‘Felicity’ ‘in the Body’: Allusion to Paul, Erasmus, and Apuleius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

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Introduction

Robert Alter writes in his *The Pleasure of Reading* that ‘all writers are forced to enter into a dialogue or debate with their predecessors, recycling bits and pieces of earlier texts, giving them a fresh application . . . [and] a radical new meaning’ (114). He names ‘Homer and Genesis’ as ‘the first texts . . . which themselves become questions for successive generations of answers’ (115). In this paper, ‘the first texts’ are Paul’s and Erasmus’s, and perhaps unexpectedly, Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*.

It has long been accepted that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* alludes to Paul’s 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 in Bottom’s soliloquy (4.1.207-10).[1] However, there are references to not only 1 Cor., but also 2 Cor. 12:1-6 (at 4.1.201-07), as Chris Hassel Jr. points out (54). Interestingly, Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folie* reworks the very same verses of 1 and 2 Corinthians, as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* does. Therefore, the play not only alludes to Paul directly but also indirectly through Erasmus. The phrase ‘in the body’ in the title here is in 2 Cor. 12:2 and 3, and is also repeatedly used in *The Praise of Folie* (120-28).

Why does the play allude to Paul’s two epistles? Alter writes that ‘a cited text may be deliberately recast or distorted in order to produce a particular effect’ (12). The state of Bottom’s ‘The eye of man hath not heard’ seems to imitate and parody the ‘ecstatic manifestations’ (Käsemann 2), which were a state of a spiritual enthusiasm encouraged in the Gnostics within Paul’s Corinthian church. For them, the religious and spiritual state of being ‘out of the body’ is the most desirable. Exaltation of the spirit is predicated on denial of the flesh. Bottom’s passion appears to be religious and spiritual when he cites Paul’s two epistles while recalling his experience.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream also draws on classical tradition. Pyramus

and Thisbe's play in Act 5, a play within the play, shows how closely it follows the script of Ovid's original.[2]

Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* is another influential text from the classical heritage, which is used to invest the relationship of Titania and Bottom with a multilayered idiom of love. Shakespeare most likely read it in the English translation by William Adlington, published in 1566, which opens by introducing the author Apuleius as 'an excellent follower of Plato his sect.' It is highly likely that Shakespeare's contemporaries read *The Golden Ass* in Neo-Platonic terms. When the protagonist Lucius is about to be transformed into an ass, he is 'drowned in the sensual lusts of the flesh' (the translator Adlington's preface to *The Golden Ass*), and is 'stricken and subdued with' the physicality of his lover such as her 'close kisses' (129). Lucius says: I 'esteem the [erotic] pleasure I shall have with thee this night above all the joys of the world' (129). After he is restored to a human shape, he becomes a follower of 'great Osiris' as well as 'the goddess Isis' (587), and ends up as a priest executing his 'office in great joy with a shaven crown in that most ancient college which was set up in the time of Sylla' (595). Within the tradition of Renaissance Neo-Platonism, the whole framework of *The Golden Ass* implies initiation into a higher level of spiritual being aspiring towards God's love after starting from the lower realm of carnal desire.

This form of transcendent love so praised in Platonism is especially clear in the episode of Cupid and Psyche. Unmistakably, as Jan Kott has argued,[3] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is steeped in Neo-Platonism, as is evident in lines such as 'Things base and vile, holding no quantity,/ Love can transpose to form and dignity' (1.1.232-33). The play also refers to 'the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling' (5.1.12-13), a literary version of the spiritual rapture also praised in the Neo-Platonism tradition. On the other hand, the play includes a strongly bawdy element of bestial love adopted from the episode of a Corinthian matron of *The Golden Ass*. I wish to show that spiritual things are challenged by fleshly ones. In order to explore 'a particular effect' produced by Bottom's allusion, I will make a detailed analysis of the text with the help of religious studies on Paul's doctrine, in order to show that Bottom's euphoria of love must be understood physically as well as spiritually.

In *The Praise of Folie, 'youngelinges* [little ones],' and '*fooles*' are equally blessed by God (117). Bottom, as a 'fool' in many respects, is apparently a

recipient of heavenly felicity. All of Titania's four male attendants are very 'little,' so they all appear to be heavenly blessed, but in fact they are earthly, and associated with fertility, since two of them such as Mustardseed and Peaseblossom are seed-bearing plants and all of them are males. Interestingly, in contrast to the four males in the play, all four attendants of the Corinthian matron of Apuleius's are eunuchs. I wish to show that the 'effect' of the allusions to Paul, Erasmus, and Apuleius results in the play's positive view of the body. I will argue that Bottom's 'most rare vision' (4.1.202) is not virtual or 'an object of mental contemplation' (*OED*, vision, 1.c), but visual, real and 'an object of sight' (*OED*, 5).

1. Allusion to Paul

A Midsummer Night's Dream obviously alludes to 1 Cor.1. Just as 1 Cor.1:27 says: 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise,' so Puck chooses to anoint Bottom, seeing him as '[t]he shallowest thickskin of that barren sort' (3.2.13-14). The foolish Bottom's distorted echo of the sacred words of 1 Cor.2:9 applies to 'the foolishness of preaching': 1 Cor.1.21 says 'in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' Similarly, 1 Cor.1:22 says the Greeks seek after wisdom,' so the Greek audience such as Theseus persist in claiming 'a good conscience' (5.1.225), 'reason' (249), and 'discretion' (229, 31, 32, 34, 48). These apparently wise people, however, may be slightly mocked. Paul explicitly opposes the foolish against the wise.

Why does Bottom use Paul's Corinthians for such a dramatic soliloquy about his unforgettable night with Titania, 'Fairy Queen' (2.1.8)?[4] To find an answer, we must pay particular attention to Paul, and 1 and 2 Corinthians. Bottom alludes to 2 Cor. 12:1-6, which is followed directly by 1 Cor.2:9-10, which we will later confirm. 'The Homily for Rogation Week' in *The Two Books of Homilies* finishes with two quotations from Paul, one of which is 1 Cor. 2:9-10, and is about the 'everlasting felicity' of the afterlife: 'In this world ye see that we be fain to borrow many things. . . . But in the world to come, in that everlasting felicity, we shall no more beg and seek our particular comforts . . .' (492-93).[5] Thus, the lines in 1 Cor. 2:9-10 are adapted to give

intimations of the eventual destiny of human souls. In the same *Homilies*, Paul's epistles are focused upon in 'A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind' (24-35), whose marginal notes show that there are seven quotations from the Romans, four from Galatians, two from Ephesians, one from each of Philippians, the Hebrews, Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus, whereas there are seven quotations altogether from other Gospel writers. Judging from the figures above, the Church of England's doctrine of salvation relies heavily on Paul, whose teachings are estimated particularly highly in relation to matters such as the status of the soul after death.

Why is Paul so prominent in this area of theological debate? According to the religious scholar John Bowker, 'the basic New Testament theme . . . [is] salvation through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ . . .' (96). In fact, in the Old Testament 'there is nothing offered by way of promise or compensation to the individual, that he or she will enjoy a happy life with God after death' (Bowker 50). Therefore Paul bridges the gap between the two Testaments through the promise of immortality,[6] to which 'A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind' testifies.

This makes clearer the unique status of Corinthians. The religious scholar Migaku Sato regards an intense focus on the cross as Paul's unique contribution to Christian tradition. Sato writes that the word for the cross, 'stauro,' had previously been avoided as much as possible, because crucifixion was a means of execution for those regarded as traitors to the Roman Empire, and that it was Paul that was not afraid to focus on such a negatively charged image (25-26):

> [Paul's unique theology of the cross] became manifest in 1 Corinthians, which was written with the main purpose of arguing against pneumatic enthusiasts at the Corinthian church. (Sato 26, my translation)

This state of ecstasy is related to Gnosticism in the church, whose followers believed that esoteric knowledge (gnosis) enables humans to grasp Christian truth. Rudolf Bultmann writes of 'the concept of *pneuma*:

> *[I]t is the miraculous—insofar as that takes place in the sphere of human life—either in what men do or in what is done to them. To the pneuma are attributed miracles and extraordinary psychic phenomena* . . . such are

> regarded as 'pneumatic' (spiritual) not because they are phenomena of the inner or ethical life but because they are miraculous. . . . Such phenomena are called 'spiritual (gifts)' or 'gifts.' (154)

One of these 'spiritual (gifts)' 'is the gift . . . of tongues,' which is '[e]specially sought after by the Corinthian church' and 'also highly regarded by Paul' (Bultmann 154). These verses below are from the Geneva Bible. The whole section of 1 Cor.14 is almost all about 'the gift . . . of tongues': '[C]ouet spirituall giftes' (1); 'hee that speaketh a strange tongue, speaketh not vnto men, but vnto God: for no man heareth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh secret things' (2); 'I would that ye all spake strange languages' (5). Paul wishes all the congregation to speak 'secret things' 'in the spirit.'

This is from 2 Corinthians 12:1-6:

> 1: It is not expedient for me to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.
> 2: **I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago**, (whether in the body, I can tell; whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;). . . .
> 3: **And I knew such a man**, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)
> 4: How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.
> 5: Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.
> 6: For though I would desire to glory, I shall *not be a fool*. . . . (underlines, bold letters, and italics are mine)

Verse 4 says that Paul 'was caught up into paradise.' So this passage is related to heaven, just as 1 Cor. 2:9-10 is about 'the world to come.' '[A] man in Christ' (verse 2) may refer to a spiritually new-born Christian through 'the miracle of rebirth,' which as Käsemann comments, 'can turn the fleshly man into the pneumatic' (2). For Paul, it is no wonder that this transformation is worthy of 'glory' ('reioyce' in the Geneva Bible), a term which he uses four times, as is underlined above. In this miraculous context, the description 'whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth' is

definitely about ‘extraordinary psychic phenomena’ attributed ‘[t]o the pneuma.’ The true believer is experiencing himself ‘out of the body,’ and to borrow Käsemann’s phrases (3), ‘in ecstasies,’ especially, since he sees ‘visions and revelations of the Lord.’ In the idiom of his Romans 7:14, Paul manages to escape from being ‘carnall, solde vnder sinne’ and be gloriously/ rejoicingly elevated into the ‘spirituall.’ Later, we will find these traditional ‘ecstatic expressions’ (Käsemann 130) in *The Praise of Folie*, in which the genuinely devout are ‘in ecstasies’ and do not know ‘whether thei were than in theyr bodies, or out of theyr bodies’ (128).

In brief, 2 Corinthians 12:1-6 should be about the experience of Paul’s ‘translation’ into heaven. The verb ‘translate’ means ‘to carry or convey to heaven without death’ (*OED*, 1.b). In fact, Bottom is ‘translated’ (3.1.113, 3.2.32) and ‘come[s] to visions.’ Since what he sees is ‘past the wit of man,’ Bottom’s ‘most rare vision’ will concern not human but rather heavenly matters. In fact, on the basis of the term ‘translated,’ Helen Hackett concludes that Bottom’s love is heavenly, and not physical (lvi). The pious Enoch in the Old Testament was similarly ‘translated’ (Hebrews 11:5).

Yet is Bottom’s experience really heavenly? We need to compare 2 Corinthians 12:1-6 to his soliloquy:

> I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what. . . .
> **Methought I was——there is no man can tell what.**
> **Methought I was, and methought I had——**but man *is but a patched fool* if he will offer to say what methought I had. *The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was*. (4.1.202-10, bold letters and italics are mine)

Hassel notes ‘the close verbal and structural parallels’ in these lines to Paul’s (54). First, both refer to ‘vision,’ repeating the same phrase twice, as is indicated in bold letters in each case, and then hesitate. The two horizontal lines in incomplete sentences are a substitute for words which remain unspoken. Bottom is uncertain what to say. In Paul’s case, this moment of indecision is expressed by the phrase ‘whether in the body or out of the body’

(verses 2, 3). Judgement on whether he is a fool or not is shown in the main clause, after each subordinate clause of ‘if’ and ‘though’ (which means even if, Paul’s verse 6). There are striking similarities. The word ‘translated’ used for Bottom’s transformation also reinforces his association with heavenly felicity, as Hackett points out. Both Bottom and Paul return to earth without undergoing death. The play may allude to Paul’s ‘translation’ in a paradoxical way, as Bottom’s version of heaven may be an earthly paradise like Eden. He will continue to represent ‘the fleshly man’ in stark contrast to Paul’s becoming ‘the pneumatic.’ The famous allusion to 1 Cor. 2:9 (italicized, above) comes immediately after 2 Cor. 12.1-6.

2. Allusion to *The Praise of Folie*

Thomas Nashe’s *Svmmers Last Will and Testament* of 1592 says: ‘The praise of nothing pleads his worthinesse:/ Follie Erasmus sets a flourish on’ (p. 278, ll. 1410-1). *The Praise of Folie* still had considerable influence on literature until the late sixteenth century. Erasmus is both a versatile literary intellectual and academic theologian of the first rank. Martin Luther translated the New Testament into German ‘from the Greek, for which the labors of Erasmus gave the basis . . .’ (Walker 432). Erasmus praises particularly highly ‘Paul, vpon whose writing we maie gesse mynde the other apostles had therin’ (81). *The Praise of Folie* refers to the exact same verses from 1 Cor. 2:9-10 and 2 Cor.12: 2, 3, as Bottom does.

Folie disparages ‘the Senses’ (123), saying that ‘some grosser in substance, as *fealyng*, *hearyng*, *seeyng*, *smellyng*, *and tastyng*,’ and ‘some againe more seuered and remoued from the body, as is *memorie*, *vnderstandyng*, *and freewill*,’ are ultimately ‘of the same’ (123-4). This denigration of ‘the Senses’ including mental faculties may come earlier because Folie is making preparations for alluding to 1 Cor. 9 (which relates to ‘eye,’ ‘ear,’ and ‘heart’) at the conclusion of the book. On the other hand, ‘the soule of man . . . [is] aliened from the grosser senses . . . as if they were benummed [sic] or brute [senseless] of iudgement, as domme beastes are’ (124). So ‘the Senses’ of spiritual men are paralyzed, and they lack intellectual judgment, as dumb ‘beasts’ do. In short, the Christians ‘as are totally rauisshed, and enflamed with the ardent zeale of Christian charitee’ are the most ‘ideotelike,’ and they live ‘*as*

if their soules dwelled not in those bodies thei beare about with theim . . .' (120). So ardent Christians lose their senses, as if '*out in those bodies*,' and are like fools. They are turned 'into the pneumatic,' as it were.

Then, Folie alludes to 1 Cor. 2:9-10 (127-28), and refers to the 'ecstatic expressions' which such zealous Christians show:

> Who so euer thererfore haue suche grace (whiche sure is geuin to few) by theyr life tyme to tast of this saied felicitee, they are subjecte to a certaine passion muche lyke vnto madness . . . thei doo speake certaine thynges not hangyng one with an other . . . [and] dooe put foorth a voyce they wote neuer what. . . . (128)

And then Folie quotes from 2 Cor. 2, 3:

> . . . thei denie plainly thei wote where thei became, or whether thei were than in theyr bodies, or out of theyr bodies. . . . (128)[7]

The sophisticated theologian Erasmus fully comprehends Paul's reference to gnostic ecstasy or 'extraordinary psychic phenomena' originally attributed to 'the *pneuma*,' expressed in 'whether in the Body' which Bottom just mimics by uttering 'The eye of man hath not heard' aloud. Thus, Erasmus's expression appears invested richly with religious flavour. But, we have to examine further what kind of 'ecstasy' he actually relishes.

As another example of the emergence of spirituality, Folie refers to Plato's love theory that 'a vehement louer liueth not now in hym selfe . . . the minde seketh to wander from the body, nor occupieth the powers of the same [the body] in the due vse . . . he is *out of him selfe*' (126). The 'vehement louer' Bottom who loses 'the due vse' of his bodily senses looks as if he had loved Titania while out of the body. His love appears to be platonic. Neo-Platonism in the Renaissance also disparagingly contrasts 'a "beastly, vulgare, and voluptuous loue" with a "celestiall loue"' (Yates 115).[8]

The episode of the Corinthian matron in *The Golden Ass* deals with the former while the love between Cupid and Psyche eventually is sublimated into the latter. Since Cupid is a god, Psyche is brought up 'into the palace of heaven, to be 'immortal' there, and Cupid becomes her 'everlasting husband'

(283). Since Titania is ‘Fairy Queen’ (2.1.8), is Bottom’s love also ‘celestiall’ and platonic? Erasmus’s true argument is about the reception of ‘a ghostly transformacion’ and the ravishment by ‘the hieghest sprite of all’ (127), which, however, is predicated on the negation of the corporeal and human senses. Since he appropriates Erasmus’s argument, so Bottom’s inconsistency can create an affirmation through a kind of double negation. Apparent confusion of the senses and mockery of spiritual ecstasy in turn may produce a positive evaluation of the body.

3. Allusion to *The Golden Ass*

Bottom and Lucius follow a similar trajectory in some ways. Bottom the ass woos any female as a ‘cuckoo’ with full lust, which we will see in the next chapter, and ends up citing the Bible. Lucius, who ‘esteem[s] the pleasure’ of the night with his lover Fotis ‘above all the joys of the world,’ is transformed into ass, and finally ‘come[s] to this present felicity of religion’ (563).

In both Apuleius and Shakespeare, ‘a little western flower’ (2.1.166) plays a significant role. In Apuleius, ‘a rose’ has a magic power to release Lucius from the shape of an ass, and ‘roses’ are frequently referred to. On the other hand, Oberon uses ‘a little western flower’ to make Titania love an ass and also to confuse the objects of love of Lysander and Demetrius. As Holland points out (71), there are many references to ‘rose’ in the play (1.1.76, 2.1.108, 2.1.252, 2.2.3, 4.1.3).

Unmistakably, the famous episode of Psyche influences the play. Venus, who desires vengeance because of hearing a rumor about Psyche’s incomparable beauty, curses her rival with ‘desperate love with the most miserable creature living . . . the most vile’ (191). Oberon also, who desires to take revenge on Titania because of ‘a little changeling boy’ (2.1.120), curses her with desperate love for ‘some vile thing’ (2.2.40). She is to be made ‘full of hateful fantasies’ (2.1.257-58), as he wishes her to love a beast, ‘Be it on lion, bear, wolf or bull,/ On meddling monkey, or on busy ape’ (2.1.180-81), or whether it be ‘ounce, or cat, or bear,/ Pard, or boar with bristled hair’ (2.2.36-37).

Titania is overwhelmed by what Venus calls ‘desperate love with the most miserable creature living . . . the most vile.’ Both Psyche’s sufferings

and Titania's love for 'some vile thing' are the consequences of envy, that is, Venus's and Oberon's. The play has clear similarity to Psyche's episode. Yet, can the passion of Titania and Bottom be physical?

Kenneth Muir argues that the episode of the Corinthian matron who 'consummates her love with' the ass is 'a more likely source of Bottom's transformation, in view of Titania's infatuation' (68). Titania is destined to love beasts under a curse by Oberon. And yet, to not only Titania, but also to Bottom, bestial love may be a 'servile [*OED*, 3.c, 'ignoble'] and dangerous pleasure' but therefore all the more delightful for its raw sensuality rather than the 'secret and filthy love of the poisonous serpent' (*The Golden Ass* 227), as the love of Cupid and Psyche is exceptional for its lyrical purity. Titania and Bottom were serious and they loved each other without being ashamed of their love. On waking, Bottom recalls his romance with the Queen of the Fairies, and seems to realize for the first time that he was an ass, and that he was loved as a beast, a scene which obviously invites comparison with that erotic episode of Corinthian matron (507-11). Lucius preserves human consciousness after transformation (137 and passim).

Titania orders her attendants to 'have my love to bed, and arise' (3.1.162). *The Oxford* and *RCS* editions both note that 'arise' suggests 'erection.' Also, between the next two orders by Titania to 'lead him' (3.1.190) and 'bring him' to bed (191), there are references to 'The moon,' 'some enforced chastity,' and an order to 'Tie up my love's tongue.' 'The moon' can be very dangerous, since it is identified with 'Hecate' (*OED*, Hecate, 1.b), who is identified with 'Persephone the goddess of the infernal regions, and hence c. regarded as presiding over witchcraft and magical rites' (*OED*, Hecate, 1.b, c). The fairies in the play are 'run/ By the triple Hecate's team' (5.1.374-75). Louis Zufoksky notes: 'Enforced means here *compelled*, *involuntary*, and not *violated* as the glossary profanes' (85). To 'Tie up' Bottom's tongue is not just in order to 'stop him braying,' as *The Oxford* and other editions note. The topic of 'chastity' lies between the two orders, so it is reasonable to infer that this 'enforced chastity' concerns his 'compelled' erotic experience.

Both women wield considerable power. Titania is 'Fairy Queen' while the Corinthian woman is 'a noble and rich matron' (507). As T. Starnes points out (1030-32), Titania holds Bottom as if to 'wind,' 'entwist' and 'enring' (4.1.39, 42, 43). She identifies herself with 'the woodbine' (4.1.41) and 'the female

ivy' (4.1.42). Woodbine has previously been called 'luscious' (2.1.251). The Corinthian matron 'embraced my [Lucius's] body round about' (507-11). Both express their infatuation by verbs such as 'love' (and 'dote on'), and 'hold' in a simple sentence and repeat them twice: 'O how I love thee, how I dote on thee!' (Titania 4.1.44) while 'I hold thee my cony, I hold thee my hops, my sparrow' (Corinthian matron 511).

Titania's attendants who bring the ass to bed are four men, who are 'Master Cobweb' (3.1.174), 'Master Peaseblossom' (3.1.178-79), 'Master Mustardseed' (3.1.182), and 'Mote.' 'Mote' is not spoken to by Bottom, because Titania impatiently interrupts Bottom's greetings to each of her four attendants with, 'Come, wait upon him, lead him to my bower' (3.1.187). As soon as Bottom expresses his desire to 'sleep,' Titania reacts with, 'Sleep thou,' and in no time she commands, 'Fairies, be gone, be always away' (4.1.40). On the other hand, the Corinthian matron's attendants are 'four eunuchs who laid a bed' (509) for the sake of her and the ass. 'Then the eunuchs, not minding to delay any longer the pleasure of their mistress, closed the doors of the chamber and departed away' (509). Moreover, Lucius refers to 'Minotaurus' (511), a myth in which Ariadne gives Theseus a ball of thread, which leads him to the exit of the Minotaurus's labyrinth. In fact, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has one sentence which plainly narrates the proceedings of their relationship: Titania 'make[s] him [Theseus] . . . break his faith,/ With Ariadne . . .' (2.1.79-80). Kott says *The Golden Ass* was well known, discussed and quoted during the Renaissance (32), so it is far from improbable that the audience recognized the reference to Apuleius.

The Corinthian matron 'had her pleasure with me, whereby I thought that the mother of Minotaurus did not causeless quench her inordinate desire with a bull.' Within less than three pages, Lucius recalls the relationship of Pasiphae and the bull twice. If we notice the allusion, we can discern a pattern of relationships with abnormal desires: Titania and Bottom, the Corinthian matron and Lucius the ass, and Pasiphae and 'a bull.' The play, in fact, conceals a threefold extraordinary kind of sexual passion.

4. Bottom in Act 3.1 and Titania's world

Harold Bloom writes that 'Bottom is amiably innocent, and not bawdy,'[9] but his staying 'innocent,' however, is only while he is in a state of 'love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity' (5.1.104). Apart from that, he is always presumptuous and unabashed. While even 'great clerks' are said to 'shiver and look pale' before Theseus (5.1.93-99), Bottom does not hesitate to interrupt, and denies Theseus flatly with, 'No' (5.1.182). No sooner had Quince announced that they were going to perform Pyramus's play than Bottom asserted, 'A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry' (2.1.13-14). Then, almost immediately, he asks Quince, 'What is Pyramus?' (2.1.19). Erasmus's *Adages* in 'An ass to the lyre' says: 'It is natural to the donkey to twitch its ears as if to convey that it has understood, when it has not even heard' (344-45).

Different from Lucius, during transformation Bottom does not realize that he has an ass-head (3.1.109-10). Even after Quince cries out 'O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. . . . Help' (99-100), Bottom cannot take it seriously: 'I see their knavery. This is to make an ass of me, to fright me, if they could' (114-15). If he had become aware of his altered appearance at this moment already, he would presumably have been struck dumb by horror, and later on waking there would be no epiphany of 'Bottom's dream.'

Bottom begins to woo the instant he 'is translated.' He identifies with a 'throstle,' and calls '[t]he wren,' '[t]he finch, the sparrow, and the lark' (3.1.120-26). In addition, he adopts the tactic of the 'cuckoo' of which 'a bird [is] well known by the call of the male during mating time' (*OED*, cuckoo, *n*.1.a). That is, Bottom as a 'cuckoo' is crying out promiscuously to the female birds, which he has previously listed. They are all small birds. *OED* observes: 'it does not hatch its own offspring, but deposits eggs in the nests of small birds' (cuckoo, *n*.1.a). The 'cuckoo' shrewdly 'deposits his eggs in the nests of small birds' of different kind. *OED* (cuckoo, *n*.1.a) adds, 'the call of the male during mating time, of which the name is an imitation. *Cuckoo's note (fig.)*.' Titania is awakened by Bottom's 'cuckoo's note,' the expression of his procreative desire.

BOTTOM. Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry '*Cuckoo*' never

so?

TITANIA. My ear is much enamoured of thy note; (128-31, underline added)

Titania's nest (womb) is desired. Like the cuckoo, Bottom desperately desires to deposit his eggs in any nest.

As Bottom himself confirms, saying 'Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry "*Cuckoo*" never so?' the 'cuckoo' has another troublesome association with cuckold. *Love's Labour's Lost* repeatedly declares: '"Cuckoo,/ Cuckoo, cuckoo." O word of fear, O word of fear,/ Unpleasing to a married ear' (5.2.897-99, 906-08). However, Oberon who has cast the spell on Titania to begin with, appears to take 'more delight' (*The Golden Ass* 227) in his own status as cuckold, as that he voyeuristically enjoys watching her make love with an ass.

On Bottom's love song, Moore comments in 1916: 'At times the dramatist uses the song in by-play to secure the most humorous scenes, amusing not for buffoonery but for revelation of human nature . . .' (qtd. in Seng 33). This reminds us of the scene in which Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* reveals his desires before the audience ('her very C's, her U's, and her T's, and thus makes she her great P's,' 2.5.66-67). Malvolio's wearing yellow garters is a form of mating ritual similar to the display of male birds. When they reveal 'human nature,' Malvolio pretends to be 'Count' (32) while Bottom pretends to be a 'Cuckoo.' To borrow Folie's words, both of them flamboyantly 'praise hir [Folie/ folly's] selfe,' with 'hir [Folie/ folly's] own trumpet' (8). (*OED*, 'folly, n^1: 3. a. lewdness, wantonness. Cf. Fr. *Folie*; 3. b. a lewd action or desire').

The ass Bottom says: 'to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays' (3.1.136-37). He loses reason when he enters into a state of 'love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity' (5.1.104). In marked contrast with Neo-Platonist love looking upwards spiritually, Bottom's love moves downwards to the flesh. That 'tongue-tied simplicity' in Act 5 may suggest not only the learned but also the ass-headed simple Bottom in 'love' whose tongue is physically and literally tied up by Titania's order, 'Tie up my love's tongue' (3.1.191).

Erasmus regards '*youngelinges*' such as foolish and weak people as blessed, and quotes from 1 Cor. 1:19, which Paul originally quoted from

Isaiah 29:14: '*I shall confounde the wisedome of wisemen, and reproue the prudence of Sages*' (Erasmus 117). As we have seen previously, Paul's theology highlights the opposition of folly and wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:20 says: 'hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' Similarly, 1:27 says: 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.'[10] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* borrows this idea from Paul and Erasmus. The 'wise' and 'mighty' Theseus chases one lover after another (2.1.77-80). He captures Hippolyta in a disgraceful manner (1.1.16-17). His frequent interruptions to Pyramus's play such as 'a good conscience' and 'discretion' only serve to reveal his shallowness and sound rather ridiculous, as we have seen. In contrast, the foolish Bottom is privileged to earn the precious love of 'a most rare vision,' which is worth boasting of to the audience. Folie says:

> [God] '*had hidden the misterie of saluacion from wisemen, and disclosed the same to youngelinges*, (That is to saie) *to fooles*, (For so the Greke woorde signifieth.) (117)

The word '*youngelinges*' means '*fooles*' and 'little children' (Glossary in *The Praise of Folie*).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* also equates the little and fools, with recipients of bliss. Titania's attendants 'Mustardseed' and 'Mote' (3.1.153) are referred to as minute creatures in the Bible (respectively, Matthew 13:31-32; Matthew 7:3-5). All four attendants (3.1.153) are addressed as 'elves' (3.1.165), as are all other followers of Titania: 'Our queen and all her elves come here anon' (2.1.17). The fairies of Oberon and Titania are called 'all their elves' who 'for fear/ Creep into acorn cups . . .' (2.1.30-31). The word 'elf' most certainly means 'a diminutive being' (*OED*, elf, 3.a).

The play is preoccupied with littleness, as Miner Latham points out:

> Before 1594 and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as far as can be ascertained, there is no record of any diminutive fairies or elves in the 16th century in England. . . . the fairies before 1594 and throughout the period, with the exception of the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and of

> those fairies who are literary descendants of Moth and Mustardseed, are pictured as possessing the statures of boys and maidens, or those of full-grown men and women. (188)

The 'diminutive fairies' in the play may plausibly be derived from the idea of the heavenly blessed '*youngelinges*' originating from Paul and Erasmus. In this play, however, they are concerned with the happiness of this world as attendants of their mistress Titania, who is rampantly lustful while under 'this charm' of 'love in idleness' (2.1.183, 168). Oberon gloats that whatever beast comes 'She [Titania] shall pursue it with the soul of love' (2.1.182).

Asses are definitely '*fooles*' and therefore associated with the '*youngelinges*.' No wonder that Folie names an ass as one of the recipients of heavenly felicity (117). In the play, Bottom when so transformed becomes Titania's lover, and receives her carnal attention with great happiness. We will later see how he goes into ecstasy over this love.

'Seed' has another significant meaning, besides its littleness. The word has the sense of 'semen' (*OED*, seed, 4). Male attendants such as 'Mustardseed' and 'Peaseblossom' (*OED*, pease, B; 'the earlier form of pea'; pea, 1, 'The seed') bring Bottom to bed in a kind of fertility rite. Similar references occur in Master Peascod (3.1.178) and Mistress Squash (3.1.177). *OED* says in squash, *n*.[1]1.1.a: 'the unripe pod of a pea, also applied contemptuously to persons.' His wife is 'unripe' and despised by being called 'Squash,' maybe because she has no 'seed.' Bottom loves eating 'oats' (*OED*, oat, 1.a.b, a grain; grain, 1.a, a seed) and 'peas' (4.1.32, 36). When Puck is disguised as a young female horse ('a filly foal'), he/she beguiles 'a fat and bean-fed [male] horse,' which will take a courtship role (2.1.45-46). A fat horse fed by 'bean[s]' seems sexually energetic (*OED*, bean, I. 1, a seed). Thisbe persists in referring twice to her lover Pyramus as a 'truest horse that yet would never tire' (3.1.90, 96), which/who is clearly endowed with extraordinary sexual ability.

Jesus in Matthew's gospel says of 'a grain of mustard seed' that 'indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof' (13:31-32). Genesis states, 'Be fruitsul, and multiply, and replenish the earth' (1:28). The bird facilitates fertile multiplication. Birds eat its fruits and so help to germinate and disseminate its seeds. The offspring of Mustardseed

prosper on earth. The play enhances Lucius's world of beastly love, adding the theme of fertility by changing 'eunuchs' of *The Golden Ass* to males endowed with seeds, and celebrating the recipients of earthly felicity.

5. The Ballad 'Bottom's Dream'

On awaking, Bottom prophesizes that he will sing a ballad titled 'Bottom's Dream.' Stephen Greenblatt (119) and Bloom ('Introduction' 1) say this never comes true. *The Oxford* edition says he 'becomes so quickly unconcerned to find himself loved by the queen of the fairies' (81). However, at the end of Pyramus's play, he is still capable of recalling the night of love with 'the Fairy Queen.'

The next two sentences are in the last part of his soliloquy, announcing his intention of singing. The first sentence is: 'I will sing *it in* the latter end of a play, before the Duke,' and the second sentence is: 'Peradventure, to make *it* the more gracious, I shall sing *it* at *her* death' (4.1.212-15, emphasis added). The italicized three usages of 'it' refer to the ballad 'Bottom's Dream.' Why does 'sing[ing] it at her death make the ballad 'the more gracious'? (*OED*, gracious, 1, 'winning favour'). Why is it 'a play,' and not the play? Why does the first sentence use 'in,' though the second one uses 'at'? Does 'her' in the second sentence mean only Thisbe? What is the true nature and reality of 'Bottom's Dream'? Is the ballad sung 'before the Duke'?

The conclusion is that the ballad 'die, die, die, die, die' (5.1.300, *OED* 7.d, sexual orgasm) has been sung 'before the Duke,' 'at her death.' '[A] play' in the first sentence suggests his enjoyment with her. '[I]t' in 'it in the latter end' means his sexual 'ecstasy' 'in' (whose preposition expresses a period of time) 'the concluding part (of a period)' (*OED*, end, *n*. 7.b; latter, *adj*. 3.b, 'latter end'). In order to make the ballad 'the more gracious,' Bottom says he will sing it 'at her death,' which means at the place, time, or scene of Titania's orgasm, which coincides with his own. In short, the content of 'it' or 'Bottom's Dream' is about his sexual 'ecstasy,' which is nuanced in what is left unsaid in his incomplete sentences a few lines earlier in his soliloquy.

Then, what does Bottom leave unsaid in the two incomplete sentences, 'Methought I was—' and 'Methought I had—'? Does he mean 'Methought I was' an ass, and 'Methought I had' 'large ears' (4.1.4)? Indeed, on waking

he may perceive that he was an ass. Or, he may realize that he had already been 'ass-headed' during that particular night even though he was previously unaware of his condition. In *The Golden Ass*, Lucius the ass is conscious of being loved as a beast, as we have seen, and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, characters who are transformed almost always remember their previous identities (and also if they are fortunate enough to be changed back)[11]; so any member of Shakespeare's original audience viewing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in that context would expect Bottom to have some recollection of having been as ass. Most of the modern stage productions deal with Bottom's 'vision' as 'an object of sight' (*OED*, vision, 5), because actors tend to shape an ass's 'large ears' (4.1.4) with their hands around his head. 'In Reinhardt's outdoor production in Oxford in 1933,' for example, 'the passage ['Methought I was'] began with a nervous groping, to see if the long snout and the long ears were still there' (*The Oxford*, n. 2.2.205). So we could add an 'ass' to his first incomplete sentence, and 'large ears' to the second. Indeed, the experience of being an ass may be 'a most rare vision,' or exceptionally 'uncommon' (*OED*, rare, 5 a), but, in Reinhardt's production on waking 'Cagney's Bottom, terrified by his memories, checked his reflection in a pond' (*The Oxford* 'Introduction' 72).

The point is not the terrifying memory of having been as an ass, but Bottom's fascinating experience of love, a special amour with 'the fairest dame/That [ever] lived, that loved [him], that liked [him]' (5.1.287-88). To begin with, something 'rare' must have something to do with some 'uncommon excellence' (*OED*, rare, 6 a). Quince's comment on Bottom just after his soliloquy must not be ignored: 'he is a very paramour for a sweet voice' (4.2.11-12). His comment is reliable, because he witnesses Bottom's ass-head and is asked to write the ballad 'Bottom's Dream.' The word 'sweet' means 'pleasing to the ear' (*OED*, 4.a), and also means 'alluring, enticing' (5.c, 'Of song . . . in bad sense, alluring, enticing'). In fact, Bottom's love song as a 'cuckoo' is passionately 'alluring' and 'enticing,' and Titania regards it as such: 'My ear is much enamoured of thy note' (3.1.131). Moreover, it is highly likely that Shakespeare enjoys having the word 'sweet' in the blank, since the term was frequently used to associate him with Ovid, and Quince's Pyramus's play originates precisely from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. 'His [Shakespeare's] contemporaries . . . [praised] his distinctive qualities with such epithets as

“sweet”, “honie-tong’d” . . . “mellifluous”. These were the terms in which Elizabethans also praised Ovid’ (Bate 20-21). Shakespeare’s contemporaries refer to him as ‘sweet’ even after his death. Ben John calls Shakespeare ‘Sweet Swan of Avon!’ in a memorial poem in the First Folio of 1623. In *L’Allegro* of 1632, John Milton calls him ‘Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy child’ (*OED*, fancy A, 4.a).

These blanks may be filled in, for example, with ‘a very paramour,’ and ‘a sweet voice.’ Or, the second sentence can plainly be complemented by ‘her.’

Methought I was ‘a very paramour’.
Methought I had ‘a sweet voice.’ Or, Methought I had ‘her.’

So Bottom had her! (*OED*, have, 14. e: ‘To have sexual intercourse with’). ‘This palpable-gross play’ mentioned by Theseus (5.1.358) means not only the drama of Pyramus and Thisbe, but also an erotic ‘play’ (4.1.213) between Bottom and Titania.

Bottom asserts that the ballad ‘shall be called “Bottom’s Dream”, because it hath no bottom . . .’ (4.1.211-12), alluding to 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. The tenth verse of *The Bible Authorized King James Version* (1611) says: ‘the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.’ These were ‘the bottom of God’s secret’ in the Geneva Bible, with which Shakespeare was familiar. Kott (31) and Thomas Stroup (80) even assert the name Bottom derives from this verse. Bottom alludes to 1 Cor. 2:9 and soon after one sentence (‘I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream’) he still continues to quote ‘bottom’ from the verse 2:10. He asserts ‘Bottom’s Dream’ to have ‘no bottom,’ and claims that it lacks ‘the bottom of God’s secret,’ which is the supremacy of ‘the Spirit’ or spirituality. This is because his love remains bodily, and even beastly.

In 3.1.17-20, Bottom testifies, ‘Pyramus is not killed indeed . . . I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver.’ As Bottom particularly emphasizes, it is not the protagonist of Pyramus’s play that calls ‘die, die, die, die, die,’ but it is ‘Bottom the weaver’ that cries these words out. We will pursue the question of Bottom’s amorous rapture in Pyramus’s play.

Bottom/Pyramus has already confused his senses in 5.1.191 (‘I see a voice’). And then, the phrase below ‘deflowered my dear’ inserted by the playwright Quince increases his confusion, because it inevitably makes him

remember his ‘deflowered . . . dear’ mistress of last night:

> Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear?—
> Which *is*—no, no, which *was*—the fairest dame
> That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer. (5.1.284-88)

Holland claims that Bottom soon forgets being loved, which is simply untrue. Bottom is unknowingly beginning to say that ‘my dame’ ‘is’ ‘the fairest dame,’ and then remembers that Thisbe is supposed to have died, and he hastily replaces ‘is’ with ‘was.’ But his thought is returning to Titania, picturing how she ‘loved [him],’ liked [him],’ and ‘looked with cheer.’ This ‘cheer’ may mean ‘the face’ (*OED*, n.1) which because of her love for him may be pale in the cheer. It is ‘pale of cheer/ With sighs of love that costs the fresh dear’ (3.2.96-97). He has been madly loved by ‘the fairest dame,’ whose infatuation for him intensifies his own passion for her. Similarly Bottom says, ‘Tongue, lose thy light’ and cries, ‘die, die, die, die, die.’ This heightened state of exaltation is still apparent at the close of Pyramus’s play. Bottom says: ‘Will it please you to *see the epilogue* or to *hear a* bergamask *dance* . . .’ (5.1.345-46, emphasis added). Theseus observes that ‘Lovers and madmen have such seething brains’ so that they inevitably become ‘frantic’ (5.1.4, 10). Clearly, Bottom’s brains are ‘seething.’ As we have seen, in Plato’s love theory, ‘a louers hert is distraught from him selfe,’ seeking to wander from the body, and does not occupy the powers of the body in its due use (Erasmus 126). Love renders his physical senses confusing and causes Bottom to ‘speake certaine thynges not hangyng one with an other’ (ibid., 128).

Muir argues (70) that the unit of six lines including this repetition of ‘die’ (295-300) ‘uses the stanza form of Thomson’s sonnet in Robinson’s *A Handfull of Pleasant Delites* (1584).’ The Following is Thomson’s:

> These Lovers twaine, who with such paine,
> die die so well content. (qtd. in Bullough 409-11)

OED v.[1] 7.d. says: to ‘die’ is ‘to experience a sexual orgasm. (Most common as a poetical metaphor in the late 16th and 17th cent.).’ In line with poetical convention, Thomson’s sonnet ends by expressing the lovers’s ‘content’ in this

overtly erotic sense.

Quince has witnessed Bottom's ass-head, understood miraculous things 'past the wit of man' had happened to him, and accepted his request to write the ballad. He also comes to know that Bottom is a 'paramour.' The playwright Quince has finished Pyramus's play with rhymed couplet, 'light' and 'flight.' And then, the poetaster Quince adds to the play the ballad with five 'die[s],' in contrast to the poet Thomson's sonnet with two, which Bottom sings with a cry of 'Now.'[12] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is said to 'stylistically' fit with 'especially *Romeo and Juliet*' (*The Oxford* edition 110; *RSC* 1678), whose story is similar to Pyramus's play. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not Romeo but Juliet who tells of her death with a poetical metaphor of 'die': 'O, happy dagger,/ This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die' (5.3.169-70).

Titania testifies 'What visions have I *seen*!/ I was enamoured of an ass' (4.1.75-76, emphasis added). She remembers loving an ass and seeing 'his visage' (4.1.78), when she wakes up. Apart from the question whether Bottom finally realizes that he was an ass, one mutual fact common to each of the two is that she loved him that night and he has 'had a most rare vision' of that night's event, and knows that 'the fairest dame . . . lived' (5.1.287-88). Bottom vividly pictures 'the fairest dame . . . that loved, that liked, that looked with [pale] cheer' (5.1.287-88). He brings her 'fairest' 'look[s]' to mind. If he should have another chance to see her later, he would never fail to recognize his lover's face. His 'most rare vision' (4.1.202) is not virtual or 'an object of mental contemplation' (*OED*, vision, 1.c), but visual, real and 'an object of sight' (*OED*, 5). To begin with, if people share the same experience 'together' (5.1.24), it should be in some relation to the material world. There should be some solid reality in that event, which should surely be called 'something of great constancy' (5.1.26), in which Hippolyta comes to believe when she sees that 'all their [four lovers'] minds [were] transfigured so together' (5.1.24).

Titania's infatuation with Bottom is only passing, whereas for Bottom memory of the 'vision' that 'the fairest dame' doted on him remains 'most rare.' He feels great happiness as a result of the experience of the madness of love, 'the eye of man hath not heard,' which he says in his famous soliloquy. As a carnal man 'in the body' with pretension of being 'out of the body,' he is glorying in love, in preference to spiritual ecstasy, which occurs in a supposedly higher realm inaccessible to the corporeal senses.

It is true that Paul's Corinthians and Neo-Platonism appear to invest the play with spirituality, whose realm is transcendent. Because of that, and further reinforced with the appearance of the fairies onstage, the play can allow a wide range of mystical productions, whether it is a film, theatre, music, opera, and ballet. But I believe that the down-to-earth Bottom, who is both foolish and blessed, enjoys his love the most as a carnal man. Alter says that allusion 'conveys a sharp dissonance of images together with a complete consonance of theme' (120), and also refers to 'a dynamic interplay between two texts' (123). As is clear from Paul's teachings, *The Praise of Folie*, and many texts of the Neo-Platonist tradition, Western culture customarily praises the spiritual, and disparages the bodily. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 'conveys a sharp dissonance' to a long and continuous tradition of negative discourse about the body, as it incorporates the more relaxed, even celebratory, attitude to physicality of *The Golden Ass*. The play produces, in effect, a statement in favour of the body.

* This paper is written based on the initial presentation in Japanese at the 54th Shakespeare's Conference of October 10th 2015.

Notes

1 Quotations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*; references to other Shakespeare's plays are from RSC. Citation from the Bible is from *The King James Version*, unless otherwise specified.

2 The episode of Pyramus and Thisbe is in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book IIII, 88-91. On Ovid's influence on Shakespeare's Pyramus's play, see Jonathan Bate's *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 130-38 and passim.

3 Jan Kott approaches Bottom's love as an issue of Neo-Platonism in his *The Bottom Translation*.

4 The cast list of the play refers to Titania as 'Queen of Fairies; fairy queen better known as Spenser's poem or Elizabeth I.

5 Hamlet uses the word 'felicity' for happiness in the afterlife. Horatio wants to drink 'some [poisoned] liquor left' to follow Hamlet's death, to which Hamlet responds by seizing 'the poisoned cup,' and says, 'Absent thee from felicity awhile/ And in this harsh world draw thy breath . . . ' (*Hamlet* 5.2.289-95). In *OED* citations, the term

‘felicity’ is usually secular, referring to prosperity, fortunate circumstances, rather than spiritual afterlife.

6 Augustine of Hippo articulates Paul’s revelation: ‘In the Old Testament there is a concealment of the New, in the New Testament there is a revelation of the God’ (qtd. in James Knapp 258). According to this argument, Paul reveals a typology that existed already in the Old Testament.

7 Kott refers to this passage of Erasmus, and says that Bottom who utters, ‘The eye of man hath not heard . . . ’ shows his religious ecstasy (42), and that Bottom ‘is more interested in the frugal pleasure of eating than in the bodily charms of Titania’ (52). Kott does not admit Bottom’s sexual desire.

8 Francis Yates comments on the distance ‘between a trivial earthly love and the heroic fury with which Platonic or intellectual love should be pursued’ (115).

9 ‘An essay of Harold Bloom’ 138.

10 1 Cor. 8:1 says: ‘we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up.’ Erasmus judges that the negation of ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ is on the basis of God’s forbidding humans to eat ‘the fruite of the tree of **Science** or knowledge’ in Genesis 1:17 (Erasmus 118).

11 At the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, Orsino explicitly refers to the Actaeon myth (1.1.20-22). To take the passage from Metamorphoses (Book III, 65-69) as example, Actaeon as a hart says that his mind is still human: ‘When he saw his face/ And horned temples in the brooke, he would cryde Alas. . . . / And downe the eyes that were not his . . . / No part remayned (save his minde) of that he earst had beene’ (67).

12 In *Metamorphoses*, before he kills himself, Pyramus only says, ‘Receyve thou my blood too’ (90).

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