lineation is keyed to that of the Arden edition by Harold F. Brooks, in arabic form. Long 's' and macron have been silently normalized.

Shakespeare's comedy, more than his other genres, is dependent upon timing, intonation, and audience response -- features which his published texts cannot preserve. Nonetheless, in the lyrical plays of the 1590's, more than at any other point in his career, Shakespeare was more a dramatic poet than a poetic dramatist. Studying the relation of the plays to the sonnets justifies the adherence to Q1, which was quite probably printed from authorial holograph. See Randall McLeod, "Unediting Shakespeare," for a more detailed argument than can be given here.

- [2] The chronological sequence of the two plays remains unclear. If it is accepted that the two are "companion pieces" (Barber 159), or that one of the two developed from the other, it seems infinitely more likely that *Romeo and Juliet*, the play with a long history of sources, was composed first, and that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* evolved in response to it. This assumption is unnecessary for many of the following observations, but it permits consistent interpretation of the data.
- [3] *Pyramus and Thisby* are mentioned in only three plays, aside from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and all belong to the mid-1590's: the pale moonlight which shone on *Pyramus* is described at *Titus Andronicus* 2.3.231; *Thisbe's* beauty is dismissed sarcastically by *Mercutio* at *Romeo and Juliet* 2.4.42; and the moonlight is again depicted shining on *Thisbe* at *The Merchant of Venice* 5.1.8.
- [4] When Shakespearean critics discuss "*Pyramus and Thisby*" at all, it is usually in relation to *Romeo and Juliet*. This paper will maintain a tight focus on the function of the playlet within the main plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the arguments of previous critics necessarily underlie this discussion.
- [5] "*Pyramus and Thisby*" is, of course, a mythological ancestor of the *Romeo and Juliet* legend, and in some sense *is* *Romeo and Juliet*. Likewise, C.L. Barber contends that *Mercutio's* Queen Mab speech "is an attempt to do in a single speech what the whole action does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (Barber 158).
All quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* are taken from the Allen & Muir facsimile of the 1599 quarto (Q2), with lineation of the Riverside Shakespeare (see Evans).
- [6] *Romeo* exclaims, "Peace, peace, *Mercutio*, peace! / Thou talkst of nothing" (1.4.95), just as *Philostrate* assures Duke *Theseus* that "*Pyramus and Thisbe*" is "nothing, nothing in the world" (5.1.78). The importance of "ayery nothing" (5.1.16) reverberates throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and throughout the work of Shakespeare: 32 references occur in *The Winter's Tale*, 31 in *Hamlet*, 28 in *King Lear*, 26 in *Othello* and in *Cymbeline*, and 18 in the *Sonnets*. There are 14 occurrences in *Romeo and Juliet*, and 12 in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, concentrated particularly in the lovers' confusion of 3.2 (3 occurrences) and the *mechanicals'* confusion of 5.1 (6 occurrences).
- [7] This interpretation is, of course, highly convenient for the chronological arrangement postulated here, that *Romeo and Juliet* preceded *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Authorial revision is quite likely in Shakespeare's plays, but convenience cannot be the sole criterion for identifying it.
- [8] Kenneth Muir describes "a strip-cartoon version of the story which appeared as a border on the title-page of

several books published by Tottel," which evidences the visual imagination's use of the Pyramus and Thisby legend (Muir 142).

- [9] Pyramus and Thisby are likewise structurally invoked in *_Mucedorus* sc. IX, in which Amadine and Mucedorus agree to meet in the valley where he slew the bear, only to have their plans confounded by Bremo.
- [10] The BBC *_Midsummer Night's Dream*, though scarcely the finest production of the play, increases the parallelism at this point. Hermia has been using her own mantle as a pillow, and leaves it on the ground when she starts up from her nightmare. Although lacking textual support, this interpretation visually emphasizes a structural parallel which is nonetheless present.
- [11] Like the treatment of Kate in *_The Taming of the Shrew*, however, the comedy of Helena's self-debasement is often filtered by a twentieth-century awareness of sexual equality. *Criticism* can be coloured by modern concerns, but *scholarship* cannot. The object of this investigation is, despite the "intentional fallacy," to examine Shakespeare's artistry and the effect it was designed to create.
- [12] Helena's assertion that they "bait mee, with this foule derision" (3.2.197) carries new undertones in the light of her claim to be "vgly as a Beare." Hippolyta clearly approves of the sport: she watched as Hercules and Cadmus "bayed the Beare" (4.1.111-2).
- [13] Although it sounds almost as though Lysander has been reading about Pyramus and Thisby (or Romeo and Juliet, as S.B. Hemingway suggests), when he laments,
- Eigh me: for aught that I could euer reade,
Could euer here by tale or history,
The course of true loue neuer did runne smoothe[.]
- (1.1.132-4)
- Likewise, Helena demonstrates some awareness of her resemblance to a literary artefact when she declares "the story shall be chaung'd" (2.1.230).
- [14] David Young notes that the lovers are mere puppets in the woods of Athens, whose movements and speech are artificial (68-9), but does not attribute this to Petrarchan conventions. Robert F. Willson, Jr., seems to totally misunderstand the significance of these echoes, when he argues that "in both the forest world and the artistic world of '*_Pyramus and Thisby*' bad acting prevails" (116).
- [15] Alexander Leggatt discusses the formal style of *_Love's Labour's Lost* and mentions its affinities with the sonnets. F.E. Halliday discusses its wordplay and rhyme in a chapter on the Sonnets and the Lyrical Plays, and G.R. Hibbard explores the ways in which the play makes "a virtue of virtuosity" (105).

Jill Levenson observes that, in *Romeo and Juliet*, "all of the dramatis personae express themselves in some variation of the Petrarchan idiom" [typescript page 7]. Petrarchan conventions are devalued in the mouths of the Nurse, the Capulets, and particularly in reference to Rosaline, an abstraction "notable primarily for her absence" [13]. It is only when vehicle separates from tenor, and the sonnet idiom is "unmetaphored," that *Romeo and Juliet* can give the conventions new significance.

- [16] This is precisely the reverse of the effect of Sonnet 130, in which Shakespeare dismisses the conventional Petrarchan similes involving the sun, coral, snow, wires, roses, perfumes, music, and goddesses as hollow, artificial, and finally limiting. Despite this anti-Petrarchanism, the final effect, as Forster points out, is Petrarchan:

[Sonnet 130] derives its strength and effectiveness precisely from the tradition it affects to deride, and its aim is the basic petrarchistic one, ingenious praise of the lady (who is so excellent that there is no need of hyperbolic imagery to praise her).
(Forster 56-7).

- [17] Helena's response is anticipated by the ladies of France in *Love's Labour's Lost*, who silently accept criticism but reject all compliment. Compare also Zantippa's response to Huanebango's extravagant Petrarchan praises in Peele's *Old Wive's Tale*.
- [18] Both Titania and Oberon invest literary convention with vitality and meaning, despite its apparent emptiness in the mortal world. Titania's description of Oberon, in the shape of Corin, wooing Phillida (2.1.65-8), is conventional pastoral, but it is energetic and exotic in a way that Petrarchisms are not in the Athenian court. Likewise, Oberon's description of "young Cupids fiery shaft / Quencht in the chaste beames of the watry Moone" (2.1.161-2) seems less hollow in the mouth of a Fairy King than it might seem coming from Demetrius or Lysander -- the boundary between court masque and fairy reality is blurred.
- [19] This innuendo is suggested by Willson (118). Eric Partridge notes several other examples, in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Partridge 192), but does not cite Thisby's lines.
- [20] Thisbe's blazon of Pyramus' physical features sounds startlingly like Leonard Forster's summation of a standard anti-petrarchan parody:

[The Petrarchan idiom] was also parodied and inverted (as when poets praise an old hag for her silver hair, golden cheeks, ebony teeth and ruby nose)[.]

(Forster 56)

Forster reports a number of such specimens, contained in Albert-Marie Schmidt's anthology, *L'amour noir* (1939).

[21] Likewise, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the sole use of "blisse" is to describe Rosaline. Jill Levenson has observed that Romeo consistently makes use of empty Petrarchan language to describe his love for Rosaline, which vanishes instantly in the face of his true passion for Juliet (Levenson, *passim*).

[22] A number of other Petrarchan images explicitly connect the main plot lovers and the "Pyramus and Thisby" playlet. The image of the dove unites the two plots: Helena remarks that "the Doue pursues the Griffon" (2.1.232), Lysander asks, "Who will not change a Rauen for a doue?" (2.2.113), and the image culminates in Thisby's "What, dead my doue?" (5.1.312), where a shortened line and simplified rhyme scheme renders the word hollow and ludicrous. Likewise, the self-aggrandizement of Lysander, while enchanted, who proclaims himself Helena's knight (2.2.143), is matched by Pyramus, who uses the same word (5.1.266). As Puck enchants the Athenians one by one, Helena enters, lamenting "O weary night, o long and tedious night..." (3.2.431). This anticipates Pyramus' first lines on stage:

O grim lookt night, o night, with hue so blacke,
O night, which euer art, when day is not:
O night, O night, alacke, alacke, alacke[.]

(5.1.168-70)

Helena describes Demetrius' unmotivated change in affection, which occurred prior to the action of the play:

For, ere *Demetrius* lookt on *Hermias* eyen,
Hee hayld downe othes, that he was onely mine.
And when this haile some heate, from *Hermia*, felt,
So he dissolved, and showrs of oathes did melt.

(1.1.242-5)

Demetrius later speaks of "my love, / To *Hermia* (melted as the snowe)" (4.1.164-5), describing his second, magical change of affection in identical terms to the first, self-motivated one. The changes in his affection are likened to a spring thaw, a perfectly natural and desirable metamorphosis. The Petrarchan "icy fire" imagery culminates in the Duke's amazement at the mechanicals' play: "That is hot Ise, / And wo[n]drous strange snow!" (5.1.59).

[23] Likewise, in *Romeo and Juliet*, a fundamental Petrarchan technique is used as a structural organizing principle: the Petrarchan convention that Leonard Forster calls "renaturalisation of metaphor" (Forster 167), becomes what Rosalie Colie calls Shakespeare's "unmetaphoring" (Colie, *passim*). Leonard Forster observes that, in *Romeo and Juliet*, "[t]he enmity of the Montague and Capulet makes the cliché of the 'dear enemy' into a concrete predica-

ment, and others are similarly enacted.... 'Thus with a kiss I die'" (Forster 51).

Similarly, Alexander Leggatt points out the relation of the malapropism to the theme of linguistic unreliability in *Love's Labour's Lost* (Leggatt 71). The clear link between rhetorical technique and theme in these early plays emphasizes the need to respect them as carefully crafted poems for the stage. (Evidence for false starts and multiple drafts of passages is primarily confined to the early plays also, suggesting a hesitance which disappears by the later tragedies.)

[24] Of 1150 references to "sleep-," "wake-," or "dream-" in the authoritative texts of Shakespeare, 66 occur in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Q1, 64 in *Richard III* F1 (in a distinctly non-Petrarchan context) and 48 in *Romeo and Juliet* Q2 (where fully one-third of the references surround Mercutio's Queen Mab speech). No other text of a Shakespearean play has more than 19 such references. Again, the Petrarchan "companion pieces" share a distinctive characteristic.

[25] Demetrius' perpetual enchantment makes the conclusion of the play as problematic for some critics as Shakespeare's problem plays. Oberon's manipulation, which makes the comic resolution possible, is inconsequential when compared with, for example, Venus' solution to the final problem in Lyly's *Gallathea*.

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