

COMPOSITION DATE & OCCASION, CONTEXT, SOURCES

1. “Most scholars are agreed that the *Dream* was designed to grace a wedding in a noble household. The one or two sceptics provide a useful reminder that [...] there is no proof of this. [...] The *Dream* has many marks of a wedding play.” [The editor of our Cambridge edition is one such sceptic...] **Brooks**
2. “Shak. had [the name Titania] from the original Latin, where Ovid uses it once for Diana and twice for Circe: moon-goddess, and shape-shifter, each associated with a leading motif in the play.” **Brooks**
3. “Whatever other associations Theseus had for Shak.’s audience, he was notorious as the first seducer of Helen.” **Garner**
4. “We might imagine that Her. is named after Hermes: the master thief, the god of commerce and the market place, and the god of dreams.” [About 1.1.36] **Marshall** [Demetrius might also recall Demeter]
5. “My purpose [...] is to suggest that *MND* might parody and transform some elements of the Bacchae myth [from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III]. To consider that story as an almost hidden model for Shak.’s play would be one way to allow that if one *were* to read *MND* as a conflict between ‘masculine’ principles of rationality and order and ‘female’ principles of sexuality and passion, it would not necessarily follow that one should privilege these terms according to the values of traditional Christian hierarchies. The story of the Bacchae provides a model in which these values are reversed. [...] We should note that in Ovid’s text the story of Pyr. and This. is told by a weaver as a story within the story of the Bacchae.” **Marshall**
6. “May Week at Cambridge University still comes in June.” “The point of the allusions is not the date, but the *kind* of holiday occasion.” “It seems unlikely that the title [...] implies association with the specific customs of Midsummer Eve [...] except as ‘midsummer night’ would carry suggestion of a magic time.” **Barber**
7. “Bott.’s craft of weaving [...] recalls Ariadne’s thread” “In Obe., [there are] aspects of both Minos the king and judge and Daedalus the craftsman and magician, maker of labyrinths.” **Freake**
8. See n^{os} 56, 92 & 11

A COMEDY, PERHAPS WITH DARK OVERTONES

9. “Most audiences react to the lovers with laughter, not condemnation.” “The threats of Dem. and Lys. against each other’s lives are amusing because we know that they will never carry them out.” “Of course, *MND* remains a very funny comedy, and its dark side should not be overstated.” **Lamb**
10. “In Athens [...], disproportion is the form of serious trouble, and temporary exorbitant exaggeration [...] provides a remedy.” **Herbert**
11. “The sexual double-entendres [...] that are manifest in ‘Pyr. & This.’ [...] would have been perfectly in keeping with the conventional bawdiness of aristocratic Renaissance weddings, which still retained archaic aspects of ancient bedding rituals.” **Patterson**

12. "Presuming that the *Dream* was a wedding play, it is natural that, except for Puck's practical jokes, Shak. should have omitted, as ill-omened, what causes fairies to be feared." **Brookes**
13. "A festive confidence that things will ultimately go right supports the perfect gayety and detachment with which Puck relishes the preposterous course they take [in 3.2.114ff]." **Barber**
14. "The movement from town to country, from the control of organized society to the freedom of nature, is appropriate to the emotional experiences of the persons involved. The wood is a place of liberation, of reassessment, leading through a stage of disorganization to a finally increased stability." **Wells**
15. "The green world of the play is at the same time a forest of wild beasts, and the dream can be turned into a nightmare." **Foakes** (p. 46)
16. "The outburst of violence in the quarrel [in 3.2] is brought under control and ritualised in the patterned speeches at the end of the scene." **Foakes** (p. 30)
17. "As is usual in Shak., the romance in the comedy springs partly from threat." **Brookes**
18. "Tragedy points to the extraordinariness of human experience; comedy points to the ordinariness of human experience." "Comedy is a world of substitution which denies the uniqueness of the individuals." **Cantor**
19. See n° 3
20. « Pour être heureux, le dénouement de *MND* semble reposer sur des fondements aussi instables que la magie mal contrôlée du roi des elfes et les caprices du roi des hommes. » **Niayesh**
21. "In many ways comedy is a more philosophic form than tragedy, because it's more intellectual, it's more sceptical and questions things." **Cantor**

THE MODALITIES OF ORDER: A LOVE COMEDY

22. "The subject of love fulfilled in marital union acted (one can suppose) as the assembling and organizing agent [in *MND*]." **Brooks**
23. "The pattern is of a contrast, in the girls, between a more conventionally feminine character, and a bolder, more assertive one, and in the men, between the traditional types of the faithless and the faithful lover." **Brooks**
24. "Separating the lovers but also providing a medium of communication, binding them in a union in partition, [the Wall] stands both as a comic, literal-minded device *and* as a literalization of one of the play's key figures." **Marshall**
25. "As part of the whole play the performance [of *Pyr. & This.*] is organic not only because it is the achieved goal of the artisan-plot, but also by its relevance to the main themes: love, and the relation between imagination, illusion, and reality." **Brooks**
26. "Bott. 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 Tit.'s embrace [...] Not falling in love is both pathologically foolish and eminently sensible." **Lamb**
27. "Far from discrediting him [...] Thes.'s broken vows forcefully demonstrate the irrationality of love central to this forest-labyrinth." **Lamb**
28. "A dotage so ridiculous as Tit.'s upon Bott. is easily cured [...] when (Obe. reports) it has done its work of eclipsing and freeing her from the one which mattered, upon the Indian boy." **Brooks**

29. “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. [...] According to the allegorical reading of the day [...] the minotaur’s labyrinth represented vice, especially yielding to sensual delight, in which sinners lose themselves until aided by some external power.” **Lamb**

THE MODALITIES OF ORDER: GENDER & SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

30. “Having begun with Theseus, one of the two mentor-characters who effect the dénouement, [the play] returns to him in conclusion, but actually concludes with the other mentor, Obe.” **Brooks**
31. “A clash of love and authority is recalled at the first entry of Thes. and Hipp., takes place at Egeus and Herm.’s, Obe. and Tit.’s, and is implicit in Pyr. and This.’s. On the second and the last occasion it has to do with the relationship of parent and child; on the others, with that of husband and wife.” **Brooks**
32. “Tit. is offending wifehood, as Hipp., formerly, did womanhood.” **Brooks**
33. « Quelle que soit l’importance de l’imagerie lunaire féminine, elle est domptée par les forces solaires de *Midsummer* qui pèsent sur toute la pièce. » **Witte**
34. “Whereas the separation of Hipp. and Tit. from other women is implied or kept in the background, the breaking of women’s bonds is central in the plot involving the four young lovers.” **Garner**
35. “I suggest that both Herm. and Hipp. are in effect tongue-tied in the same way: their fate is to have others dictate their sentiments while they are silent or silenced.” **Marshall**
36. “[Tit.’s] attachment to her dead friend’s child has become an obsession. It is perhaps (Puck may imply this) high time the boy was weaned from maternal dandling to be bred as knight and huntsman.” **Brooks**
37. « Les différentes phases de la lune, ascendante / pleine / descendante, associées aux trois visages d’une même déesse lunaire, Artemis / Cynthia / Hécate, semblent faire écho aux trois âges de la femme représentés dans la pièce par les vierges Her. et Hel., l’épousée Hipp. et la mère de substitution qu’est devenue Tit. pour le petit garçon indien. » **Niayesh**
38. “The changeling comes to represent all of the characters in the play who are traded or fought over as property. It also shows us that the other characters are changelings in the sense that the play’s plot revolves around their exchanges: their substitutions and their interchangeability.” “We also could say that the play is performed by changelings because that is what actors are. [...] Actors take others’ parts and places. [...] This is farther compounded in *MND* because characters often seem to be changed into actors: [...] individual characters seem reduced to parts or roles.” **Marshall**
39. “The infatuation of the Queen of Fairies with a common artisan [is] the most extreme example of status inversion and misrule [in Shak.]” **Patterson**
40. “The play panders to an aristocratic ideology by wreaking comic punishment on all who defy the prince’s legislation of desire.” **Freedman**
41. See n° 5

REASON V. FANCY, DREAM & MAGIC V. REALITY

42. “Athens, in tradition a city of wisdom and order, contrasts with the woods to which the lovers flee as a place of disorder and licence.” “The lovers flee from Athens, the city as symbol of civilisation, to the woods outside, symbolic of the wilderness, only to find they have escaped one form of tyranny to encounter another, in themselves.” **Foakes** (p. 31)

43. “*MND* achieves a splendid balance between [reason and imagination]; if the imagination wakes possible visions and experiences otherwise inaccessible, and liberates natural energies from the restraints of reason, those visions and experiences are only given form and meaning through the reason.” **Foakes** (p. 37)
44. “The theme of imagination at odds with reason is sounded out by all the groups in turn.” **Brooks** See also n° 25
45. “That the fairies cannot be thus [= as tiny] represented on the stage is not merely obvious; it is also a point of some importance in the scheme of the play. Shak. seems deliberately to draw attention to the discrepancies between what we see and what is described. Here the audience is required to use its imagination in order to make the play possible. The same is true of the stage audience in the final scene.” **Wells**
46. See n° 95
47. “In a play in which good sight equals right judgment, Obe. asserts the superiority of his vision over Puck’s [...] when he narrates the story of the little Western flower.” **Vlasopolos**
48. “A widespread and time-honored tradition regards dreams as purveyors of secret information, engineered externally or from the self and asking for ingenious decodings.” **Greenfield**
49. “Entering the woods is like dreaming in that the characters — and the audience — perceive differently and gain new imaginative ways of seeing.” **Kehler**
50. “Long before a stage-audience as such watches Quince’s play, scenes are turned into the near semblance of plays-within-the-play by the ‘invisible’ stage-audience of Obe., Puck or both.” **Brooks**
51. “The play is ultimately a tribute to the poetic and the dramatic imagination.” **Cantor**

EPISTEMOLOGICAL & SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS: THE MAZE

52. “[Quince & al.] feel the need to explain everything, like rationalists who believe that truth is to be discovered only by the processes of discursive reason.” **Blanc**
53. “The way perception is dwelt upon is illustrated by the fact that ‘eyes’ are mentioned far more frequently than in any other play of Shak.’s. [...] In Puck’s fog, hearing serves only to lead Lys. and Dem. astray: the emphasis on perception, naturally, is most often on its liability to error.” **Brooks**
54. “The notion of a dislocation between the senses, and between the senses and the brain, is recurrent.” **Wells**
55. “Both Lys. and Herm. initiate the series of violent threats and counterthreats that ring throughout the woods (3.2.255, 297–98). In other words, the originally admirable lovers lose those traits that made them different from their rivals, becoming to the viewer’s distress alter egos of Hel. and Dem. In this way, the dark wood seems to identify a higher character with a lower denominator, reducing the former to the latter in the process.” “Bott.’s ‘translation’ into an ass obviously depersonalizes him; yet, regarded from another viewpoint, this change perfectly individuates him.” **Hunt**
See also n° 18
56. “M. E. Lamb [...] compares the woods to the minotaur’s labyrinth, for Elizabethans often an allegory of sexual sin. The lovers conquer irrational passion and find their way back. [...] The names of the artisans also recall Daedalus, the craftsman (read playwright) who built the labyrinth.” **Kehler** See n° 29, and also n° 76
57. « À la Renaissance, la forêt est le lieu où l’on se perd pour mieux se retrouver et, à ce titre, elle joue le même rôle initiatique que le labyrinthe : tous deux sont des lieux d’errance et d’erreur qui signifient, selon les époques, les difficultés de la quête spirituelle ou la nature tortueuse du désir. » **Cunin**

58. “The woods are established as a region of metamorphosis, where in liquid moonlight or glimmering starlight, things can change, merge and melt into each other.” **Barber**
59. “The dark wood has been a labyrinth, complete with its own minotaur (the translated Bott.), a labyrinth in which, in one sense, the lovers have died to an old self and been reborn to a new identity.” **Hunt**
60. See n^{os} 29 & 14

AN APOTROPAIC OR PROPITIATORY FUNCTION?

61. “A *Dream* theology must belittle human responsibility. Athenian mortals’ wickedness, like troubles and joys, spins off from fairy discord.” “Mischievous Robin perpetrates mischief on Bott. and his friends simply because he notices an opportunity. Bott. does nothing to deserve translation. The lovers do nothing to earn help. Athens mimics Calvinists’ grace and election.” **Herbert**
62. “Pyr. and This. speak less frequently to each other than to Wall, Moon, and Nature, to eyes, tears, sword, and night. They assume, in short, that Nature is responsive to them and that each part of their world has, or is, a spirit capable of understanding.” **Herbert**
63. “Before Shak., *Goodfellow* often sounded ironically threatening to English ears [...] much as *Eumenides*, ‘the well disposed ones’, sounded threatening to the Greeks.” **Herbert** See also n^o 12
64. “People are making the heavy weather that counts. Ege.’s tyranny over his daughter, Thes.’s harsh legalism, Dem.’s fickleness, Hel.’s treachery — such behavior, out of kilter and out of character, reflects Obe.’s disordered household.” **Herbert**
65. “Until Obe. and Tit.’s brawl is settled, the marriage of The. and Hipp. — or any of the Athenian lovers — would be ill-advised, simply because the Nature disturbed by the fairies’ quarrel remains hostile to happiness.” **Hunt**
66. See n^o 94
67. “On the whole [Obe. & Tit.] exercise their power for beneficent ends, and there is a sense in which they are projections of forces of nature favourable to humanity just as their human counterparts, Thes. and Hipp., exercise a benevolent rule over the citizens of Athens.” **Wells**
68. “The theatrical conventions with which [Shak.] started writing already provided a congenial saturnalian organization of experience.” “It was of course a practice [...] for the clowns to present a burlesque version of actions performed seriously by their betters.” **Barber**
69. See n^o 5
70. “The lovers’ progression from the night of misrule to the light of the holy day parallels the pagan nature of the Midsummer festival and its Christian conclusion.” “Characterized by exorcisms of evil spirits, and by reconciliation and atonement [...], the feast of Saint John the Baptist follows the license and misrule of the eve and night preceding June 24.” **Vlasopolos**
71. “Shak.’s contemporaries often equated fairies with dryads and nymphs, Robin Goodfellows with satyrs and fauns.” **Staton**
72. “In its very title and in passing allusions — to the festivals of Midsummer Eve and St John’s Day, to the rites of May and to St Valentine’s Day — the play gestures towards a larger context of popular holiday occasions and customs that mixed together pagan and Christian traditions.” **Montrose**

73. “Courtly pastime is part of the festival tradition in which the *Dream* is strongly rooted [...] In that tradition, even more important for the *Dream* are folk-customs and the folk-beliefs that went with them.” **Brooks**
74. “It was in the May-game that the tradition of the ancient fertility cult lived on. [...] There is a correspondence in the *Dream*’s whole action with the movement of the May-game, from the town to the woods and back, bringing home the summer. [...] The May Queen presented the person of the Summer Lady, with whom Tit. is associated [in 3.1.129]. Obe., traditional fairy ruler, has been given attributes of the May King, patron of new and renewed fertility, and vernal genius of the green-wood which is the seat of Obe.’s magic power.” **Brooks**
75. “[The] title sends the reader’s thoughts to St. John’s Eve and its associations with magic. [...] It was to dew gathered on May-day morning that magic properties were attributed. But ‘night-rule’ in the woods was appropriated to Midsummer Eve. [...] It was a time when both magic and madness were abroad. ‘Midsummer madness’ was proverbial.” **Brooks**
76. “May-game wantonness has a reverence about it because it is a realization of a power of life larger than the individual, crescent both in men and in their green surroundings.” “[The fairies are] embodiments of the May-game experience of eros in men and women and trees and flowers, while any superstitious tendency to believe in their literal reality is mocked.” **Barber**
77. “As a ritual, Midsummer represents a time of change in which man attempts to adjust to and maintain himself in harmony with nature. Correspondence between animate and inanimate, between macrocosm and microcosm, is heightened.” “The quarrel between Obe. and Tit. exemplifies the close ties between sexuality and cosmic order.” **Vlasopolos**
78. « La rotondité, image traditionnelle de la fécondité, est omniprésente dans la pièce, marquée par une forme de stylisation géométrique. » « La pièce se clôt (presque) sur un épithalame, destiné à écarter les naissances monstrueuses, à protéger les enfants qui seront conçus au cours de la nuit de noces de toute malformation. » **Cunin**
79. “[At the end] the fairies have been made into tutelary spirits of fertility.” **Barber**
80. “In the *Dream* the Moon reigns queen of fertility no less than of virginity.” “The Moon is the planetary regent of the *Dream*, and with the other aspects of ‘the triple Hecate’, its mythological regent.” **Brooks**
81. “Represent[ations of] the marriage of the sylvan deities in the persons of a King and Queen of May [...] were no mere symbolic or allegorical dramas, pastoral plays designed to amuse or instruct a rustic audience. They were charms intended to make the woods to go green.” **Frazer**
82. “This play is a comic effort to revive pagan mythology.” “[Shak.] was trying to demilitarize fairies.” “[Nature, like Puck, is] not malicious but capricious.” **Cantor**

“THE CONCORD OF THIS DISCORD”

83. “We have seen already that the lovers needed the tolerance and understanding indulgence of other people to achieve their happiness. The play scene extends this idea outside the world of the lovers to other groups of society too.” **Wells**
84. “[In 5.1.60, Thes.] shows something of the understanding that previously seemed to belong rather to Hipp. The shift in attitudes is interesting. Shak. seems to be hinting at the infinite adjustments necessary in the establishment of social and emotional harmony.” **Wells**
85. “For Shak. and in the thought of his time the harmony of music and of movement in the dance signified concord and was capable of promoting it in the body and the mind.” **Brooks**
86. “All of the mechanicals are concerned with some form or manner of joining. [...] All join together what is apart or mend what has been rent, broken, or sundered.” **Marshall**

87. “Hipp.’s description [5.1.23–26] of a concord of minds that seem to stand together is also the dream of the theater.” **Marshall**
88. “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 Bott.’s even more absurd encounter with the fairy queen, there would be no ballads of our dreams, no impulse to create art.” **Lamb**
89. “For James E. Robinson (1968) the play’s structure inheres in the fusion of ritual — magic and marriage — with rhetoric — love and law.” **Kehler**
90. “[Obe. & Tit.] are especially interesting stylistically, for as king and queen they speak like humans, while as fairies or spirits, they pass easily into rhyme or song.” **Foakes** (p. 29)
91. See n° 43

COMPLEMENTS AND PARALLELS

92. “[Thes.] ordained another feast also upon the sixteenth day of the month of June.” “It was he also which made the games called Isthmia [that] were done in the night, and had rather form of sacrifice or of a mystery, than of games and open feast.” **Plutarch** *Life of Theseus*, trans. Thomas North (1579)
93. “In some European countries, the design of the board was given special significance as a symbol of protection from evil [and the centre of it was] a symbol of regeneration.” **Wikipedia** s.v. Nine men’s morris.
94. “But when the planets / In evil mixture to disorder wander, / What plagues and what portents, what mutiny, / What raging of the sea, shaking of earth, / Commotion in the winds! Frights, changes, horrors, / Divert and crack, rend and deracinate, / The unity and married calm of states / Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shak’d, / Which is the ladder of all high designs, / The enterprise is sick!” *Troil. & Cres.*, 3.1; see the whole speech by Ulysses (3.1.130ff) about the “great chain of beings” and order in the cosmos.
95. “And let us, ciphers to this great account, / On your imaginary forces work. [...] Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts [...] Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them [...] For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings, / Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times, / Turning th’accomplishment of many years / Into an hour-glass” *Hen. V*, Prologue: the audience’s imagination as necessary for the theatre.
96. Hamlet’s advice to the Players (3.2): “Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc’d it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as live the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who (for the most part) are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipp’d for o’erdoing Termagant. It out-herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.”
97. Other works that are partially or indirectly related to *MND* and may shed some light on it while being highly enjoyable: Purcell’s opera *The Fairie Queen*, adapted from Edmund Spenser (1590–96); the 1973 film *The Wicker Man*; Arthur Machen’s fantasy / decadent novel *The Great God Pan* (1894); Terry Pratchett’s *Lord and Ladies* and to a lesser extent *Hogfather*; Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* comics; illustrations by Arthur Rackham or William Blake, and Richard Dadd’s works. See <http://khagneanglaisdaily.tumblr.com> for additional resources, images and video clips.

REFERENCE KEY

- Foakes** — Cambridge edition, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2003
- Brooks** — Arden edition, ed. Harold Brooks, 1979
- Wells** — Penguin edition, ed. Stanley Wells, 1967
- Frazer** — James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1922 edition
- Barber** — C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, Meridian, 1959
- Herbert** — T. Walker Herbert, *Oberon's Mazéd World*, Louisiana State UP, 1977
- Cantor** — Paul Cantor, video lectures, <http://thegreatthinkers.org/shakespeare-and-politics/>, 2015
- Kehler** — Dorothea Kehler, “MND: A Bibliographical Survey of the Criticism”, in *MND: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler, Routledge, 1998
- Garner** — Shirley Garner, “MND: ‘Jack Shall Have Jill / Nought Shall Go Ill’”, 1981, *ibid.*
- Patterson** — Annabel Patterson, “Bottom’s Up: Festive Theory in MND”, 1988, *ibid.*
- Freedman** — Barbara Freedman, “Dis/Figuring Power: Censorship and Representation in MND”, 1991, *ibid.*
- Montrose** — Louis Montrose, “A Kingdom of Shadows”, 1995, *ibid.*
- Freake** — Douglas Freake, “MND as a Comic Veresion of the Theseus Myth”, *ibid.*
- Greenfield** — Thelma Greenfield, “Our Nightly Madness: Shak.’s *Dream* without *The Interpretation of Dreams*”, *ibid.*
- Blanc** — Pauline Blanc, “‘Very tragical mirth’: The Mechanicals’ Dramaturgy in MND”, in *Lectures d’une œuvre : MND*, dir. Christine Sukic, Éds du Temps, 2002
- Niayesh** — Ladan Niayesh, « L’heure des Amazones », *ibid.*
- Cunin** — Muriel Cunin, « “Such seething brains, / Such shaping fantasies” : Imagination et conception dans MND », *ibid.*
- Witte** — Anne Witte, « Les temps du *Songe* : Une lecture du *comput* shakespearien dans *SNÉ* », *ibid.*
- Hunt** — Maurice Hunt, “Individuation in MND”, 1986
- Marshall** — David Marshall, “Exchanging Visions: Reading MND”, 1982
- Staton** — Walter F. Staton, “Ovidian Elements in MND”, 1963
- Vlasopolos** — Anca Vlasopolos, “The Ritual of Midsummer: A Pattern for MND”, 1978
- Lamb** — M. E. Lamb, “MND: The Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur”, 1979