INVITED EDITORIAL

A Midsummer Night's Dream - An Analysis of the Different Levels of Language in the Play[1]

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Abstract

The works ascribed to William Shakespeare[2] (1564 – 1616)[3] are without doubt among the most important literary creations the world has ever seen[4]. The fact that there is fierce controversy as to whether the theatre man from Stradford upon Avon[5] is indeed the author of the works that have been handed down to us is a question that remains open; this work includes tragedies, comedies and also sonnets. Among the comedies >A Midsummer Night's Dream< stands out, what may be due to the fact that four levels of action are artfully interwoven, and that on each level, as well as between the levels, there are confusions of love relationships between the figures of the play. A comedy is dominated and characterized by the language[6] of the figures of the play; insofar there is the following grouping to be regarded in detail:

– Language of the people at the court of Athens.

[1] This essay is dedicated to Prof. Dr. Hans Itschert (1925 – 2014). Hans Itschert was an outstanding expert on world literature, he rendered outstanding services to the University of the Saarland.

[2] To him: Hans-Dieter Gelfert: William Shakespeare in seiner Zeit. München, 2014, p. 277 – 282; Margareta de Grazia, Stanley Wells (Hrsg.): The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare. Cambridge, 2001; Ina Schabert (Hrsg.): Shakespeare-Handbuch. Die Zeit, der Mensch, das Werk, die Nachwelt. 5., durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage. Stuttgart, 2009, p. 399 – 405. Ulrich Suerbaum: Shakespeares Dramen. Tübingen/Basel, 2001.

[3] Cfr. Martin Wiggins: Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time. Oxford, 2000.

[4] Cfr. Lawrence Danson: Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres. Oxford, 2000.

[5] Cfr. https://www.visitstratforduponavon.co.uk/.

[6] Cfr. Russ McDonald: Shakespeare and the Arts of Language. Oxford, 2001.

- Language of the craftsmen that want to perform a play on Theseus'[7] and Hippolyta's[8] nuptial day.
- Language of the young lovers.
- Language of the fairies.

That >A Midsummer Night's Dream< is a full success as a stage play is proven by the number of remakes under the authorship and direction e.g. by Andreas Gryphius (1616 – 1664)[9], Henry Purcell (1659 – 1695)[10], David Garrick (1717- 1779)[11], Samuel Phelps (1804 – 1878)[12], Charles Kean (1811 – 1864)[13], Augustin Daly (1838 – 1899)[14], Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1853 – 1917)[15], Harley Granville-Barker (1877 – 1946)[16], Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)[17], Peter Brock (1916 – 1982)[18] and Adrian Noble (1950)[19].

Keywords: William Shakespeare, comedy, language, leitmotif, play in the play, love, error

Introduction

The aim of this paper is not – so one might be inclined to suppose – to make some general statements on the language of Shakespeare's comedy >A Midsummer Night's Dream<[20], the attempt is made to go into detailed and explicit analysis. In the very begining it is necessary to set up a number of

[7] To men in Shakespeare's works cfr. Bruce R. Roberts. Shakespeare and Masculinity. Oxford, 2000.

[8] To women in Shakespeare's works cfr. Phylllis Rackin: Shakespeare and Women, Oxford, 2005.

[9] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 136.

[10] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 137.

[11] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 139.

[12] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 144.

[13] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 145.

[14] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 146.

[15] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 147.

[16] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 149.

[17] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 153.

[18] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 156.

[19] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 156.

[20] Harold F. Brooks (ed.): William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Arden Shakespeare. Second Series. London, 1979, p. XXI – CXLIII; Reginald A. Foakes (ed.): William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Cambridge, 1984, Neuauflage 2003, p. 1 – 48; Peter Holland (ed.): William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford, 1994, p. 1 – 126. Barbara Mowat/Paul Werstine (ed.): William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream. New York 1993, p. XIII –LIII. Jonathan Bate, Eric Rasmussen: William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream. The RSC Shakespeare. Houndmills, 2008, p. 1 – 18, 85 – 150). Linda Buckle (ed.): A Midsummer Night's Dream, Cambridge School Shakespeare. Cambridge 2010, Fiona Banks/Paul Shuter (ed.): A Midsummer Night's Dream. London, 2014.

criteria and test the language of the play against its background. The analysis consists of four steps: First, reference to the names of the characters in the play is made because it throws light on the language of the characters. As the play is written in verse its main features have to be pointed out. In a third step lexical, grammatical and syntactical structures are subject to further analysis. In the end there are given some informations about the main stylistic features (e.g. pune, antithesis etc.). After running through these four clusters of criteria we attain different levels of language in Shakespeare's[21] famous comedy.

To the language of the people at the court of Athens

To begin with the play's setting is Athens, for Theseus[22] is introduced to the reader (spectator) as the „*Duke of Athens*". There is no doubt that the names of the people at the court are Greek ones[23]: As far as Theseus[24] and Hippolyta[25] are concerned there is some evidence that Shakespeare might trace their names back to:

- Plutarch's[26] >Lives of the noble Grecians and Romans< translated by North[27] in 1579.
- Ovid's[28] >Metamorphoses<[29] (7, 40 ff.).
- Chaucer's[30] >The Knight's Tale<[31].

But Shakespeare did more than gleaning to Greek names, he did take Greek and Roman material from the Theseus' myth. These passages are set off against the other by blankverse[32] i.e. an iambic pentameter[33] without rhyme.

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[21] To the identity of the author: Kurt Kreiler: Der Mann, der Shakespeare erfand. Edward de Vere. Earl of Oxford. Frankfurt am Main, 2009.

[22] To the mythos of Theseus: Frank Brommer: Theseus. Die Taten des griechischen Helden in der antiken Kunst und Literatur. Darmstadt, 1982.

[23] Cfr. Collin Burrow: Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity. Oxford, 2003.

[24] On Theseus and Ariadne cfr. Ovid, Met. 8, 152 sqq.

[25] To her Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 56.

[26] To him Timothy E.Duff: Plutarch's Lives. Exploring virtues and vice. Oxford, 1999.

[27] Thomas North: The lives of Noble Grecians and Romanes, Compared Together by that Learned and Grave Philosopher and Historiographer, Plutarke of Chareonea. London, 1597.

[28] To him Franz-Rudolf Herber: Ovid's elegische Erzählkunst in den >Fasten<. Diss. phil., 1994, Saarbrücken.

[29] To this work G. Karl Galinsky: Ovid's Metamorphoses. An Introduction to the Basic Aspects. Oxford, 1975.

[30] To him Franz-Rudolf Herber: Chaucer, in: Vox Latina 2018, p. 208 – 220.

[31] To this tale cfr.
John Finlayson: *The "Knight's Tale": The Dialogue of Romance, Epic, and Philosophy, in: The Chaucer Review.* Vol. 7 (1992), p. 126 – 149.

[32] To blankverse cfr. T.V.F. Brogan u. a.: Blank Verse, in: Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman et al. (ed.): The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. 4. edition. Princeton, 2012, p. 145 – 150.

One of its most striking features is the enjambement[34] hinting at the fact that the syntactical structure is rather complex than simple. The extension of sentences is sometimes up to 4 or 5 lines. Complicated words are rare except for the case of metonymy (cfr. I.1 v. 107 „*Nedar's*[35] *daughter*"), the style is rather copious, because almost every noun has an attribute. Sometimes the agens of a sentence belongs to the category „*inanimate*" although according to English grammar it should belong to the category „*animate*" (cfr. I.1 v. 7 „*Four days will quickly steep themselves in night*"). There are only a few sub-clauses; the main clauses are superior in number: Many of the main clauses are introduced by addressing the person that is to speak the text (or at least expected to do so). In the very beginning of the play we have at least five different leitmotives:

- The first one to occur is the leitmotif „*moon*": The description of the moon renders more than a romantic background for she is said to bear an influence on ones mood (cfr. I.1. v.3 „*… how slow this old moon wanes! She lingers my desires*"). Thus there is developed a strong connection between terrestial and extraterrestrial things. To compare the moon[36] to a „*silver bow new – bent in heaven*" (cfr. I.1. v. 9) is striking: The moon's colour may be subject to slight change: „*Silver, however, she will never get*"; thus the imagination of the reader is somewhat stressed. A bow is only one of the moon's shapes; admittedly, the most suitable to provoke description and imagination. „*New-bent*" suggests that there were some forces at work altering the moon's shape.
- The second one is a striking alliteration feature: „*merriment*" – „*melancholy*" – „*mirth*" (cfr. I.1. v. 12). Here the wordfields „*happiness*" and „*sadness*" contrast with each other: The words denoting „*happiness*" are superior in number, obviously because a wedding is a happy event per se.
- The w-alliteration in „*Hippolyta, I wooed thee with may sword, and won thy love doing these injuries*" (I.1. v. 18 f.). points at an antithesis: Theseus captured Hippolyta in conquering the Amazons[37] and fell in

[33] To the iambic pentameter cfr. https://versemeter.wordpress.com/category/why-iambic-pentameter/.

[34] To enjambement cfr. Harai Golomb: Enjambment in Poetry. Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics. Tel Aviv, 1979.

[35] Cfr. http://wordplay-shakespeare.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-naming-of-egeus-in-midsummer-nights.html.

[36] To the moon as a leitmotif in literature cfr. https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/der-mond-in-der-literatur-ein-unerlaessliches-requisit-der.974.de.html?dram:article_id=340874.

[37] To the Amazons cfr. Jeannine Davis-Kimball: Warrior Women. An Archaeologist's Search for History's Hidden Heroines. New York, 2002.

love with her, but both events have nothing in common because one cannot be forced to love another person.

- The fourth one is a striking anapher[38] in I. v. 19 „*with pomp, with triumph and with reveling*". „*With*" is three times repeated; the words that follow are almost synonymous; they are on the increase (incrementum[39]) and apt to emphasize the solemnity of the nuptial day as such.
- Another interesting wordfield is the one referring to law: I.1. v. 40 sqq. is typical of it and provides some material for discussion: „*I beg the ancient privilege of Athens. As she is mine, may dispose of her; which shall be either to this gentleman or to her death, according to our law immediately provided in that case*". To dispose of one daughter's life and to regard her as one's property is completely against our today perception of the rights a father/a mother may claim[40]; furthermore, the verbal expression „*to dispose of*" requires a non-living object, as one can dispose e.g. of one's money etc pp. Even nowadays a father's/mother's consent in his/her daughter's choice is of some importance and one is off the track if one underestimates this factor. But to be judge over death and life is a right unthinkable for a father/mother[41]. Our today law – particularly § 1626[42] of the German Civil Code – gives only scope for a parental care which has to take into account the self-responsibility of children[43]. Theseus' answer is no less interesting (I.1 v. 48 „*To whom you are but as a form in wax by him imprinted and within his power to leave the figure or disfigure it*"). Two things are to be pointed at: To state that a daughter is an effigy of her father may be regarded as an allusion to the Old Testament[44] in the Bible[45]. The expression „*to leave the figure or disfigure it*" reminds of James I[46] speech before the House of Commons in 1603, in which he

[38] To the anapher cfr. https://www.contify.de/glossar/richtig-schreiben/anapher/.
[39] To the incrementum in language cfr. https://mymemory.translated.net/en/Latin/English/incrementum.
[40] Raymond Westbrook: Vitae Necisque Potesta, in: Historia. Vol. 48 (1999), p. 203 – 223.
[41] The Roman *patria potestas* included the right to decide upon ones children lives; later on, the Christians were the first to deny such a right.
[42] To this paragraph cfr. Huber, in: Münchener Kommentar zum BGB. 8. ed., München 2020.
[43] Within the framework of the execution of a so-called living will, however, the constellation can occur that a child may decide on the last will and testament of a parent and thus may decide on life and death.
[44] Cfr. the book Genesis in the Old Testament.
[45] Cfr. Steven Marx: Shakespeare and the Bible. Oxford, 2000.
[46] To him Philipp C. Almond: King James I and the Burning of Reginald Scot's The Discoverie of Witchcraft: The Invention of a Tradition, in: Notes and Queries, Vol. 56 (2009), p. 209 – 213.

gave a plea for the king's right to make or un-make ones subjects. Here we may draw the conclusion that – suprisingly enough – the language of law is dominating at the beginning of our play providing for a realistic representation of events. Later on, however, the world of dream and vision draws upon the play: Therefore the wordfield „*law*" is an interesting contrast to the one of „*dream*"; above all, it determines the further development of the play. If Egeus[47] had given in right away, the young lovers would have never made for the woods.

To the language of the craftsmen that want to perform a play on Theseus' and Hippolyta's nuptial day

Although some of the names are self-explanatory we like to quote Murray J. Levith[48]: „*Bottom's gangs are named for their trades. Quince and Snug are carpenters, as quince or quines were blocks of wood to be joined snugly. Nicholas may have been a generic appellation or a favourite Christian name for a weaver. The meaning of Bottom as the core for the skin is referred by Grunio when he speaks of a „bottom of brown thread" (IV, iii, 137) in „The Taming of the Shrew*". *But the name Bottom is also a pun on ass, an association reinforced by the visual image of Bottom's head. The world of a Midsummer Night's Dream is topsy-turvy; things are turned around, bottoms are up.(…). Flute's job is to repair bellows with holes in them, and the fluted staps of church organs that whistle when defective; his name additionately suggests his small, flute-likewise voice. Tinkers like Tom Snouts weld or solder spouts or snouts to pitchers. Robin Starveling is a thin, birdlike tailor. Here we have no metre at all; the speech is prosaic. To regard these lines as some kind of long-lines is to fail*". But we see that Shakespeare's usage of prose is not surprising at all, the reason is rather obvious: On account of the social status of the craftsmen[49] one is prone to state that they may use in their speech only simple words, but one is wrong for time and again complicated Latin words do occur in their speeches: In the case of I.2 v. 64 „*You may do it extempore; for it is nothing but roaring*" one is taken by surprise, because one expects only a learned person to use such a word in a speech. But even then the context conditioning such usage is restricted to an academic lecture or something similar, to use such a word suggests the following alternatives:

- The speaker is learned to such a degree that he cannot avoid such words in so called small talk.
- The speaker is learned, but wants to boast with his knowledge.

[47] To him Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 58.
[48] What's in Shakespeare names?. London 1978, p. 77.
[49] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 66 sqq.

– The speaker is not educated, but pretends to be so by applying complicated words.

The consequences are at hand: Malapropism[50] is given, when a word is used wrongly according to grammar or when it does not suit into the semantical context. Either way provokes laughter: In the course of the following passage one comes across words that are entirely misapplied cfr. e.g. I.2. v. 76 sq.: „*But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove"*. What Bottom[51] wants to say is, that he has to moderate his voice. A very interesting example of malapropism is IV. 2 v. 10 sqq.: *(Quince[52]): „Yea, and the best person, too; and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice" (Flute): „You must say „paragon". A paramour is – God bless us – a thing of naught".* It is revealed by the dialogue itself, that Shakespeare's aim is to make these people comic figures[53]. On the other hand the speech of the craftsmen is full of colloquialisms: Cfr. I.2. v. 77: „… *so that I will roar you*" (instead of „*roar for you*") and III. 1. V. 16.: „*I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue* …" instead of „*write a prologue*". There is some reason that the wrong spelling in I. 2. V. 4 „*According to our scrip*" and in I.2. v. 48 „… *Thisne. Thisne* ..." that represent the speaker's wrong[54] pronunciation. Such mistakes are not suprising, because we can easily categorize these words as hard words that give not so educated speakers a lot of difficulties. As far as the syntax and the length of sentences is concerned we can state the following: In general the sentences are rather short; if there occurs a long sentence its construction is transparent and simple. The only conjunction used is „*and*" in order to produce sentences of some length; this modus of speaking is very useful though very monotonous, cfr. e.g. III.1. v. 15 ff.: „*Write me a prologue and let the prologue seem to say we will do harm with our swords, and for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus but Bottom the weaver*." It is not surprising that there are only few stylistic features in this passage, but when they occur they have a similiar

[50] To malapropism Arnold Zwicky: Classical malapropisms and the creation of the mental lexicon (PDF), in: Loraine Obler and Lise Menn (ed.). Exceptional Language and Linguistics. 1982, p. 115 – 132.
[51] To him cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 67.
[52] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 69.
[53] Vgl. auch Ernst Leisi: Das heutige Englisch. Heidelberg, 1974, p 67: „Schon *Shakespeare gibt sie (i.e. Malpropismen) vielen seiner Clowns mit, etwa den Handwerkern im Sommernachtstraum (IV 2 10 ff.(...). Wenn im Roman oder im Theater die Malpropismen zu den festen Zügen der komischen Figuren gehören, so bedeutet dies, daß flascher Fremdwortgebrauch (...) den Sprecher mehr oder weniger zu einer komischen Figur macht".*
[54] To solecism http://jlsp.steconomiceuoradea.ro/archives/002/jlsp-i2-7.pdf.

kind of alienation effect[55] as the malapropism mentioned above. In III. 1. v. 33 „*You must name his name*" and in III.1. 46 „*play your play*" we have a figura etymologica[56] whose usage is almost restricted to poetic language only. In III.1 v. 35 f. we have a climax „*I would wish you*" or „*I would request you*" or „*I would entreat you*". Time and again the language in this whole passage shows that the craftsmen trying to perform a play cannot put up with the fact that the player's „*I*" („*ego*") is fictitious (cfr. III.1. v. 18 ff. „*and for the better assurance, that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom, the weaver*"). The following passages give evidence of the fact that the craftsmen cannot cope with the illusionary elements of drama, cfr. e.g. V.1. v. 250 sqq. *(Starveling): „All that I have to say is to tell you that the lantern is the moon, I the man i „th" moon, this thorn bush my tho m bush, and this dog my dog*".

To the language of the young lovers

Let us again quote *Levith*[57] in order to throw light on the names of Lysander[58], Demetrius[59], Hermia[60] and Helena[61]: „*Plutarch has both a „Life of Theseus" and „Life of Lysander" (...). Lysander calls attention to Demetrius' name when he asks: „Where is Demetrius? O, how fit a word is that vile name to perish on my sword (II, ii, 1206 – 1207)". Demetrius suggests the fertility goddess Demeter, but this does not really explain for the play. Why it is a „vile name"? Hermia and Helena alliterate neatly. Hermia's name recalls Hermes, the messenger of the gods, the Romans Mercury. This would account for the character's fiercy personality (cfr. Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet). Hermia is a brunette (see III, ii, 257, 263) to contrast with the fair Helena, whose name derives from the word for light in Greek (helene). Helena is also the name of a popular British saint as well as another of Shakespeare's man-charming women (in „All's well that ends well"). Although the Helena of a „Midsummernight's Dream has little in common with Helen of Troy, it should be pointed out that this archetypically beautiful woman figures in the Theseus' myth (...)".* It is of small use to go into detailed analysis of the different rhymes that occur. By and large, perfect rhymes[62], imperfect

[55] To the alienation effect cfr. Schober, Anna: Ironie, Montage, Verfremdung. Ästhetische Taktiken und die politische Gestalt der Demokratie. München, 2008.
[56] To the figura etymologica cfr.
https://camws.org/meeting/2009/program/abstracts/11E3.Clary.pdf.
[57] What's in Shakespeare names?, London 1978, p. 76 f.
[58] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 58.
[59] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 60.
[60] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 61.
[61] Cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 64.
[62] To perfect rhymes cfr. https://www.masterclass.com/articles/perfect-vs-imperfect-rhymes#what-is-a-perfect-rhyme.

rhymes[63] as well as assonances appear, but without a strict regularity to be observed. End-stopped lines[64] and run-on-lines[65] do mix, the latter are superior in number. The passages dealt with here differ very much according to length, there are passages of one line only (cfr. stichomythia[66] in I.1. v. 135 – 140, v. 140 – 201) and semantic units of 4, 5 and 6 lines are middle-sized. Very long passages are usually found at the end of a scene, e.g. Helena's speech at the end of I.1. (25 lines) and Hermia's speech at the end of II.2 (12 lines). In general, we can say that these passages do not contain difficult word material, but there are few exceptions to be pointed at:

- In II.1 v. 1991 sqq. „*Thou toldest me they were stolen unto this wood and here I, and wood within this wood*" there is no error, but a pun on the word „*wood*", whose older meaning „*mad*" in the form of an adjective does no longer exist in Modern English.
- The frequent usage of learned allusions in the form of metonymy, cfr. e.g. I. 1. V. 174 „*the false trojan*[67]*"* et alia.

As far as grammar is concerned one feature is to be pointed out that traces back to French influence on English word order: It is the postposition of adjectives after the noun they belong to, we have it e.g. in I.1. v. 231 *„things base and vile*" and in III. 2 v. 137 *„O Helen, goddess, nymph perfect and divine*" and III.2. v. 226 sq. *„To call me goddess, nymph, divine and rare, precious, celestial*?" The last two examples are of course not mere accident: Whereas in the speech of the people at the court of Athens subclauses are rare, the speech of the young lovers gives ample scope for subclauses of all kind. In regard to rhetoric these passages are highly stylized: The speech of the young lovers is full of similar stylistic features, one may interpret the text in this way that there is a lacking individualization of the characters, but the following stylistic features are striking; there are learned illusions in the form of metonymy[68]:

[63] To imperfect rhymes cfr. https://www.masterclass.com/articles/perfect-vs-imperfect-rhymes#3-uses-of-perfect-rhymes-in-poetry.
[64] To end-stopped lines cfr. https://literarydevices.net/end-stopped-line/.
[65] To run-on-lines cfr. https://www2.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/intranet/englishbasics/PoetryProsodic03.htm.
[66] To stichomythia cfr. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stichomythia.
[67] The false Trojan is in today language a virus infecting computers.
[68] Harald Weinrich: Zur Definition der Metonymie und zu ihrer Stellung in der rhetorischen Kunst, in: Arnold Arens (ed.): Text-Etymologie. Untersuchungen zu Textkörper und Textinhalt. Festschrift für Heinrich Lausberg zum 75. Geburtstag. Wiesbaden, 1987, p. 105 – 110.

- The adjective „*cupid*" in I.1. v. 169/234 makes reference to the Roman goddess of love, who in Roman mythology and Roman literature is named „*Cupido*"[69].
- The compound noun „*Chartago queen*" in I.1. v. 173 is an allusion to the famous story of Dido[70], the queen of ancient Chartago that did fell into love with the Trojan-Roman heroe Aneas. Aeneas[71], however, was destined by *fatum* to leave Carthago[72] and take course to Latium, Dido therefore committed suicide; Vergil describes the end of Dido's life thus (IV, 675 ff.):

  „*(675) hoc illud, germana, fuit? me fraude petebas?*
  hoc rogus iste mihi, hoc ignes araeque parabant?
  quid primum deserta querar? comitemne sororem
  sprevisti moriens? eadem me ad fata vocasses,
  idem ambas ferro dolor atque eadem hora tulisset.
  (680) his etiam struxi manibus patriosque vocavi
  voce deos, sic te ut posita, crudelis, abessem?
  exstinxti te meque, soror, populumque patresque
  Sidonios urbemque tuam. date, vulnera lymphis
  abluam et, extremus si quis super halitus errat,
  (685) ore legam.' sic fata gradus evaserat altos,
  semianimemque sinu germanam amplexa fovebat
  cum gemitu atque atros siccabat veste cruores.
  illa gravis oculos conata attollere rursus
  deficit; infixum stridit sub pectore vulnus.
  (690) ter sese attollens cubitoque adnixa levavit,
  ter revoluta toro est oculisque errantibus alto
  quaesivit caelo lucem ingemuitque reperta".
- The words in I.1. v. 175 „*false Trojan*" do make again reference to the historical conflict between Athens and Troy[73], the conflict itself did arise because of a woman (Helena[74]) – Helena is one of the unlucky lovers in our play.

[69] To Cupido cfr. the antique fable of Cupid and Psyche.
[70] To Dido cfr. Antonio Ziosi, Didone regina di Cartagine di Christopher Marlowe. Metamorfosi virgiliane nel Cinquecento. Roma, 2015.
[71] To Aeneas cfr. https://www.die-goetter.de/aeneas-irrt-im-mittelmeer.
[72] To this antique town Walter Ameling: Karthago. Studien zu Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft. München, 1993.
[73] Homer describes this conflict in his >Ilias<.
[74] To her cfr. Helene Homeyer: Die spartanische Helena und der Trojanische Krieg. Wandlungen und Wanderungen eines Sagenkreises vom Altertum bis zur Gegenwart (= Palingenesia. Band 12). Wiesbaden, 1977.

A most interesting passage in the text is the stichic[75] part occurring in I.1. v. 153 sqq:

(Hermia): „*I frown upon him, yet he loves me still".*
(Helena): „*O that your frowns would teach my seniles such skill".*
(Hermia): „*I give him curses, yet he gives me love".*
(Helena): „*O that my prayers could such affection move".*
(Hermia): „*The more I hate, the more he follows me".*
(Helena): „*The more I love, the more he hathed me".*
(Hermia): „*His folly, Helena is no fault of mine".*

Within this stichic part there are a number of stylistic features which are not to be enumerated for an end in itself, but to illustrate to what degree the text is stylized and therefore it cannot be denied that the speech of the young lovers is somewhat artificial: There is a parallel order of lines marked out by anapher „I" – „I" and „O" – „O"; there follows a series of alliterations in the words „*still"* – „*smiles*" „*such*" – „*skill*". Almost every line is built on the antithesis „*The more I hate, the more he follows me*" and vice versa. In the lines 195/196 we have the climax of Shakespeare's play on this motif[76]; the parallel construction of both lines that are identical up to the middle „*I hate*" – „*he follows*" and „*I love*" – *he hates*" is obvious. The here implied question whether love is also subject to reason or not is differently answered: In the beginning of the play Lysander seems to be convinced that love is not subject to reason (cfr. I.1. v. 190: „*Or if there is a sympathy in choic*e …", on the other hand Helena states „*Love looks not with the eye but with the mind*" (I.1. v. 237). The irony, however, is that Lysander puts his love to Helena down to reason after Puck[77] had swayed his will by notorious love juice: „*The will of man is by reason swayed, and reason is that you (Helena!) are the worther maid*" (II.12. v. 120). The leitmotif of irrationality of love is exploited in the stichic[78] passage entering in I. 1. v. 193 sqq. „*The more I hate the more he follows me* …" in II.1. v. 203 we have the same leitmotif: „*I am yours spaniel; and Demetrius the more you beat me I will fawn on you*". In I. 1. Vv. 209 sqq. the moon is personified and called „*Phoebe*"[79]; ergo she can behold her mirror-image reflecting in the dew covering the earth[80]: „*Tomorrow night,*

[75] Cfr. footnote 66.
[76] In I. v. 180 there is an interesting pun on words: *(Helena):* „*Call you me fair? That „fair" again unsay Demetrius loves you fair. O happy fair!*" The second „*fair*" is not an adjective but a noun and has the meaning of „*beauty*".
[77] To him cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 73.
[78] Cfr. footnote 66.
[79] This is a learned allusion to the Greek goddess Phoebus.
[80] In IV. 2. V. 431 sqq. the leitmotif of „*night*" and "*day*" contrast with each other: (Hel.): „*O weary night! O long and tedious night abate thy hours, shine comforts from the East. That I may back Athens by daylight. From these hat my poor company detest*".

when Phoebe does behold her silver visage in the watery glass decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass", this metaphor functions as an atmospheric background. But in III.2 v. 53 „*I'll believe as soon as this whole earth may be bored and that the moon may through the centre creep and so displease her brothers noontide, with the Antipodes* …." an absurd vision is described to insinuate that Lysander's leaving Hermia is as unthinkable as the moon's creeping through the centre of earth. In act IV the leitmotif "*dream*" is exploited; the quoted passages are self-explanatory:

- *Cfr. IV.1. v. 145 sq.: (Lysander): „My lord, I shall reply amazedly half sleeping, half waking. But as yet, I cannot truly say how I came here".*
- *Cfr. IV.1. v. 185 sqq.: (Demetrius): „Things seem small and undistinguishable like far-off mountains turned into clouds".*

(Hermia): „Me thinks I see these things with parted eyes when everything seems double".
(Helena): „And I have found Demetrius, like a jewel, mine own and not mine own[81]*".*
(Demetrius): „Are you sure we are awake".

To the language of the fairies

For explanation of the names cfr. again Levith[82]: *„The Latin version of the Metamorphoses, in addition to an extensive account of Theseus' exploits, gives Shakespeare his name Titania for the Queen of the forest fairies referring to Diana Ovid writes "dumque ibi perlucitur solita Titatania lympha (...) Oberon is either from the old French romance Hion of Bordeau of Robert Greene's play >James IV<. Spencer refers to "King Oberon" and "Sir Huon" twice in book II of Faerie Queene (I, 6; X, 75-76), a work Shakespeare surely knew. The Latin oberro, "I wander about or go astray" may be the root of the name. Puck is not a name but rather a designation for an evil spirit. By identifying the character Puck with Robin Good "fellow, the popular name of a so-called "housefairy", Shakespeare makes his spirit non-malignant. Among other places he reads "Robin Goodfellow" in Reginald Scot's The Discoverie of Wichtcraft (1584) (...). Moth is the other fairy in the group whose names suggest their forest habitation and size (Cobweb, Mustardseed). Like the lovers, generally they speak in rhyme, sometimes in delicate octosyllabics, more often in decayllabics, it is surpassed by hundred lines blank verse in which Oberon quarrels with Titania (...). It is Titania that speaks the poetry (...). it is the poetry of the Sonnets, with its self-contained lines and related verbal trochees, its beautiful mutation of consonants and its*

[81] This is an antithesis.
[82] What's in Shakespeare names?, London 1978, p. 76 sqq.

phrases – yet it is the sonnet poetry with a difference; the old ceremonious moods of expression are giving place to a language that approximates more closely to that really spoken by men, as well as by the fairies, and the formality of the sophisticated line is modified by a more natural rhythm". The passages treating the world of the fairies[83] have in common that the wordfield „*nature*" is omnipresent, these words may be grouped together, if certain criteria are regarded:

- Seasons as the determining factor: *„… and old Hiems' thin and very icy crown, spring, autumn, summer, childing autumn, angry winter change*" (cfr. II.1. v. 100-110).
- Water: Flood, fountain, brook and sea.
- Sky: Moon and sun.
- Earth: Bush, briar, wild forests, flowers, mead, hill and whistling winds (cfr. I.1. v. 80 sqq.).
- Animals: Ox, filly, foal, crow (cfr. I.1. v. 80 sqq.), dolphin's back, lion, beer, wolf, bull, monkey and ape (cfr. II.1. v. 180 sqq.).
- Fruits: Green corn, herbs (cfr. I.1. v. 890 sqq.), apricocks, dewberries, grapes, mulberries and honey (cfr. III.1. v. 160 sqq.)[84].

In Titania's speech there are obvious veins of bucolic language (cfr. II.1. 80 – 116): The origin of the so-called Bucolic landscape is to be traced to Theocrit[85] and, of course, to Vergil's[86] eclogues. In antique the main features of such a bucolic landscape was an ideal landscape, in which a shepherd (ploughman) is playing one's flute (ploughman) and narrating tales. In Titania's landscape description we can find several hints that support the thesis that we deal here with some kind of bucolic language: Fountain, rusky brook, straining ox, sweating ploughman and lean sheep, but the romantic and idyllic atmosphere is destroyed by a distemperature of the seasons, whose origin is to be sought in Titania and Oberon's quarrel.

An interesting part out of the fairy world[87] are the songs presented by the first and second fairy as well as the chorus. These parts are wholly lyric and remind us of fairy tales one might have read during one's childhood. In a neatly structured song the fairies implore snakes, spiders etc. to do their fairy

[83] Cfr. Reginald Scot: The Discoverie of Witchcraft, wherein the Lewde Dealings of Witches and Witchmongers is Notable Detected, the Knauerie of Coniurors, the Impietie of Inchantors (…) and all the Conueiances of Legierdemaine and Iuggling are Deciphered, London, 1584.
[84] Other words may be subsumed under the wordfield "exotic": rubies, perl, in every cocolip's ear, spiced Indian air, Indian king, from the steps of India.
[85] To him Bernd Effe (Hrsg.): Theokrit und die griechische Bukolik (= Wege der Forschung, Band 580). Darmstadt, 1986.
[86] To him Brooks Otis: Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry, Oxford. 1964.
[87] In this play the fairies are positive characters.

queen no harm. In II.1. v. 18 we have a simile which points at the fairy's enormous speed: (Fairy): „*I do wander everywhere swifter than the moon's sphere*". IV. 1. v. 94 works on the same pattern: (Oberon[88]): „*We the globe can compass son swifter than the wandering moon*". In II.1. v. 160 the moon is marking a point of time: „*I'll met by moonlight bright Titania"*. In Titania's[89] speech (cfr. II.1. v. 103 sqq.) the moon are attributed enormous powers which alter the natural sequence of seasons. Consequently, everything is subject to change and thus upset. As the fairies dispose of enormous power about the lives of mankind, it is not striking that quite a number of learned proper names are found in the language of the fairies – this underlines the power of the fairies:

- II.1. v. 70: Bouncing Amazon[90].
- II.1. v. 109: Hiems[91].
- III.1. v. 360: Aurora's[92] harbinger.
- IV.1. v. 112: Hercules[93] and Cadmus[94].

Summary

In V.1. v. 413 sqq. we have a quasi-epilogue of Puck that revels the world of dream and vision[95]. We may regard this passage as some kind of disillusionment: „*If we shadows have offended think but this and is mended that you have but slumbered here while these visions did appear. And this weak and idle theme no more yielding but a dream Gentles, do not reprehend*". Although we tried to work out the different levels of language we have to point at the fact that the main leitmotives which occur again and again achieve the interrelation of the different levels. In support of this point of view we quote Halliday[96]: „*In a Midsummer Night's Dream there is the same imaginative fusion of events. Even rarer than Puck, the fairy link between the four groups of characters, there are the dreams. All the lovers dream; Titania has a vision of an ass, and the ass himself a most rare vision of a queen. Hippolyta begins the play with a dream image, and Puck rounds off all – shadows, visions and dreams – with the apologetic "This weak and idle theme, no more yielding but*

[88] To him cfr. Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 71.
[89] To her Frauke Reitemeier: A Midsummer Night's Dream. Bochum, 2005, p. 58.
[90] Cfr. Jeannine Davis-Kimball: Warrior Women. An Archaeologist's Search for History's Hidden Heroines. New York, 2002.
[91] This is the Latin word for winter.
[92] Aurora is a metonymy for sun.
[93] To him Robert Baldwin: A Bibliography on the Hercules Theme (with a focus on the early modern period). Connecticut College, 2004.
[94] To him Ruth B. Edwards: Kadmos the Phoenician. A Study in Greek Legends and the Mycenaean Age. Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1979.
[95] Cfr. in this regard Peter Holland: Shakespeare and Film, Oxford, 2006.
[96] Frank Ernst Halliday: The Poetry of Shakespeare's plays, London, 1953, p. 89.

a dream". But there is an element even more pervasive than dreams, almost it might be said, a character more ubiquitous than Puck. This is the characters irrespective of rank or origin, heroes, lovers, clowns and fairies subducing everything to the insubstantial silver of a vision, and intensifying the dreamlike quality of the play. The moon is either referred to quite simply, or personified as a goddess of chastity, or more obliquely evoked as an image, and in the comic plot the very earthly and pedantic artisans wrest her from the sphere, unsex her and disfigure her upon the stage as a lantern in the hand of the tailor Starveling". The fact that members of different social classes differ in their language is a phenomenon that can be observed both in the Elizabethan age and in today's digital age[97]. Education has a very strong impact on the respective language competence[98]. In this comedy, these aspects also appear exaggerated because there is a game within a game, in this case the attempt of the craftsmen to put on a play on the occasion of the wedding of his Athenian ruler. This comedy shows the following very clearly: In the affairs of the heart of love, even the best linguistic competence is of little use, because love is also determined by non-rational elements. The admirable thing about our comedy is that the play within the play is also, as it were, an anticipation of the epic theatre that Thornton Wilder[99] (1897 – 1975) made famous in the 20th century in the English-speaking world and Bertold Brecht[100] (1898 – 1956) in the German-speaking world. In this context the very beginning of the V. act is very interesting; here Theseus makes a very remarkable statement on the poetic and the rhetoric of the play[101]:

„*More strange than true: I never may believe*
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
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 fine frenzy rolling,

[97] Cfr. in this regard Jill. L. Levenson: Shakespeare and Twentieth-Century Drama. Los Angeles, 1996.
[98] Cfr. https://www.klett.de/sixcms/media.php/321/kdt29_sprachkompetenz.pdf.
[99] To him cfr. Penelope Niven: Thornton Wilder. A life. New York, 2012.
[100] To him cfr. Klaus-Detlef Müller: Bertolt Brecht: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung. München, 2009.
[101] Ifor Evans: The language of Shakespeare's plays, 3rd edition, reprinted 1985, Westport 1985, p. 70.

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!"

Theseus, of course, is making a statement for the author (*the poet's eye/the poet's pen*), putting clear that it is only a play: We do understand that only in a play fairies may confuse the feelings of mankind and that only in play confusions may be solved so easily – in real life things are much more complicated.

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