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M. E. Lamb

A Midsummer-Night's Dream: The Myth of

Theseus and the Minotaur

That the myth of Theseus and the minotaur has not been already identified as an influence on *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is surprising indeed.¹ There have been so many sources and influences identified for this play; several have been mythological, and some of these have been Ovidian.² In fact, the advancement of yet one more Ovidian mythological influence may seem superfluous. There are, however, several ways in which recognition of the influence of the myth of Theseus and the minotaur contributes to an increased understanding and appreciation of the play. First, it links the lovers' wanderings to an allegorical tradition of the time; it at least partially accounts for the widely varying critical responses towards Bottom; it explains why Theseus, the figure for the "unkinde" lover, can be represented as an ideal husband. Still more important, this study moves beyond an examination of influence to explore a new metaphor, Daedalus's labyrinth, through which to view the theme of art in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and suggests a new interpretation of Theseus's famous speech comparing lunatics, lovers, and poets. Finally, it explores the implications of the myth of Theseus and the minotaur for the dark side of the play, to discover that the world of the irrational has sinister as well as beneficial possibilities, that the materials of tragedy and comedy are inextricably linked within the nature of man.³

According to Golding's Ovid and North's Plutarch, two texts often consulted by Shakespeare, this myth includes the following account: the minotaur was a monster half bull and half human, engendered through the intercourse of Pasiphae, queen of Crete, and a bull. Her husband, King Minos, directed Daedalus to construct an intricate labyrinth to contain this creature, which was fed with human flesh. Included among the minotaur's victims were youths, both male and female, offered periodically as tribute to Crete from

conquered Athens. These unfortunates were placed in the labyrinth, where they were doomed to wander until they starved to death, or until they were consumed by the minotaur. One year, King Aegeus's son Theseus asked to be included in this tribute. When he arrived at Crete, King Minos's daughter Ariadne fell in love with him and provided him with a thread to tie at the entrance of the labyrinth so that he could find his way out. Having vowed his love for Ariadne, Theseus killed the minotaur and, as agreed, took her with him when he escaped Crete. However, he broke his vow on the trip homeward and abandoned her as she slept on an island where the ship had docked.⁴ Most of the details of this myth appear in one way or another in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*.

The labyrinth itself, in which Athenian youth are sacrificed to the minotaur, contains broad implications for *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. Like the youth of the myth, the young lovers of the play enter a kind of labyrinth, a forest where they become hopelessly lost; and at the center of this labyrinth is a creature, half human and half ass. The similarity between the forest of the play and the labyrinth becomes even more striking when the myth is understood according to the allegorical reading of the day: the minotaur's labyrinth represented vice, especially yielding to sensual delights, in which sinners lose themselves until aided by some external power.⁵ In fact, Shakespeare elsewhere uses the labyrinth in a slightly different allegorical sense to represent uncontrollable passion: in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, the Duke of Suffolk muses on his lust for his future Queen: "But Suffolk stay. / Thou mayst not wander in that labyrinth; / There Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk" (V.iii.187-89); in *The History of Troilus and Cressida*, Thersites exclaims to himself: "How now, Thersites? What, lost in the labyrinth of thy fury?" (II.iii.1-2).⁶ This allegorical understanding of the labyrinth provides a new context for the lovers' progressive "loss" of themselves in their own passions as the play progresses. They enter the forest-labyrinth with a purpose: Hermia and Lysander are fleeing to Lysander's aunt's house, where they will be free to marry; Demetrius is pursuing his beloved Hermia, somehow to prevent her from marrying Lysander; and Helena is pursuing Demetrius "to have his sight thither and back again" (I.i.251). By the end of their sojourn in the forest, however, their motives of love have changed to more violent impulses as they circle each other helplessly, Demetrius and Lysander attempting to slay each other for love of Helena, Helena fleeing Hermia's sharp nails. Like the sinners of the allegorical interpretation, they are unable to save themselves; and it is only through the beneficent aid of the fairies that they emerge, alive and evenly paired, back where they began.⁷

The usual response to these mad lovers chasing each other around the forest-labyrinth of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is not, however, consistent with the judgment implied by the myth's allegory. In fact, one critic's harsh claim that "Shakespeare shows us how undisciplined passion can turn humans into beasts whose sexual reflexes are totally irrational and arbitrary"⁸ seems curiously perverse. *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is a comedy, not a moral tract; and most audiences react to the lovers with laughter, not condemnation. Audiences know that there will be a happy ending. Unlike the doomed Athenians of the myth, unlike the sinners of the allegory, the lovers are safe. They are watched over by the fairies; and the monster of this maze is no threatening minotaur but a low-life craftsman, the "shallowest thickskin of that barren sort" (III.ii.13). So the threats of Demetrius and Lysander against each other's lives are amusing because we know that they will never carry them out. We laugh at the incongruity of the diminutive Hermia reaching up to scratch out the eyes of Helena, her taller adversary who runs away in fright, because we know that Helena's eyes are in no real danger.

The presence of Bottom as the minotaur adapts the Theseus myth to the comic spirit of the play. Yet Bottom is also a creature of the Theseus myth, and his identity as a comic minotaur extends beyond the fact that he is half human and half ass. Bottom is a conflation of the minotaur and the bull which sired him, and the relationship between Bottom and Titania is heavily influenced by the relationship between Pasiphae and this father bull. In the whimsical account in Ovid's *Art of Love*, which differs in this respect from most versions of the myth, Pasiphae is not merely lecherous: she is really in love. She "envies the lovely Heifers to the death," when they seem to be favored by her beloved bull; she would crop "fresh boughs, and mow yong grasse" for her love; she meets the bull "in the wild woods" where she "joyfull skips . . . And proudly jetting on the greene grasse lips, / To please his amorous eye."⁹ Her concern for her lover's food, her attempts to please him, her meeting him in the woods—all of these resemble Titania's treatment of Bottom. And like Titania, Pasiphae never gains her love's amorous attention; to consummate her love, Pasiphae has to resort to disguising herself in a cow's skin.

Bottom's roots in the Theseus myth go beyond Pasiphae's bull. At the time his name "bottom" was used to refer to "thread" or "a skein of thread,"¹⁰ the household item which played a crucial role in delivering Theseus from the labyrinth. In fact, Caxton's translation of the *Aeneid* uses the exact phrase "a botom of threde" in the description of Theseus's adventure with the minotaur.¹¹

Furthermore, Bottom's vocation as a weaver would bring the association of this meaning of his name to the mind of an Elizabethan audience.

Bottom is both the monster of this labyrinth and the thread leading the way out of it; and the complexity of our response to him is demonstrated by the widely differing attitudes adopted towards him.¹² On the one hand, Bottom is truly an ass; in fact, he is called an ass twice in the course of the play. Surrounded by magic and moonshine, lying in the arms of the fairy queen, yet oblivious to her considerable charms, Bottom asks only to be fed "your good dry oats" and to be scratched about the face, where he is "marvelous hairy" (IV.i.26, 34). As Bertrand Evans has pointed out, Bottom is, of all the characters, the most "congenitally, chronically unaware."¹³ On the other hand, into his braying mouth are placed the wisest sentiments about love expressed in the play. He knows that he is not the paragon Titania admires; when she compliments his beauty and wisdom, his reply shows an honest sense of his own limitations: "Not so, neither" (III.i.152). Unlike the other characters, he knows that "reason and love keep little company together now-a-days" (III.i.147). In short, Bottom is an ass because he does not succumb to love; and he is a thread out of this labyrinth because he refuses to abandon his common sense even in Titania's embrace. Chasing a rival through a nettle-filled forest would never be for him. The paradoxical attitude directed towards Bottom by the play is a paradoxical attitude towards love: not falling in love is both pathologically foolish and eminently sensible.

The myth of Theseus and the minotaur also clarifies our understanding of Theseus. Long considered the embodiment of "the reasonable man and the ideal ruler of both his lower nature and his subjects,"¹⁴ Theseus has now been recognized as having had a sinister character in the Renaissance. He was, in fact, the figure for the "unkinde" lover, a deserter of women. His reputation for infidelity draws its force from his abandonment of Ariadne, whose complaint was movingly presented in Ovid's *Heroides*, and can be found in several sources well known in the Renaissance: Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Golding's *Ovid*, North's *Plutarch*, Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governor*.¹⁵ Shakespeare does not ignore this tradition. In fact, if anything, he exaggerates it by telescoping Theseus's various infidelities when Oberon accuses Titania of making Theseus break faith with "fair Aegles . . . With Ariadne, and Antiopa" (II.i. 79-80), of leading him "through the glimmering night / From Perigouna, whom he ravished" (II.i. 77-78).

Far from discrediting him by adding "an ironic dimension to the play,"¹⁶ Theseus's broken vows forcefully demonstrate the

irrationality of love central to this forest-labyrinth. Theseus, too, has been led through the maze, just as Puck leads the lovers in the play. The lovers will, like Theseus, emerge from the forest; and their broken vows, like Theseus's previous infidelities, highlight by contrast the evident happy stability of the marriages at the end of the play. It is to Theseus, the apparently reformed heartbreaker, more than to Theseus the good prince, that the underlying myth of the play directs us, at this point.

The parallel between the love experiences of Theseus and the lovers of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is drawn closer yet by other echoes of the myth. The manner of Theseus's desertion of Ariadne is recalled by Lysander's desertion of Hermia. Like Theseus and Ariadne, Lysander and Hermia are fleeing a forbidding father; like Theseus, Lysander has vowed eternal love for Hermia only suddenly to vow love for another woman; and, perhaps most striking, both Hermia and Ariadne are abandoned while sleeping. The moment when Ariadne wakes to find Theseus gone is pathetic indeed in Ovid's *Heroides*; but, as with Pasiphae and the bull, the main influence seems to be *The Art of Love*, where Ariadne's situation is very similar to Hermia's. Ariadne wakes alone to cry, "What shall I do? . . . what shall I do? / And with that note she runs the forest through" (B4). When Ariadne finally falls senseless from exhaustion and grief, she is surrounded by sympathetic nymphs, satyrs, and other woodland creatures, much as the lovers (especially the female lovers) gain the sympathy of the forest fairies in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*.

The attitude towards the irrational expressed in the love plot of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is, finally, ambivalent. On the one hand, falling in love is a form of madness, which causes perfectly normal young people to act with cruelty towards each other, to become lost in a maze of passionate impulses, to break vows uncontrollably. Clearly, this forest-labyrinth is no place for mortals to dwell; and stable marriages must be lived out in Athens. On the other hand, the lovers, watched over by the fairies, will come to no real harm. In fact, they leave the forest evenly paired and ready to reenter a society they fled only a short time before. The attitude towards their abandonment to the impulses of love is mixed. Their experience within this forest-labyrinth cannot be wholly envied or pitied, any more than Bottom, minotaur and thread, can be praised or blamed for his immunity to the charms of Titania.

Lovers are not the only Athenians to enter the forest-labyrinth of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; the "rude mechanicals" practice their play there, and their hilarious mistakes introduce the subject of art into the play. The development of this theme in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* also shares several characteristics with the myth of Theseus

Lysander
+ Theseus
are similar
Hermia
is Ariadne

and the minotaur. The labyrinth constructed for the minotaur was created by Daedalus, an artificer “renowned in the lande / For fine devise and workmanship in building.”¹⁷ Daedalus was, in fact, one of the most famous craftsmen of classical legend; and his work for King Minos apparently justified his reputation. The myth’s emphasis upon the artisan Daedalus may have influenced the unusual focus on the vocations of the craftsmen in *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*. At first, there seems to be little justification for identifying Quince as a carpenter, Snug as a joiner, Bottom as a weaver, Flute as a bellows-mender, Snout as a tinker, and Starveling as a tailor; Shakespeare does not specify the vocations of low-life characters in other plays with such precision. Glancing at the underlying myth, however, we see that Bottom’s vocation as a weaver calls attention to his role as the thread leading out of the labyrinth. Similarly, the vocation of Peter Quince as a carpenter links him with the builder Daedalus. Even Quince’s name has architectural meaning: a “quoin” was a wedge-shaped piece of stone or wood, also used to describe a cornerstone.¹⁸ And Shakespeare, the playwright of *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, is even more closely related to the Daedalus figure; he, too, has built a structure, marvellous in its complexity, which contains wandering Athenians and a kind of minotaur. Thus, the underlying myth focuses attention on the playwright as a craftsman who must work with other craftsmen to produce a finished work of art.

The mistakes of Quince’s company in their production of the Pyramus and Thisbe love story show by contrast the tremendous craft required of any finished play production. Their problems must be faced by Shakespeare’s company as well: how shall moonlight be represented? what props shall be used? how should actors react to insults from the audience? (Insults could be expected from the groundlings of the Globe, if not from more refined audiences, as well.) The ridiculous solutions arrived at by Quince’s company demonstrate the artistry of Shakespeare’s.¹⁹ Thus, the bumbling artisans call attention to the craftsmanship of *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*; but they call attention to another issue as well. The artisans’ most damaging mistake, as Barber points out, is their “tendency to treat the imaginary as though it were real.”²⁰ They fear that the ladies will mistake an actor wearing a lion’s skin for a real lion, and the company agrees that the ladies’ fear “would hang us, every mother’s son” (I.ii.80). They are also worried that the audience will take the highly unrealistic stage deaths of the characters Pyramus and Thisbe for real deaths; and they compose a prologue to assure the audience that no one has been killed and that Pyramus is not really Pyramus, but “Bottom the weaver” (III.i.23). Their confusion about the appropriate attitude of an audience can be further explored



by turning to the labyrinth as a metaphor for a work of art. This metaphor may or may not have influenced Shakespeare's thinking about art; it is presented here primarily as a way of clarifying some issues in the play.

The myth of Theseus and the minotaur includes three separate viewpoints of the labyrinth: the viewpoint of the victim, the viewpoint of the outsider, and the viewpoint of the artist, who perceives the labyrinth from the perspectives of both victim and outsider. For example, Ovid's narrator admires the art of Daedalus's labyrinth: "He confounds his worke with sodaine stopes and stayes, / And with the great uncertaintie of sundrie winding wayes, / Leads in and out, and to and fro" (VIII, 213-14). He compares the labyrinth with the river Meander which "meeting with himselfe doth looke if all his streame or no / Come after" (VIII, 218-19). Admiration for the labyrinth seems curiously amoral given its sinister purpose, the minotaur's devouring Athenian youth. *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* also contains this double perspective. In its intricate complications, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* resembles Daedalus's labyrinth, and Ovid's narrator's description applies equally well to the play, with its "sodaine stopes and stayes," and even with its "meeting with himselfe" in its examination of its own craft through the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. And Shakespeare's play also contains its victims, the Athenian lovers, tormented in their desperate and seemingly haphazard wanderings through the forest. Yet their circlings are in reality carefully ordered by Puck, who takes great delight in his art: "Up and down, up and down, / I will lead them up and down" (III.ii.396-97). And he enjoys equally the patterns which lie outside of his making: "Then will two at once woo one. / That must needs be sport alone; / And those things do best please me / That befall prepost'rously" (III.ii.118-21). Like the audience, Puck's response to the lovers' misery is laughter at their plight and delight in the patterns, whether his or fate's, which control them. And here lies the second view of the labyrinth: viewed by the outsider rather than by a victim, it is a dazzling work of art. For the lovers, the labyrinth is the setting for a journey in which they encounter unfamiliar and frightening aspects of themselves. As an audience, however, we do not enter the labyrinth. Instead we appreciate its art and marvel in its complexity.²¹ It is these two perspectives that the artisans confuse, in their fear that the ladies will be truly frightened by a stage lion or truly grieved over Pyramus's death.

There is another perspective which transcends these two; besides the viewpoint of the victim and the outsider, there is the viewpoint of the artist. For this we must turn to Theseus's famous speech, which unites the themes of art and love. For a long while the beauty

of Theseus's description of how the poet's pen "gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name" (V.i.16–17) led critics to interpret his speech as praising the power of poetry. More recently, critics have recognized its explicit deprecation of poetry: like lunatics and lovers, poets are deluded and cannot tell bushes from bears.²² Many readers have refused to accept Theseus's sentiments as expressing a serious position. Shakespeare was a poet, after all; and he knew that poets were not deluded. Consequently, Hippolyta's reply that "all the story of the night told over . . . grows to something of great constancy" (V.i.23, 25) is often read as a satisfactory answer to Theseus; while art does not meet the test of realistic truth, she is saying, it creates beauty from its "great constancy." In describing the order underlying the lovers' tales, Hippolyta evokes the perspective which views Daedalus's labyrinth as a work of art.

While Hippolyta's position is a valid statement about art, it does not allow us wholly to discount Theseus's speech, so powerful in its expression and so prominently placed at the beginning of the last act. In the end, Theseus's speech does not address the nature of art; it addresses instead the experience of the artist. Like the lovers, Theseus has had no chance to experience the art of the labyrinth; he has experienced only its terror. And in this perspective lies the true significance of Theseus's comparison. Before a poet can create a controlled work of art, he must, like the lover and the madman, reach that highly dangerous state of mind in which a bush seems a bear. The poet, like the lover and the madman, is an explorer of the irrational self; like them, he must lose himself in his own labyrinth and, if he meets a minotaur instead of an ass, risk a kind of death. Only after he experiences the labyrinth as a victim can he discover its order and create from it art.²³

It is ironic that this statement about the poet is spoken by Theseus, who not only deprecates poetry, but also refuses to believe the lovers' story, so like an "antique fable" or a "fairy toy" (V.i.3). He seems to have forgotten even more of his own experience in the forest than the lovers forgot; and he certainly did not, like Bottom, wake with an urge to have a ballad written of his experience. Theseus distrusts irrationality, and perhaps his refusal to believe the lovers' tale reflects something of his experience in the forest-labyrinth. The differences in the experiences of the lovers, dragging their exhausted bodies through a dark forest, and Bottom, coaxed and coddled by the fairy queen, demonstrate the range of experiences possible to a journey into irrationality. And the lovers and Bottom all explore a labyrinth without a minotaur. Perhaps, despite the kind offices of Titania, Theseus's journey aroused his permanent distrust for such explorations. And perhaps he was right. As the Renaissance

audience was aware, Theseus's good fortune at the end of the play was only temporary. Later, after his betrayal of Hippolyta, his uncontrollable fury will be aroused by the evil Phaedra, and he will murder his own son Hippolytus. Oberon's blessing on the marriage bed of Theseus and Hippolyta is perhaps the playwright's request of the audience not to recall this terrible event; yet denying it has the paradoxical effect of bringing it forcefully to mind: "To the best bride-bed will we, / Which by us shall blessed be; / And the issue there create / Ever shall be fortunate" (V.i.410-13). As everyone in the Renaissance audience no doubt knew, the issue created in that bed will be very unfortunate indeed.²⁴

Even as we laugh at *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, the underlying myth points to the potential for tragedy in the experience of the lovers and of poets: the myth's allegory implies the destructive effects of passion; but the lovers are finally saved, after considerable initial confusion, by the well-wishing fairies. Theseus will commit one of the most horrible crimes imaginable, the murder of his own son; but at the end of the play, he and Hippolyta express all the joyful serenity possible to a happily married couple. In the woods Bottom loses his full humanity to become a monster, even though he is loved by Titania, even though he emerges from the forest none the worse for his experience. Although there is no minotaur to devour the Athenians, the implication of the myth is still there: not all labyrinths contain Bottoms; some contain minotaurs.

The substitution of Bottom for a minotaur represents the transmutation of the elements of tragedy into comedy. And the close relationship between comedy and tragedy was a problem Shakespeare was exploring in, for example, the farcical production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, "very tragical mirth" (V.i.57). In fact, *Pyramus's* humorous invocation to the Furies to "cut thread and thrum," deflating grand tragic style by reminding his audience that he is really a weaver at heart, glances at the implications of the myth for tragedy: one can become lost and die in a labyrinth without a thread to lead the way out. This is, in a way, what happens to *Pyramus and Thisbe*; in the force of his passion, *Pyramus* leaps to a false conclusion about *Thisbe's* death, and both lovers commit impulsive suicide. This hilarious short play reminds us of a dark truth: under different circumstances the Athenian lovers, who were also escaping a forbidding father by running into the woods, might also have perished.

Shakespeare had already been struggling with the relationship of comedy and tragedy; in *Love's Labor's Lost*, written shortly before *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, the expected comic ending is suddenly thwarted by a father's death and by the knowledge that the songs

of winter inevitably follow the songs of spring. And the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*, strikingly similar to the plot of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, explicitly develops the tragedy possible to lovers in a society of threatening parents and strict laws.²⁵ Taken as a pair, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* suggest that recklessly abandoning oneself to love can lead either to death or to long married life. In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, the lovers are led magically from their labyrinth back to Athens where they reenter society; in *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers' world becomes increasingly constricted until it shrinks to a tomb. While the endings are different, both plays represent the experience of love as filled with beauty as well as the potential for danger. Together they show that the materials of tragedy and comedy are inextricably intertwined in the irrational nature of man. And this profound understanding of the closeness of the elements of tragedy and comedy is, as much as any other characteristic, central to Shakespeare's art.

Of course, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* remains a very funny comedy, and its dark side should not be overstated. In the end, the play does not develop the myth's implications for tragedy. The destructive potentialities of the abandonment of reason are only implied; the play itself demonstrates that paradoxically within this irrational world, which turns relatively sane Athenians into madmen and asses, lies the very source of civilization. Without the lovers' absurd excesses of passion, there would be no happy marriages, no children, no regeneration of society; and without Bottom's even more absurd encounter with the fairy queen, there would be no ballads of our dreams, no impulse to create art. The lovers wake feeling confusion and relief, but Bottom wakes with a feeling of true awe: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was" (IV.i.15-18). The process of turning an interior journey into art is truly miraculous, and Bottom's sense of wonder has been expressed by poets of all periods. Perhaps one of the most impressive descriptions of the wonder of turning the materials of subconscious into a labyrinth of art has been written by Wordsworth:

Visionary power

Attends the motions of the viewless winds

Embodied in the mystery of words:

There, darkness makes abode, and all the host

Of shadowy things work endless changes,—there

As in a mansion like their proper home,

Even forms and substances are circumfused

By that transparent veil with light divine
And, through the turnings intricate of verse,
Present themselves as objects recognised,
In flashes, and with glory not their own.²⁶

A Midsummer-Night's Dream, analyzed in the context of its influence, the myth of Theseus and the minotaur, shows that this experience, like love, can only be attained by the loss of self within the labyrinth of one's own irrationality.

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Notes

1. There have been two offhand allusions to the presence of the Theseus myth in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*: Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 133; and T. Walter Herbert, *Oberon's Mazed World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), p. 44, where he mentions that Bottom is a kind of minotaur. Standard source works which have omitted all mention of the Theseus and the minotaur myth include Frank Sidgwick, *The Sources and Analogues of "A Midsummer-Night's Dream"* (New York: Duffield, 1908); Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. I: *Early Comedies, Poems, and "Romeo and Juliet"* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 31-46; T. W. Baldwin, *On the Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Plays, 1592-1594* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1959), pp. 472-92.

Since the acceptance of this article by *TSSL*, a very different treatment of similar material appeared; see David Ormerod, "A Midsummer-Night's Dream: The Monster in the Labyrinth," *Shakespeare Studies*, 11 (1978), 39-52. Ormerod's article concludes, "To see the play as underpinned by the narrative of Theseus and the Minotaur is . . . to stress those elements in Shakespeare's comic world which seem paramount to modern criticism—the rejection of the love which is *alatus et caecus*; the moral purgation necessary, in an amorous context, to enable the lover to progress from Blind Cupid to Anteros, and the imperative reconciliation of opposites into a new *discordia concors*" (p. 39).

2. James A. S. McPeck, "The Psyche Myth and *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 23 (1972), 69-79, builds on an article by Sister M. Generosa, "Apuleius and *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*: Analogue or Source, Which?" *Studies in Philology*, 42 (1945), 198-204, to find Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, especially the Psyche myth, as a source for *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; Titania recalls both Venus and Psyche at different parts of the play. Marjorie B. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 76, likens Puck's fluid nature to Proteus's. Critics often pay lip service to Ovid's influence. Two studies devoted to Ovidian influence include Walter F. Staton, Jr., "Ovidian Elements in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 26 (1962), 165-78, where he parallels the cosmic disturbances caused by the quarrelling Titania and Oberon with those caused by the disagreements between Juno and Jove;

Puck, like Mercury, is a "crafty prankster." Leah Scragg, "Shakespeare, Lyly, and Ovid: The Influence of 'Gallathea' on 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" *Shakespeare Survey*, 30 (1977), 125-34, claims that the "elusiveness" of "the nature and extent of the Roman poet's influence . . . may well be accounted for by the intervention of Lyly between Shakespeare and Ovid."

3. There have been too many arguments for the dark side of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* to do them justice here. Two noteworthy examples are Michael Taylor, "The Darker Purpose of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 9 (1969), 259-74; and John William Sider, "The Serious Elements of Shakespeare's Comedies," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 24 (1973), 1-11.

I am using the rather cumbersome term *irrational* rather than the more commonly used *imagination* because the connotations of the latter term have changed so much since the Renaissance that it has become misleading. Another possible term, the *subconscious*, implies psychological theories that the Renaissance might have understood but had not yet formulated in their literature. I use it only in reference to Wordsworth at the end of the article. Renaissance readers would probably have been more comfortable with the term *irrational* because much of their literature on the psychological composition of man defined his feelings and ideas in terms of reason.

4. *Shakespeare's Ovid Being Arthur Golding's Translation of the "Metamorphoses,"* ed. W. H. D. Rouse (London: Centaur Press, 1961), p. 164; Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. Sir Thomas North, 1597 (London: David Nutt, 1895), I, 44-48. These two versions differ on the number of years between the Athenian tributes, and the name of the island on which Ariadne was abandoned. According to Plutarch, who includes more detail and interpretation, Theseus abandoned Ariadne for another woman.

5. Natale Conti, *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem* (Venetia, 1568), p. 219b.

It is tempting to look at a kind of modern allegory, Jung's theory of archetypes, according to which the labyrinth is a "well-known symbol of the unconscious with its unknown possibilities" (Carl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* [Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1964], p. 171). Jung's perspective applies easily enough to the lovers as they chase each other through the forest. In the end, the Jungian view and the allegorical view both perceive the forest-labyrinth as a counter for that part of the human mind which does not function according to reason or logic; today we would call it the subconscious. It lies beyond the scope of this study, however, to apply a full-scale explication of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* according to Jungian theory.

6. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. George Lyman Kittredge (New York: Ginn and Company, 1936), pp. 698, 895. All quotations from Shakespeare will be taken from this edition.

7. Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*, published in 1581 as *Il Laberinto d'Amore*, gives us some insight into how easily a Renaissance mind would have identified a forest as a kind of labyrinth, and would have perceived this forest-labyrinth as a representation of the dangerous irrationality which often characterizes love. In Boccaccio's work a rejected lover falls asleep, pondering the loss of the power of his reason over his actions and "the vicissitudes of carnal love" (*Corbaccio*, ed. and trans. Anthony K. Cassell [Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975], p. 2). He dreams that he is lost in a dark forest, filled with brambles and nettles and enveloped by a dense fog. According to a spiritual guide sent to him from Purgatory, one of the names for this forest is the "Labyrinth of Love . . . because men become as trapped in it as they did in that of old, with-

out ever knowing the way out" (p. 14). This forest is the true destiny of those who have yielded to carnal love, "a blinding passion of the spirit, a seducer of the intellect" (p. 23). After a tastelessly detailed misogynistic sermon, the dreamer awakes, mercifully cured of his love. The dream frame, the fog and nettles, tempt one to see the *Corbaccio* as another influence on *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. However, according to Herbert C. Wright, *Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson* (London: Athlone Press, 1971), p. 44, the work was not well known in England. Since foggy forests were a standard dream convention, and since the allegory of the labyrinth was widespread, the two authors probably arrived at their similarities independently.

8. Hugh M. Richmond, *Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy: A Mirror for Lovers* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 106.

9. An anonymous translation appeared sometime near the end of the century; it can be identified as STC 18935a. The romance of Pasiphæ and the bull is described in A7-A7^v. There are enough references to Ovid's work, however, at this time to indicate that Shakespeare would have had easy access to the original; and T. W. Baldwin's classic *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Less Greeke* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1944) presents convincing proof of Shakespeare's ability to read Latin.

10. "Bottom," *OED*, I, 1016; reference noted by Sewell, p. 132.

11. Virgil, *Eneydos*, trans. William Caxton (London, 1490), H7^v; and see reference in *OED*, I, 1016.

12. Richmond, pp. 121-22, for example, describes a Bottom who is "not trapped in any role," so that his "flexibility and responsiveness are the marks of true sophistication." In fact, his "rueful acceptance" of his limitations echoes the tone of the speaker of the *Sonnets*. David P. Young, *Something of Great Constancy* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), p. 92, describes Bottom's "absolute lack of awareness joined to the absolute confidence with which he moves through the play." Bottom's deficiency in imagination is presented by John A. Allen, "Bottom and Titania," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 18 (1967), 107-18; he denies Bottom's common sense. Perhaps the least patient with Bottom is Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 44, where Bottom is described as "unawareness concretized."

13. Evans, p. 43.

14. Paul A. Olson, "A *Midsummer-Night's Dream* and the Meaning of Court Marriage," *ELH*, 24 (1957), 101.

15. These are some of the sources cited in an excellent study of Theseus's reputation as a heartbreaker: D'Orsay W. Pearson, "'Unkinde' Theseus: A Study in Renaissance Mythography," *English Literary Renaissance*, 4 (1974), 276-98.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 297.

17. Golding's *Ovid*, p. 164.

18. "Quoin," *OED*, VIII, 76; Sewell, p. 130.

19. See, for example, R. W. Dent, "Imagination in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15 (1964), 123-24; Young, pp. 42-45; C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 148-49.

20. Barber, p. 148.

21. At least two critics relate audience detachment to the genre of comedy. See Larry Champion, *The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 7; and Henry Alonzo Myers, *Tragedy: A View of Life* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1956), reprinted in Wolfgang

Clemen's edition of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (New York: Signet, 1963), who relates detachment as the source of comedy in the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. The empathy evoked by comic characters like Viola of *Twelfth Night* makes me uncomfortable with a definite distinction between tragedy and comedy on these grounds.

22. Howard Nemerov, "The Marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta," *Kenyon Review*, 18 (1956), 633-41; Young, p. 137; Sidney R. Homan, "The Single World of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*," *Bucknell Review*, 17 (1969), 72-84.

23. A thought-provoking discussion of the labyrinth as a metaphor for art, especially narrative art, has been written by J. Hillis Miller, "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1976), 57-78.

24. Pearson, p. 297, brings up this part of the Theseus myth in his article and argues that a Renaissance audience would be very aware of it.

25. See, for example, Thomas P. Harrison, "Romeo and Juliet, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*: Companion Plays," *TSSL*, 13 (1971), 209-14; Harriett Hawkins, "Fabulous Counterfeits: Dramatic Construction and Dramatic Perspectives in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 6 (1970), 50-65, presents the fairly arbitrary control the genres of comedy and tragedy exert over the same dramatic material, with special reference to *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* (p. 63).

26. *The Prelude*, V, 595-605, in *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (1936; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 528.