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L EST YOU EXPECT THE WRONG THINGS OF THIS TALK, please let me say at the start that I shall not be speaking impressionistically. It is not my aim (indeed, it is not within my capacity) to give you, in my own words, on a lecture platform, the kind of experience that you can get somewhat by a sympathetic reading of the work we are to discuss, or still better, by seeing it expertly performed. Though we shall throughout be concerned with one work in particular, the discussion also involves considerations of critical method in general. Some may disagree with this very method. For them the best I can do is try to make it as cogent as possible so that, if anyone cares to raise objections afterwards, we can help make it more certain that the objections are to what I shall have actually said. Objections are all the more to be welcomed because, at least in one notable respect, I ran into some notions that I did not have when beginning my analysis.

I

In his book on Greek tragedy, Aristotle states that it is better to read such plays than to see them performed.[1] This notion is probably due in part to the fact that Aristotle was so thoroughly a bookman, but also to the fact that, at that stage in the development of technology, many visual aspects of a performance must have been quite crude. Consider, for example, the tragedies which involve the appearance of a god in a machine, the *deus ex machina*. Doubtless the very awkwardness made it good fun to have such a figure in Aristophanic comedy, somewhat as with the farcical performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And though the traditional dance-steps in a tragedy may have had much to recommend them, the masks must have at least made impossible such mobility of bodily expression that

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[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1462a11–14, 18.

we take for granted as an important aspect of the actor's art. By the same token, among what he called the six qualitative parts of tragedy (plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle),[2] he rated spectacle (*opsis*) lowest[3]—whereas the high development of technology today readily allows for kinds of "spectacular" in which the visual show is the major source of the attraction. The fact that, except for pageantry, the Shakespearean theater also had meager resources as spectacle accounts for one major problem, particularly in the modern filming of a Shakespeare play. Where the playwright is trying to produce, by sheerly verbal means, the sense of a visual experience like dawn or dusk or moonlight (which can now readily be imitated by sheerly technical means but, in the original conditions of performance, were to be imagined in broad daylight), such lines tend to become redundant, since they are aiming to produce a kind of effect that is already being produced by other means. As early as 1816, there was a performance that, to Hazlitt's disgruntlement, stressed spectacle and incidental music, at the expense of the poetry.[4] And the battle has been variously waged since then.

Over the years many things have been done with the play. Sometimes the text has been greatly cut, and music featured—Mendelssohn's, for instance—or folk tunes. There was even a performance that wholly eliminated the courtly figures, and was all buffoonery, by greatly expanding the role of Bottom. I shall work from the text as we have it, in the book—and shall not concern myself with directors' twists (as, for instance, having the same actor play the roles of Theseus and Oberon, or the same actress play Hippolyta and Titania). For regardless of the innovative effects that may be got by such resources, in the last analysis the roles themselves are quite distinct. And in particular I must lay great emphasis upon the standard *distinction* between the two queens.

How quickly things get set up. First there is Theseus saying "Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour / Draws on apace" (1.1.1–2).[5] He would wed "With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling" (l. 19). Immediately thereafter, an outraged father, Egeus, introduces a first useful complication, in complaining of the young

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[2] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a10.

[3] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b15–20.

[4] William Hazlitt reviewed an adaptation by Frederic Reynolds at Covent Garden, with music by Sir Henry Bishop, in the *Examiner* (London) of 21 January 1816, repr., Stanley Wells, comp. and ed., *Shakespeare in the Theatre: An Anthology of Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 43–46.

[5] Quotations from Shakespeare have been edited to match the text and line numbers from *The Norton Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), since Burke cited various (unknown) editions over the years, often with silent, minor modifications of punctuation, spelling, and sometimes speech prefixes for minor characters. However, *The Norton Shakespeare* was not followed when Burke referred to stage directions; he cited conventional mid-twentieth-century stage directions, usually those established by the British scholar William Aldis Wright (1831–1914), whose work formed the basis of the nineteenth-century Clarendon, Cambridge, and Globe editions.

courtier, Lysander, "This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child" (l. 27), whom Egeus, against her wishes, would marry to a different courtier, Demetrius. Even thus early, the theme of bewitchment that will infuse the scenes in the wood is introduced, though perhaps unnoticeably until we give the text a close look. Next we see further evidence of tangles among the lovers, with regard to the two girls, Hermia and Helena. Then we see the simple workmen, the "mechanicals" (3.2.9), planning the play that will bring the plot back to the court in the last act. Then, in "a wood near Athens" (2.1 sd), we are in the realm of fancy that gives the play its name, with Puck (or Robin Goodfellow), King Oberon, and Queen Titania, variously appointed to help get the plot entangled.

Above all, in this connection, observe that the woodsy atmosphere is charmingly established before we learn of the "little western flower," to be found "where the bolt of Cupid fell" (2.1.166, 165). It had been "milk-white," now it is "purple with love's wound— / And maidens call it love-in-idleness" (ll. 167–168). It is an "herb," the juice of which "on sleeping eyelids laid / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees" (ll. 169, 170–72). And at the same time we are told that this "charm" can be taken from the sight by "another herb" (ll. 183, 184). And so, what with mistakes, and Puckishness, and the dramaturgic convenience of such a magic juice, conditions are set for as many tanglings and untanglings of the plot as the playwright considers advisable. It is Puck who helps Shakespeare help the plot along by mistakenly squeezing the magic juice in the eyes of the wrong courtier, and who deliberately "translates" Bottom (3.1.109) by giving him an ass's head (thus making Queen Titania's infatuation particularly "spectacular").

But the remarkable thing is that, by first establishing the woodsy dimension before introducing talk of this magic juice, and by surrounding it with such lovely connotations when he does introduce it, the combination of Shakespeare's timing and his astonishing stylistic grace shifts our attention away from the rudimentary nature of the device itself, as a way of keeping his plot on the move. And instead, we feel it as infused with the spirit of the same fancifulness with which the imagery as a whole levitates. But in this general account of what is going on in the play, we should also stress the fact that the opening remarks by Theseus clearly establish the *point of view* in terms of which this play is to be received. Except for one notable feature (and my speculations on that matter involve a notion which you might not agree with), I take it that, being in all likelihood written for a wealthy patron who was by implication honored (or, if you will, flattered) in the figure of Theseus, the play is presented from such a noble patron's point of view. Though Shakespeare was as suave in honoring his patron as his "rude mechanicals" were not, both his play, and the handicrafts men's efforts to perform the play-within-a-play, implicitly approached the nature of the social gap "from the top down"—except . . . but on that point, more anon.

II

In the strictest sense, the "Dream" is confined to the sequence of entanglements and disentanglements that take place in the woods. Here we might, for contrast, recall the dark and savage (*oscura*, *selvaggia*) woods in which Dante was lost at the beginning of his journey into Hell.[6] Morally, it there stands for a region of Error which one first enters at adolescence. Politically, it stands for the "troubled state of Italy in Dante's time." Both works touch upon the kind of attitude that proverbially equates "being in the wood" with "being at a loss." And the expression is even used reflexively when Demetrius refers to the young lovers' confusions as a "wood within this wood" (2.1.192). Yet here the whole notion of confusion is reduced to the antics of a mere comic imbroglio. Maybe I am being over-thorough, but in meditating on this range of meanings (between the fearsome and the playful) I like to think that such a prettifying of the problematical could even be related ultimately to such transformations as are implicit in the thought that the body's powers of *pleasurable* awareness may be attenuated modifications of what began as sensitivity to *pain*. True, as judged sheerly by the resources of stagecraft, the complications of the play can be said to center in the fiction of a magical juice that, when squirted into a sleeper's eyes, "Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees" (ll. 171–72), plus the availability of another device that will undo this fascination. But we soon run into complications considerably much subtler and more exacting than that.

If we dig deeper, how is the whole work seen to shape up? I shall try to show why much stress should be placed upon the fact that the *dramatis personae* comprise three quite distinct classes of characters. First, there are the figures who are "courtly" in two senses, both as regards their privileged *social* status and as regards their varied involvements in the theme of *sexual* courtship. At the other end of the social scale are the "handicraft" men, the crude "mechanicals" whose ingenuous earnestness makes them the butts of the comedy's fond derision. (I am puzzled as to why Granville-Barker refers to them as "rustics."[7] If they were rustics rather than low-bred townsmen, some of my notions about the underpinnings of the play would have to be considerably altered.)

Between these two contrasted social orders (or perhaps we might better say, alongside them), there are the wood sprites, the fairy people who appear only in the forest scenes, at night, by moonlight. These are the figures whom Shakespeare entrusts with the function of giving the play its miraculously rare dreamlike quality.

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[6] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, 2 vols., trans. and comm., Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 1:2; canto 1, ll. 2, 5.

[7] Reprinted in Harley Granville-Barker, *More Prefaces to Shakespeare*, ed. Edward M. Moore (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), 94, 125, 127.

With them in mind, it does us good to recall what Francis Fergusson, in his charming epitomizing of the play, has summed up thus:

> It is the strange events of Acts II and III, in woodland and summer moonlight, that give *A Midsummer Night's Dream* its name and its magical quality. In creating that sequence Shakespeare drew upon his memories of two age-old festivals of the summer season which must have been familiar, since childhood, to him and his audience: May Day and Midsummer Eve. The May Day games, when the young people ran through the woods all night to gather boughs and flowers for the maypole (a custom that scandalized the Puritans), suggest the nocturnal hide-and-seek of Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius. Midsummer Eve, the summer solstice, was the time of "midsummer madness," and maidens were supposed to dream, that night, of their true loves—as Shakespeare's young people, and even his Bottom and Titania [about whom further anon], do in their odd ways.[8]

Probably commissioned as a kind of masque, to celebrate a wedding among persons of nobility, the "Dream" simply exports the aesthetic and social values of the court to a series of fanciful scenes in the woods, which are the court all over again, but in an idealized form.[9] Here the susceptibility to shifts of allegiance, so "natural" to courtship as so conceived, is treated with the help of contrivances whereby the vagaries of infatuation can be acceptably exaggerated, in both their nature and their instability. Dreams are always a kind of caricature, over-simplifying motives in one way or another. And the machinery of this Dream is designed to provide a masque-like entertainment by the use of such conventions, and the establishing of such expectations, as readily allow for sudden reversals whereby, for instance, a character can at one moment be vowing eternal loyalty to another, and at the next moment is headed in a quite different direction, paying equally zestful court to someone else. Then, to round things out, back at court where the play began, all can end on the assumption that henceforth the time of such confusions is over, all but the wood-

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[8] Francis Fergusson, *Shakespeare: The Pattern in His Carpet* (New York: Delacorte P, 1970), 125. In a deleted passage, Burke continued, "I quote this passage for two reasons. First, it admirably sums up the point about the possible 'archetypal' elements of folklore that, in all likelihood, the dramatist did draw upon, when helping his audience to imagine the magic of moonlight in the woods. But, second, Fergusson is so alive to poetics in the Aristotelian sense, unlike the myth-men he would never propose to derive the structure of the play thus 'archetypically.' Archetypes be damned. In the passage I quoted, he takes care of that angle, and shrewdly, since it often now happens to be in. He indicates how one should make allowances for the 'archetype' way of defining and lining up literary modes. Incidentally, for many purposes, it proves itself to be an exceptionally civilized way of lining things up. But first of all, I submit, if you *must* build the whole set-up around 'archetypes,' then, when you get to one particular text, ask not what *static* 'archetypes' (as mythic background) it exemplifies. Ask, rather, what are the ARCHETYPAL DEVELOPMENTS?"

[9] Burke's inference that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had its origin in private performance, with later revision for public performance, was at the time arguable, but no longer reflects a consensus of opinion among Shakespeare scholars.

sprites have come out of the woods, and for the humans everything ends in perfect order, climaxed by the closing stable relationship between the courtly figures and the laborers, the prime one among whom is Bottom, the weaver, who during the period of confusion had been "translated" into an ass. But no, that isn't quite the case. There is a further scene in which Puck, Oberon, and Titania also speak to undo their association with the intermediate time of turmoil, and to establish it that their attitude, too, is one of total benevolence towards the courtly figures (there is no reference to the "mechanicals").

<center>III</center>

Now that everything has been brought to a state of perfect rest, let us, alas! unloose *our* problems. I have felt that a handy way to bring out the nature of the comic motive in this work would be to contrast it with such a grotesque tragedy as Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. And as a corollary to that emphasis, I want to discuss some implications of the play's "Puckishness," including its diplomatic tie-in with the famous set-speech of Theseus, the Duke whose impending marriage is the occasion of the events that lead to the incidents in the woods and to the play-within-a-play that comes in the last act, and that the dramaturgic skill of Shakespeare leads us to receive as a kind of long-awaited fulfillment. I refer to the often-quoted lines: "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, / Are of imagination all compact" (5.1.7–8). It is a formulary that felicitously merges both felicitous and sinister connotations in the concept of the creative. And it is often taken, I think mistakenly, not just as a speech given to Theseus for handling a dimension of this particular play, but as Shakespeare's summarizing of his own skills. To take up these two points in succession:

The tragedy of *Coriolanus* well serves our present purposes because it centers in a character who despises the populace, and takes every opportunity to say so. Thus the drama brings to maximum intensity the conflict between patricians and plebeians, a conflict that the heroic victim's combination of bravery and arrogance constantly accentuates. On the other hand, in the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, whereas there is an equally wide social gap between the courtly characters and the "handicraft men" who are so seriously concerned with their plans to perform a play in the Duke's honor, the mood is one of total *relaxation*. Perhaps, in the last analysis, the Duke's friendly condescension towards the self-serious mutts whose bungling he affectionately enjoys is but a variant of the same social ratings as Coriolanus so turbulently swore by. However, the social gap is here presented in an attitude of almost benign amusement, towards the social underlings, on the part of the Duke in whose honor they perform a play in *farcical* earnest.

Maybe I could best make my point this way: While agreeing that we should, first of all, consider a work of art in terms of its internal relationships and transformations, I submit that we can meet such tests without sacrificing a reference to what I

might call a kind of "social psychosis" prevailing outside the work. In the case of *Coriolanus*, the point is obvious. In actual life, an intense conflict between social classes can be a cause of much distress. But a tragedy built around the use of such a topic can imitate the actual social problem in such a way that, in its aesthetic analogue, it becomes transformed into a source of *entertainment*. The poetic imitation of a situation that would be tragic in actual life can so transcend the conditions of life that it allows us to experience what Aristotle would call the "tragic pleasure."[10] I have such thoughts in mind when I ask what "social psychosis" a tragedy might be exploiting, for the delectation of an audience. And I have said that the "social psychosis" involved in the tragedy of *Coriolanus* is in the conflict between the nobles and the populace.[11]

But just where are we, when we turn to comedy? And particularly just where are we, when we have such comedy as this, which takes it easy, even when we watch the characters (who don't know of their plight as we do) being temporarily agitated? We *just know* that the "Dream's" entanglements are going to get untangled. Such expectations are built into the form. In fact, the various shifts of allegiance, without any corresponding depths of transformation in the comic characters themselves, are all that is needed to tell us in a general way that this play is under the sign of relaxation.

Though I think that Elder Olson's excellent book on comedy[12] misleads us somewhat by placing too great stress upon the *trivial* as an aspect of comedy's appeal in general, I think he is quite correct in stressing a somewhat related motive, the state of total *relaxation* in which at least a comedy such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* helps the audience to participate. Where I differ from Olson is in wanting to consider underlying motivational elements which are decidedly *not* trivial. Thus, in reviewing Olson's book, I used the example of some folk-humor that turned up in the old days that doubtless antedated many of you, during the Middle Western dust storms of the Thirties. The comic line ran thus: "I guess Uncle Ebenezer will soon be along. I just saw his farm go by." In contrast with an outcry that might tragically intensify the great gravity of the situation, the joke was "trivial." But it was not "much ado about nothing." Rather, the motive underlying its comic appeal (what I would call the "psychosis" of the situation) was in dead earnest. And I have such considerations in mind when, in asking about a possible "social psychosis" that underlies this masque-like comedy, doubtless written originally for appreciation "from the top down," I would contrast its way of dealing with the distinction between upper and lower classes with comedy's way of treating much the same issue.

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[10] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453b11–13.

[11] Burke refers to his essay "*Coriolanus*—and the Delights of Faction," *Hudson Review* 19 (1966): 185–202.

[12] Burke reviewed Elder Olson's *The Theory of Comedy* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1968); see Kenneth Burke, "The Serious Business of Comedy," *New Republic* 160.11 (1969): 23–24, 27.

We shall return to this point later. Meanwhile, let us consider for a while the other strand, the romantic "Puckishness" with which Shakespeare inspirits the play, by his use of the woodland imagery. (Meanwhile, if my use of the term "psychosis" bothers you, please let it hang for now—and we'll return to it later.)

As regards the *dramatis personae*, obviously there are three dimensions in this play. So far, we have touched upon the contrast between the courtly characters and the beloved low-born mutts (in the stage directions they are called "clowns" [3.1 sd]), whose performance of the play-within-a-play will be considered by the stage-audience farcical, a judgment shared by audiences other than the one for which the original wedding-masque was presumably written. The more they bumbled, the more lovable they were; and all the more so because (as regards the standpoint of the courtly psychosis), in all their bumbling they took for granted the respect that they paid to their patron and his actual bride (doubtless represented in the original performance by Theseus and Hippolyta).

But what of the third dimension among the characters? There is a sense in which we could class the courtly characters and the respectfully subservient "mechanicals" together, in contrast with this woodsy lot, headed in poetic Puck (the self-proclaimed lover of the "preposterous"[13]), King Oberon, and Queen Titania. In considering this third dimension, I ran across an unexpected likelihood. If you won't go along with it, I doubt whether I could prove the point, but I bring it up because it bears upon my distinction between a tragic and a comic use of *extra*-poetic tensions. As regards the crossing of the social gap between upper and lower classes, it is conceivable how the tensions of a courtly psychosis might provide the poetic conditions for the appeal of an intense *tragedy* in which a queen becomes madly in love with a low-bred commoner. But what of a *comedy* that, while written for such an audience, is under the sign of *total relaxation*? I submit that, by an act of highly inventive dramaturgic diplomacy, the dramatist solved the problem by so peopling the woodsy dimension of his cast that he had *two* queens, only one of which, Hippolyta, would have alluded to the bride of the *actual* wedding for which this wedding-masque had been designed. Within these conditions, Shakespeare is able to cross this social gap (and, in that sense, is able to build lightly atop the tension that would be most basic to the courtly psychosis). I would assume that the ultimate dramaturgic grounds for attempting to cross such a gap would be not necessarily social (in the sense that the dramatist wanted to "sneak something across"). The effort would be grounded, rather, in a technical fact; namely: (for all their differences) both comedy and tragedy profit by kinds of imitation that are built atop tense issues as their explicit or implicit subject-matter.

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[13] "Those things do best please me / That befall prepost'rously" (3.2.120–21).

No one can say how much the text may have been modified, if at all, when transformed from a masque for private performance before a select audience to a play designed for appeal to the public at large. In any case, as we now have it, if we consider it from the standpoint of the courtly psychosis (which all dramatists of the time necessarily, or even "naturally," took into account), do we not find, lurking within the work, a delightful twist that is almost an obscenity? For Bottom fails to see any glamour at all in being attended so assiduously by an infatuated queen. He is interested in oats, and in getting his ears scratched (4.1.7, 21–24, 29–30)—and he doesn't want his attendants to be so courteous. While all the courtiers, when lost in the wood, were continually shifting, Bottom was as firm and stable as a rump. Along with his unconscious references to even the sheerly visible nature of his asininity (and Shakespeare works them for all the traffic will bear), there is also, in his "translated" state, this blunt unresponsiveness. And however asininely inappropriate it may seem, within the terms of the courtly psychosis, I can understand the nature of its appeal to lower-class members of the audience, like I'm.

IV

But all that I have been saying has been but leading to a kind of problem which has not been so much as vaguely indicated. Dear friends, though Dante got us out of the woods, and though the play we have been considering never even got us into Dante's woods, we have now brought things to the point where I must break down and admit that, with regard to this play, I am still in the woods.

Let's face the matter thus:

In considering both drama and the dramatizing resources of journalism, and the ways of life itself, I have been much affected by the important role of *victimage*, in either dramatic imitations of life, or journalistic documentary reports of life, or life itself. When, years ago, I first began thinking of this play, I told myself that one ultimate source of the loveliness in it is its total absence of a victim. (And that's a possibility particularly worth considering in these times, when so many enterprisers of so many sorts are doing all within their power to play up victimage.)

But on this score I was cheating somewhat. For although things turn out pleasantly for everyone, and though the audience never has reason to expect that the incidental discordancies along the way will end in victimage, there is a constant succession of such turbulencies, however prettified. And although "*The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe*" (1.2.9–10) with its "very tragical mirth" (5.1.57), but imitates victimage in ways that are not felt as such by either the audience of the play or the audience of the play-within-a-play, the unconscious burlesque of themselves provided by the "rude mechanicals" does in effect class them as victims of a sort. For they are butts of derision, albeit it kindly derision, and quite beyond their range of awareness as implied within the terms of the fiction. Yet it all

adds up not to the absence of victimage, but to the imitation of attenuated or qualified victimage.

But now where are we? It is a fact that, after several revisions of this piece, I end on what I originally began with. In connection with a seminar I was planning some several months ago, for the final assignment I suggested two topics. For members of the class who would be most at home in the close analysis of one particular text, I suggested *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

For those who would prefer a general topic, I suggested "Humanism." Was it on the way out? Or was it due for some sort of revival? I had been invited to attend a conference abroad on this subject. But when circumstances prevented my attending, I "sublimated" by proposing that some members of the class take this subject as their point of departure. On the assumption that, throughout our history, various "isms" are defined with relation to other "isms," I had in the back of my mind the thought that a New Humanism now would be defined antithetically to "Technologism," which would be distinguished from mere technology in the sense that, while accepting a large measure of technology as necessary and even desirable, this particular brand of Humanism, local to our time, would programatically condemn (in what it called "Technologism") the assumption, explicit or implicit, that the remedy for technologically caused problems should be sought, not in the attempt to *moderate* such modes of livelihood, but rather in schemes making for still more and more of such technologic clutter.

In this connection I thought of the "Dream" as exemplifying a quite different dimension. Even when it was first performed, I assumed, its scenes of Puckish bewitchment in the woods appealed somewhat by the romanticizing of a fictive realm that, even then, was felt as romantically antithetic to men's ways of life in town. Hence, why not all the more so these days, when a sizable stand of timber marks but an uncomfortably problematic region of overlap between raw material for pulp mills and the environmentalists' view of it as a possible protection against the ravages of progress, population explosion, and pollution.

"Wouldn't it be lovely," I told myself, "to view the relation between town and non-town in terms of Puckish woodsiness?" At that time, I hadn't specifically concerned myself with the problems of accountancy involved in the relation between a courtly psychosis then and what I would want to call a technological psychosis now, though recognizing that the very presence of the play's mechanicals (a carpenter, a joiner, a bellows-mender, a tinker, a tailor, and above all, our ass-bottom weaver) testified already to a fairly advanced technology.

As regards the town's ways of matching its current psychosis in terms of non-town, I think at least of three: (1) fantasies of life technologically made possible beneath the sea; (2) fantasies of life that technology makes possible in outer realms of space and/or time; (3) tourism, with the constant and necessary aid of all the

technical and financial and organizational resources that are the very essence of the town. Here are three ways of projecting the town into non-towns that are imaginary counterparts. But *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I have suggested, is of a different order, dialectically on a different plane entirely, its dream being built by the fragmentary use of old legends that (at the time when the play was written) still did have some living expression, in country customs, still vigorous enough for the Puritans to feel the need of reproving them severely.

Humanism now, as I see the issue, would necessarily confront the Technological Psychosis head on. Thus, it would in some notable respects be *antithetical* to Technologism. As I see the Dream, it is not, in its origins, anti-technologistic. For its embodiment of town-thinking even included, pleasantly, without connotations of resistance, the role of the "mechanicals" in contributing to the ways of the Courtly Psychosis (the tensions implicit in the social situation there being smoothed over so gently, you'd hardly suspect that Shakespeare ever even thought of them, were it not for a grotesque tragedy like *Coriolanus*, in which the same underlying "socio-psychotic" situation is so stridently insisted upon).

Just what, in sum, is my position? This masque-like comedy, at the time of its original production, was clearly infused with the extra-poetic influence of the courtly psychosis. This comes to focus in the farcical performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* and Titania's infatuation with Bottom. At the same time, the play also had, for the town, an element of medicinal, nostalgic fantasy, in its vision of a romanticized non-town. The sense of its courtly reference is not for us now a *major* aspect of its appeal. But in the meantime, a theory of Humanism that would be defined as antithetical to Technologism brings to the fore a sense of the work's relation to what, as seen from the standpoint of Humanism so defined, would be called a Technological Psychosis.[14]

But maybe you might now see why I would want to speak of a "courtly psychosis" rather than using the orthodox Marxist term for class "consciousness." For Humanism, as I see it now, must square itself against a kind of Technologism that we confront today in capitalist, fascist, socialist, communist, tribalist, or anti-colonialist modes of expectation and exhortation. Regardless of politics, both the Volga and U.S. rivers can now catch fire—have caught fire.[15] Though I strongly doubt whether a Humanism, as so defined, has much of a chance, I see nowhere else to turn. But be that as it may, I see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a fanciful embodiment of the Humanistic attitude.

[14] In a deleted passage, Burke went on: "Thus, my embarrassment resides in the fact that my ideal play, to represent in fantasy a realm outside a 'technological psychosis' is in its very essence bound to 'courtly psychosis,' though I do think that I have shown how, and why, for us at least, it can outreach those limitations."

[15] Burke refers to spontaneous combustion of polluted materials on the Volga River in Europe in 1970 and, likely, to the 22 June 1969 fire on the Cuyahoga River, in Cleveland, Ohio.

Meanwhile, for a happy ending that befits the tenor of the play, let us revert to those famous lines of Theseus' we mentioned earlier:

> 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.
> Such tricks hath strong imagination
> That if it would but apprehend some joy
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
> Or in the night, imagining some fear,
> How easy is a bush supposed a bear!
>
> (5.1.7–22)

Grand lines, but they are Theseus' lines, not Shakespeare's. For they contain no mention of the astounding rationality he brought to his trade as a playwright. They are not the recipe for Shakespeare. Shakespeare was all that, and more. Also recall, at least, that grand set-piece by Ulysses, on degree, in *Troilus and Cressida* (1.3.101–34). Learn how to discount for shrewd attitudinizing, and there you see him saying, with a whole panoply of pleasantries, what Marx said with his modes of armament, in talking as he did of what, in our terms, might be called the "hierarchical psychosis." Or, returning to our play, let us end with meditations on that much-quoted line of Puck's, "what fools these mortals be!" (3.2.115). Think of the great tribute he paid to us mortal fools, in the astonishing rationality with which he put together his things of the imagination. I do believe he was the sort of craftsman who, if we believed such-and-such, could make a great play out of such beliefs, and could as easily have made a great play out of the opposite beliefs, if those others were what moved us. For what he believed in above all was the glory of his trade itself, which is to say, the great humaneness of the word, and the corresponding search throughout the range of all its aptitudes. True, the miraculous resources of the word have led us into a technologic clutter that threatens to turn both town and anti-town inexorably into modes of horror. But still being born anew, there is the wondrous constructive *rationality* of the word, so masterfully embodied in Shakespeare's blithe dramaturgic schemings.