

Reconfigured Time in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: *tempus longum* or *tempus commodum*¹?

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Abstract:

The dramatic space occupied by the two plots in A Midsummer Night's Dream allows Shakespeare to reconfigure time from its empirical quality (as a linear trajectory) into a subjective defiance of the Christian sense of history.

*The experience of temporality in A Midsummer Night's Dream is invested with a round movement which resists the phenomenological aspect of a timeline and reveals itself as an "antique fable" marked off by the visible indeterminacy of the human condition. Such meditations about the evanescence of life by Lysander, Titania and Theseus bear testimony to the absurdist dimension of temporality which ostensibly resists the category of duration (*tempus longum*) as of potential (in its Petersonian sense as *tempus commodum* or agent of renewal). As a first impression, time is portrayed as a negative force with hardly any prospect ahead except death. To counter this ontological immateriality of time, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seeks through such expedients as dream, the intrusion of the fairies, etc to present man with a new parameter to his time-consciousness beyond the fixation on death and the Christian promise of an afterlife.*

This redefinition of the performativity of time in A Midsummer Night's Dream is preconditioned by the synergy of chaotic forces which disconnect the text from its historical time into a prefiguration of the more thrilling (actually Nietzschean) stunt of being unhistorical.

Keywords: Christian timeline, unhistorical, *tempus longum*, *tempus commodum*.

¹ These two word combinations are coined by Douglas L. Peterson and appear in his article "Time, Tide, and Tempest" 412.

Literature Review

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the type of text which breeds a feel of a crisis in its representation of a temporality shuttling back and forth between *tempus longum* (or clocktime) and time as a perpetual thwarting of its possibility as *tempus commodum*.

Hume tells us that approaching knowledge of all type has to go first through the law of causality which places human consciousness above the theological ideals of fate and god. Schopenhauer gives an eagle-eyed account of Hume's concern for the law of causality which is "nothing beyond the empirically perceived succession of things and states in Time, with which habit has made us familiar"². In this sense Schopenhauer observes Time as a precondition for the establishment of habits, by extension, for the implementation of mass history as a fixed set of rules and customs: what he bluntly deems as "metaphysics".

Schopenhauer pokes fun at the law of causality as the phenomenological fixation on the timeline; while he assigns to knowledge the more engaging task of "representation": that is of reconfiguring Time from a mere fact into an intellectual experience. Schopenhauer borrows this meditation from Kiesewetter:

Reason of knowledge is not to be confounded with reason of fact (cause) [...] The former is the fundamental principle of thought; the latter that of experience. Cause refers to real things, logical reason has only to do with representations. (Kiesewetter, "Logik" qtd. in *Two Essays*, 25)

The experience of temporality in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* takes a different turn from that of the law of causality and is therefore invested with a round movement. When cognition and agency are both dropped from the time-consciousness of such characters as Lysander, Titania, and Theseus we end up with a *third* dimension to temporality which finds meaning in Shakespeare's prefiguration of the Nietzschean rebuff of mass history into the lure of the revolutionary, unhistorical time-consciousness. Shakespeare's representation of this crisis reveals his existential concern with temporality also as a prefiguration the Bergsonian formula of subjective versus clock time:

Bergson's philosophical theories, especially his theory of duration, strongly influence the existential drama –from him, the existential dramatist borrows the concept of subjective, as opposed to clock, time. (Brustein, 27-8)

Shakespeare's profile as an existentialist dramatist has been discussed by a many critics with variable sharpness. Marie A. Plasse observes an overlap between man's estrangement from the dramatic timeline in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the deeper *malaise* stemming from his subjective time-consciousness. However, by referring to man's insoluble rapport to time as "the volatility of paradoxical impulses", I think she does not exhibit sufficient attention to

² Arthur Schopenhauer. *Two essays: "On The Fourfold Root Of The Principle Of Sufficient Reason" & "On The Will In Nature"*, London: Bohn's Philosophical Library York Street, Covent Garden 1889, p 24.

the dilemma suffered by the individual between time as duration and time as a deeper existential concern.

John S. Mebane is also aware of the anxiety about time in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; however, he insists on his claim that the comic aspect of the play is what curtails the bitterness of its time-consciousness. The same is true of Virgil Hutton who recognizes an overlap between the tragic and the comic in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Hutton conceives of the fairies as what “protects the mind from too direct a confrontation with unpleasant reality” (304). However, he misses the rigor of understanding time-consciousness as the other facet to the world of dream and imagination: therefore as the most disconcerting “reality” about man.

Contrary to Marjorie Garber’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s idea of history in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the immediate reflection of his patriotism, I suggest the more critical reading of Shakespeare as a prefiguration of Nietzsche’s unhistorical determination which discredits mass history as nothing milder than the category of metaphysics.

Research objectives

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy which is never at odds with Shakespeare’s philosophical inquiry of how to bring the comic face to face with the tragic within the same text. The following article is an attempt to interpret Shakespeare’s sense of temporality behind the happy-go-lucky impression of the comic. It tracks down prefigurations of the philosophy of Bergson in Shakespeare’s concern of how to interfuse the dramatic timeline with the more authentic subjective time. Such moments of crisis (as when Francis Flute questions the authenticity of the role he is cast to play) will be revealed as instances where Shakespeare deliberately suspends the dramatic clock—together with its obsessing Christian consciousness—in favor of the more energetic hypothesis of an unhistorical sense of time. The individual is celebrated principally in his potential to disown the past (as metaphysics) thanks to the empowering autonomy of his intellect. These are the terms according to which I undertake the responsibility of liberating Shakespeare’s text from theater performance in a resolute turn to self-will outside national history.

Research questions

The study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1- To what extent does the play-within-a-play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* solve the riddle of *tempus longum*?
- 2- To what extent has Shakespeare prefigured an answer to the Bergsonian dilemma of the ego and the clock?
- 3- Can we consider dreamwork as a respite from an otherwise unbearable time-consciousness?
- 4- Can Shakespeare be hailed a precursor of Nietzsche’s *unhistorical* man?

Shakespeare's aesthetic response to historical linearity or *tempus longum*

An existential inquiry is represented by Shakespeare through the duke, Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* who rhetorically inquires (with more or less the same bitterness as Pozzo in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*) about any possible relief from the strain of temporality: "Is there no play, /to ease the anguish of a torturing hour?" Few lines later, the same inquiry recurs when Theseus is on the lookout for an "abridgement" i.e., a "pastime" to kill away the pain ensuing from excessive idleness: "How shall we beguile/ The lazy Time?": a burdened rant, much comparable in tone to the insoluble rapport to time we feel in Beckett's Krapp (for example). Shakespeare is presenting us with the reality that it is difficult to link up with temporality outside the vicious circle of suffering. Sharp time-consciousness is what incessantly deters man from progressing and ultimately condemns him to stasis: much akin to—but still more biting than—clinical death.

An obvious crisis in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be diagnosed in light of its intriguing roundness which challenges the traditional expectation of a linear plot. This expectation is thwarted by such characters as Bottom who vehemently antagonizes all art at once: "If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity for my life. No, I am no such thing; I am a man, as other men are". Bottom intercepts our expectations of his role-playing and steps out of the narrative to acquaint us with the truth that art cannot interpose itself between man and his sharp time-consciousness.

In warding off the temptation of fully engaging in artistic mimesis, Bottom affirms the ready-to-hand aspect of his plot in a comedy which keeps on picturing man "as other men are" –that is to say within the limits of the earthbound. Marjorie Garber suggests that Bottom resists his attire of an ass on account of his class-consciousness: "Bottom with an ass's head is more like himself than before" (Garber, 204). I think we can suspend the hypothesis of class-consciousness at least for a while. Bottom's scorn of his mimetic task is Shakespeare's idiosyncratic metaphor which challenges the temporal linearity of the comic into an existential time-consciousness as man's most troubling concern. The same is true of Francis Flute.

Marie A. Plasse observes in Flute's reaction to the role assigned to him by Quince a moment of crisis within the drama of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* whereby "the potential for aggression is attributed to the spectators, while the greatest sense of corporeal and psychological vulnerability rests with the actor" (Plasse, 35). Marie A. Plasse considers Flute's resistance to role-playing in parallel with his fear of effeminacy:

QUINCE. Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.
FLUTE. What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?
QUINCE. It is the lady that Pyramus must love.
FLUTE. Nay, faith, let me not play a woman: I have a beard coming.
QUINCE. That's all one: you shall play it in a mask; and you may speak as small as you will. (I. 2)

Marie A. Plasse justifies Flute's vulnerability to the audience in line with the subversion of gender roles he risks if he accepts to play the female part of the lover of Pyramus: "Flute hopes that Thisbe is a "wandering knight," a character which would allow him to pretend to possess much more power and virility than he enjoys in his life as Francis Flute, smooth-faced bellows mender" (ibid). Marie A. Plasse signals another moment of crisis during the very performance of the part of Thisbe when Flute objects to the act of kissing Pyramus: "I kiss the wall's hole and not your lips at all" (Plasse, 35) because the part of wall is actually played by a male actor. Flute's sensitivity to displaying his body to such distortions of sexual identity is another picture of man's dependence on his body as a source of meaning to his existence. Part of Marie A. Plasse's analysis of this moment of crisis in the dramatic timeline is premised on a sexual argument.

However, I am inclined to observe in Flute's hesitation a moment of standstill instantiating a graver crisis within the timeline of the drama beyond the sexual anxiety of playing the part of Pyramus' female lover. This instance from Act 1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a metaphor of the transformation of the individual from a Cartesian "chose qui pense" into a Bergsonian "chose qui dure" (Brustein, 27-28). Flute has to play the part assigned to him: therefore to progress along the timeline designed for the play. In this case, he would be allowed little or no "thinking" about "who" he really is. His apprehension of role-playing can be linked to his fear of being displaced from one temporal pattern (clocktime) into another (the dramatic clock). Plasse analyzes Flute's sexual anxiety also as a reflection of the shortness of the temporal lapse allowed by the performance: what she describes as:

the volatility of the theatrical experience and [...] the instability of the paradoxical impulses towards goodwill and hostility which performers and spectators alike display within its context. (Plasse 37)

Marie A. Plasse signals an overlap (in this scene in particular) between the time necessary for the performance (*tempus longum*) and the subjective sense of time, which she refers to as the sporadic "impulses towards goodwill and hostility". Plasse's concern about the instability of man's temperament between good and evil (what can also be taken as *tempus commodum*) reveals her understanding of Shakespeare's *soucis* of temporality behind theater performance. Shakespeare presents us with the truth that time-consciousness is endemic to the minds and souls of people everywhere. Actors or spectators: it matters very little.

Lysander's sense of *tempus longum*: a prefiguration of the Bergsonian withdrawal of the ego

In an article entitled "Structure, Source, and Meaning in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", John S. Mebane presents us with a reading of the question of temporality full of undoubted radicalism. This is because his reading is polarized between the religious timeline in its inexorable progress towards death (on the one hand) and the relief offered by the joviality of the comedy (on the other). His scrutiny of Lysander's meditation:

[I]f there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,

Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth;
And ere a man hath power to say "Behold!"
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion. (I, i)

—yields the hypothesis that if Lysander ever manages to eschew religion's procrastination of man's attainment of happiness it is thanks to the merry atmosphere typical of the genre of the comedy:

Lysander's speech [...] develops apocalyptic overtones; at one level the imagery of the lines hints at a description of the dissolution of the cosmos at the end of time. Like many speeches in the play, this vision of heaven and earth illuminated brilliantly for a brief moment, then devoured by darkness, [...] alludes delicately to an ultimate harmony which can be experienced only in the next life. (Mebane, 263)

Lysander limits his time-consciousness to the divine promise of a better life in the beyond. He gives us an idea of the Christian time pattern in terms of this procrastination of the pleasures of the *now*. "A brief moment" is the lapse of the entirety of a lifetime in Lysander's reckoning. Contrary to Mebane's complacency about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a comedy which allays the tension of the inexorable forward movement of time, I suggest to measure Lysander's time-consciousness against Bergson's theory as it occurs in his book: *Time and Free Will*:

[L]et us withdraw for a moment the ego which thinks these so-called successive oscillations: there will never be more than a single oscillation, and indeed only one single position of the pendulum, and hence no duration. (*Time and Free Will*, 108)

We can say that Lysander has withdrawn his ego to succumb to an external sense of time imposed on him by the Christian clock. As a potential prefiguration of Bergson's theory, I hypothesize that Lysander has no sense of duration except for one single position of his religious clock which is literally incognizant of the here-and-now: "making it momentary as a sound" in its obsession with the Beyond. Against the Greek setting of the romance, Lysander has virtually *withdrawn his ego* (to borrow Bergson's phraseology) in favor of a standardized time-consciousness typical of the Christian world picture. This time-consciousness is premised on *tempus longum* as the daunting feel of duration which drags the subjectivity of the individual to its very background. It is therefore the opposite of *tempus commodum* as the belief in man's potential.

Mebane who was aware of Lysander's "emphasis upon the brevity and uncertainty of mortal life" (260) admits that this kind of cosmic meditation is counterpoised by the merriment typical of the comedy as what runs down the tension of excessive time-consciousness:

This anagogical dimension of meaning enriches the play aesthetically as well as philosophically, but it would be a serious mistake of emphasis to see it as more than a significant analogue and appropriate backdrop for the earthly concerns which are usually the center of attention. (Mebane, 263)

One thing to bear in mind, however, is that Mebane's warning shall not interpose itself between the recipient of the comedy and the larger philosophical inquiry of the dramatist about temporality as man's insoluble enigma. This has been the point made by David Cecil who has quite seen into Shakespeare's tacit wistfulness in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* beyond its overlay as a hymn to love, art and imagination:

[Shakespeare's] gaiety is made poignant by a sense of its fleetingness, that sets our thoughts roving into darker regions far beyond the apparent compass of the play [...] The pleasure of life is as ephemeral as a dream [...] The fair faces grow pensive, as for an instant there passes over them the shadow of their mortality. (Cecil, 31)

Tempus longum is the closest qualifier we can attach to time behind the vibrant joviality of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Time is stretched beyond man's endurance because it is constructed within the narrow space of a history which hails God on its top.

The fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Shakespeare's aesthetic scoff at his Christian timeline

In his analysis of what spares *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the epithet *comic*, Virgil Hutton opens a luring prospect for criticism to counter the hypothesis that the comedy could be possibly a representation of a teleological time-consciousness typical of the Christian faith. He observes that Shakespeare's sense of religion in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is tilted towards Greek paganism rather than Christian monotheism. Hutton's attention to the interference of the fairies with the life of humans is also meant to ridicule the monotheistic belief in god's control over his subjects. The fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are (according to Hutton) a deliberate anomaly in the world of nature meant to withdraw the responsibility of men's lives from the hands of God. More than that, Hutton observes their interference as an atheistic scoff at Christianity. This is Hutton's comment on Titania's confession:

And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original. (II. i)

"The fairies, unlike Christianity's God, do not hesitate to accept responsibility for some of the evils in the world" (Hutton, 300). To Hutton's consciousness about Shakespeare's bias towards the Homeric sense of responsibility, I may adduce that this naturalization of man's propensity for evil is also typical of Shakespeare's larger project of how to depict the frailties of man no longer as a taboo. Shakespeare's new idea of history reveals itself in his emphasis on man's infirmity also as a substance of history.

This is the idea I imbibe from Shakespeare's implicit rebuff of the Christian dogma of collective guilt in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through his invitation of the supernatural. Shakespeare brings man's subjectivity to the fore even when the issue is sin and evildoing. It seems that what matters for Shakespeare is the cultural performance of a breach within the Christian timeline: a breach whose aim is to display the autonomy of man away from a deity. However, man's attempted severance from the Christian apocalyptic timeline is always marred by his acerbic time-consciousness. Simultaneously as he celebrates such "earthly" matters as love and sexuality, Shakespeare is pulled down to the truth about man's mortality. Instances of such meditations (as they occur in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) are a memento about death as the inexorable end to man's journey in time. This is also what justifies Hutton's observation of a constant overlap between the tragic and the comic in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The moonless conclusion of "Pyramus and Thisby" represents the intrusion of dark reality into the midst of comic romance, and Pyramus's "now die, die, die, die, die!" becomes the comic equivalent of Lear's "Never, never, never, never, never" [...] Theseus pairs the moon with the lion to perform a ritual symbolizing not the joy of restoration but the finality of death: "Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead" (V. i). (297)

In addition to Hutton's heed of the tragic underlying the valence between Lion and Moon for Theseus, I distinguish the part of the lion as a metaphor of the devouring monster, *time*, while the moon arouses the symbolic effect of the reversibility and uncertainty of men's fortunes. Shakespeare's fixation on such symbols as *lion* and *moon* is one way for him to juxtapose the tragic side by side with the comic in order for his concern with temporality not to miss its authenticity. Hutton is even keener on signaling Shakespeare's time-consciousness when he presents the Pyramus and Thisbe play as a curtailment to our judgment of comedy exclusively as matter for laughter and family reunion:

Our world of daily tragedies is more faithfully mirrored in the godless world of Pyramus and Thisby than in the fairy world of the Athenian woods. (Hutton, 295)

This ambivalent aspect of the comedy –according to Hutton—stresses Shakespeare's pessimism about the position of man "in an unpromising world" (Hutton, 303). Soon as we heed the fairies as nothing beyond the figment of dreamwork, we immediately bounce back on the bitter truth that it is hard for man to extirpate himself from a world governed by a will external to his own. Shakespeare's Christian consciousness is what ultimately betrays his pessimism about a temporality fully possessed by God. Shakespeare is daunted by religion's bearings on men's sense of history so much so that he introduces the element of dream (tentatively) as an anti-Christian respite from the linearity of a temporality whose sole end is death.

This is the conclusion Hutton reaches about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as what manifests Shakespeare's angered response to Christianity: a response which finds shape in the Poet's wistful morning over the now lost world of Greek gods: "The displacement of the fairies and of the Homeric gods by later beliefs [...] stress[es] how much has been lost" (303). However,

Hutton ends up unsettling this last claim by stressing the unreliability of the “weak and idle theme” of dream as an epistemic source (ibid).

Hutton enlarges the purview of his criticism when he delineates dreamwork as Shakespeare’s expedient which “protects the mind from too direct a confrontation with unpleasant reality” (304). By the same logic, I can say that temporality is Shakespeare’s most arresting “reality” which he sets out to encumber at once. The dreaminess engendered by the fairies within the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is a watershed moment in the midst of the frightening reality of death. Shakespeare reconfigures the longitudinal reality of time (typically Christian) thanks to dreamwork which equips *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with a subjective sense of temporality. Dream has the merit of allaying the strenuous reality about death and about the evanescence of man’s life into the prospect of *tempus commodum*: albeit illusory.

The temporalization of dreamwork: a response to the oncoming thrownness of *Dasein*

The play-within-a-play of Thisbe and Pyramus (which is actually the mechanicals’ play) anticipates “a brave new world” to come as what can be gauged Shakespeare’s secular response to the overwhelming Athenian deism of the main plot. However, the enchanted maunderings of the dream can also be interpreted as the reaction prepared by Shakespeare to the subject-less outlook of *Dasein* given by Heidegger. What the latter postulates in *Being and Time* as the thrownness of *Dasein* hardly offers any solution to the riddling question about man’s position in the world. In this sense, the enactment of dream in the comedy is how Shakespeare transforms *Dasein* from an isolated instant into an opportunity of relatedness: therefore literally from *tempus longum* into *tempus commodum*.

In his book, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton criticizes Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* as “a perpetuation of metaphysical thought” (296):

The ‘thrownness’ of *Dasein* means that it can never be its own master, never mistake itself for the originary source of its own being. It is unfinished, [...] shot through with negativity, always eccentric to itself. (Eagleton, ibid)

Ironically, Shakespeare seems to have anticipated Eagleton’s observation of Heidegger’s sense of *Dasein* as “a non-aesthetic form of being” (Eagleton, 296).

A Midsummer Night’s Dream finds meaning to man’s being-in-time as a hymn to subjectivity more than anything else. The realm of art is where subjectivity becomes most visible. The class-consciousness of the mechanicals who express their fear of frightening “the ladies” during the performance of their play-within-a-play is never at odds with this same idea.

Indeed, (and for all its bitterness) class-consciousness is one way the subject relates to his socio-economic environment and is in this sense a confirmation that *Dasein* cannot survive without relating to its historical time. Shakespeare refutes any sense of time unless it traverses the subjectivity of the individual. The mechanicals’ awareness of the stakes of their bourgeois society reinforces their historical consciousness beneath the cloak of theater performance. We make out that Shakespeare employs art as a pretext for his larger experimentation with the dilemma of *Dasein* ahead of its time. Temporality in Shakespeare resists the oncoming

thrownness of *Dasein* into a self-conscious interactivity of the subject with his society at any cost.

Prefiguring Nietzsche's unhistorical man: Shakespeare's criticism of mass history

Ay me, for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth. (I. i)

Lysander's idea of love is inextricable from his time-consciousness. The latter, in turn, is nothing beyond the obsession with mass "history" which strikes a sad note about people's life stories always in terms of a tragedy. A similar grim note is stricken when Theseus reminds Hippolyta: "I wooed thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries" (I. i). Theseus' narrowly institutionalized politics of love is another hint to Shakespeare's depiction of a communal sense of history which survives by clamping down on man's pleasure once it slips outside its customs and norms.

Still in (I. i) Shakespeare insists on acquainting his recipients with an idea of history which hardly extirpates love from suffering and even from the penalty of death. The Duke, Theseus, enforces chastity as a law for love. He emerges in this sense as the voice of a traditional conception of love as nothing beyond the socially-sanctified institution of marriage. His warnings to Hermia are a mirror image to the Athenian social outlook with its dual conception of woman either as a wife or as a nun:

Either to die the death, or to abjure
For ever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires.
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun [...] (I. i)

Marjorie Garber makes a correlation between Theseus' evocation of the custody of father or church (on the one hand) and –what she opines as— Shakespeare's consciousness of the historical stakes of his age (on the other):

A reader interested in history might wonder how this description of the cloistered life of a virgin ("To live a barren sister all your life, / Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon") would accord with the public image of Queen Elizabeth. But where virginity or maidenhood disempowers Hermia, remanding her to her father's care or to the care of the Church, virginity empowered Elizabeth, who [...] asserted [...] that she herself was England's bride. (*Shakespeare After All*, 202)

Garber uncritically celebrates Shakespeare's idea of history in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the reflection of his sense of patriotism. However, I think that Shakespeare rather directs his irony at how people conceive of history as a hymn to their nationalism. To Theseus' counsel to Hermia "To you your father should be as a god," Shakespeare seems to respond in

the negative. In this sense, Shakespeare is far from complying with the extant idea of history among his compatriots. He is rather prefiguring the Nietzschean unhistorical sense by repudiating the antiquarian conception of a history which finds legitimacy in the fervor of patriotism: "History," says Nietzsche, "belongs, above all, to the active and powerful man, the man who fights one great battle, who needs the exemplary men, teachers, and comforters and cannot find them among his contemporary companions" (*Use and Abuse*, 9). It seems that English patriotism loses out since the opening scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the warmer passion of the unhistorical man.

Conclusion

To a large extent, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* resists the category of the romance into a more complex structure where the risible and the tragic converge at one point: which is man's mordant time-consciousness. Whether in its orgiastic celebration of the woods as the symbolic stage of prelapsarian bliss, or in its ontological inquiry of how to compromise the time of dramatic performance with a subjective sense of temporality, *A Midsummer* is a metaphor of the endless interactivity between the individual self and their history. However, it also seeks to solve the relation of the subject to their historical past as no less than a dilemma: is history a matter of veneration or should history be unearthed only to be broken to pieces? Shakespeare has predicted this existential problem through the critical situations where he portrays such characters as Lysander and Flute in their grievances about the ways of time. I find in such query much of a prefiguration of the Nietzschean cry into the monumental idea of history: a cry which (in turn) solves the oncoming Heideggerian ordeal about the *thrownness* of man's being-in-time.

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