



Theses and Dissertations

---

2015-12-01

## What a Dream Was Here: An Ontological Approach to Love and Magic in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream

Brittany May Rebarchik  
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Rebarchik, Brittany May, "What a Dream Was Here: An Ontological Approach to Love and Magic in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations*. 5637.  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5637>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

What a Dream Was Here: An Ontological Approach to Love and Magic  
in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Brittany May Rebarchik

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Brandie Siegfried, Chair  
Richard Duerden  
Bruce Young

Department of English  
Brigham Young University

December 2015

Copyright © 2015 Brittany May Rebarchik

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

What a Dream Was Here: An Ontological Approach to Love and Magic  
in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Brittany May Rebarchik  
Department of English, BYU  
Master of Arts

This paper takes Heidegger's notion of world disclosure and uses it for extended thematic analyses of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In contrast to the majority of Shakespeare critics who treat Shakespeare's use of magic as an epistemological issue, I argue that the main action of the play develops through an inherent contradiction between the magical and non-magical ontological states of the characters and the love that results. Borrowing from German philosopher Martin Heidegger, I demonstrate magic's role as a catalyst in giving certain kinds of love a "shift of existence." I show that the characters come more fully into being, not because of what they know, but by means of *how* they love, thus answering the question of magic's ultimate role in the play: what happens when the characters react to the idea that "the course of true love never did run smooth"? When looking at this play through Heidegger's lens one can see that magic is the catalyst for discovering new planes of existence for the character's to enter, each one of these planes based on love.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Renaissance, Critical Theory, Heidegger

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Professor Siegfried for her tireless assistance in getting this piece in top form. Without her this brazen combination of Shakespeare and Heidegger would have fizzled at the onset. I would also like to thank Professor Duerden, not only for introducing me to theoretical discourse but also for his expansive knowledge of the film history of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I would like to thank Professor Young for his indispensable experience and expertise in both Shakespearean and theoretical fields.

The most profound acknowledgement should go to my husband Luke, however. In the many moments of doubt and frustration he provided such a solid foundation of support that I would have resigned ten times over without him. His enthusiasm for my work was one of my biggest driving forces. All this does not even mention his enthusiasm in translating complex German words for me and watching our three children while I wrote and researched.

In case they read this at a much later date, I would like to thank my children, Finn, Isla, and Eliot for constantly reminding me not to take my work too seriously. For reminding me that, while Shakespeare wrote interesting pieces of work, I should sometimes put it down in favor of *The Gruffalo*.

And to my mother, whose reputation at this university precedes me in both time and grandeur. Thank you for being the world's best nanny these past 6 months and beyond.

## Table of Contents

What a Dream Was Here: An Ontological Approach to Love and Magic in Shakespeare's <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> .....	1
I. Heidegger and Shakespeare: Analytical Justification.....	2
II. Entering Into the Wood: Thrownness, Fore-throw and Fallenness .....	9
III. Confusion, Dread, and Attunement.....	15
IV. Love as an Ontological State .....	20
V. Critical Approach to Magic's Role: A Defense of Magic as an Ontological Catalyst.....	27
VI. Theatrical Support .....	32
VII. Conclusion.....	38
VIII. Bibliography.....	41

What a Dream Was Here: An Ontological Approach to Love and Magic in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Though sometimes invoked, Heideggerian philosophy is not often seriously developed in Shakespeare criticism. More particularly, Heidegger's notion of world disclosure has yet to be used for extended thematic analyses of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In contrast to the majority of Shakespeare critics who treat Shakespeare's use of magic as an epistemological issue, I argue that the main action of the play develops through an inherent contradiction between the magical and non-magical *ontological* states of the characters and the love that results. Borrowing from German philosopher Martin Heidegger, I will demonstrate magic's role as a catalyst in giving certain kinds of love a "discovery of existence." Furthermore, I will show that the characters come more fully into Being, not because of what they know, but by the means of how they love, thus answering the question of magic's ultimate role in the play. The ontological lens allows us to see that magic's use is the catalyst for creating new, *necessary* paradigms for the characters, an event that ultimately answers Heidegger's question, "What does it mean to exist?" What becomes important in this consideration is that when the play is adapted for stage and film, this implication is not lost, rather it is enhanced as I will show in my analysis of Michael Hoffman's 1999 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I will compare the results with Adrian Noble's radically different 1996 film production of the same name to show that the ontological developments are inherent in the text and story and present themselves through virtually any production or reading.

Through this analysis, I will show that Shakespeare unequivocally leads us through the process of ontological development. It is this same development that Heidegger lays out, as the fundamental motive for one's reason for *being*, the motivation for one to be actively engaged in a world of one's own creation. As Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius move from the

common world of Athens to the foreign world of the fairies, their every action leads them not only towards love, but an enlightenment that helps define and outline how one finds and exists in an ideal existence.

There is a body of Shakespeare scholarship that reads *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a philosophical tradition. These approaches are similar to this analysis in that they aim to show how human existence is not enacted on a timeless stage but in a world, where in order to attain the coherence and substance of an identity, an imaginative realization must be rooted in something more than the particularity of things and the changeable wills that fasten on them. Philosophical interpretations range from thoughts from contemporary philosophers such as Derrida or Benjamin, to the classical schools of Plato and Aristotle. What is most important to note is that these philosophical interests in Shakespeare are bound up with interest in understanding oneself as a human being and one's place in a disenchanted natural world, in a fragmented social world. A Heideggerian approach tackles this interest and supersedes it exploring the ontological implications of how one exists in such a disenchanted world by escaping it by creating a new world which gives motive to existence itself.

## I. Heidegger and Shakespeare: Analytical Justification

In considering the theoretical ground work for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which makes these analyses possible, it is necessary to explore how Heidegger and his theories work on an existential level within the worlds of the play. Because Heidegger's philosophies on existence and ontology are prolific, I will be drawing primarily from his seminal work *Being and Time*, focusing on the ideas surrounding world disclosure in order to show how magic acts as a catalyst for disclosing worlds and shifting existences.

One of Heidegger's main ambitions is to address the question of *being*. Namely he asks, "what is Being?" In an effort to make his question sound informal, perhaps even approachable, Heidegger reduces it to a simple "was heist 'Sein.'" Literally translated to: *What is called "being"?* Or paraphrased to *What do we mean by "to be"?* or *What does it mean to be in a world?* This is the question that spawns an entire philosophy, yet emerges with clarity and simplicity, and is confronted by the characters within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Heidegger's question can be described as one of, "the inner possibility of understanding being," (King 24) which focuses on how one can exist *authentically*.<sup>1</sup> The answer to the question relies on a process where the act of *being* develops an understanding and relation to the world and those in it; only one who can discover how to understand, and relate to their own being *and* other beings can, "authentically find oneself existing and engaging with themselves and the things they meet within the world" (Heidegger 24). Simply put, one can *be* in a world when one has the possibility to engage meaningfully with the people and things they meet within that world. The process that leads to this authentic *being* is laid out by Heidegger, and as this analysis will show, this process is followed and embodied by Shakespeare and his characters within the play. The lovers, as they encounter magic and love, and as they develop their relationships, provide proof that answer the existential question of what it means to exist purposefully in a world.

In writing *Being and Time* Heidegger claims to give philosophy a revival and yet his question of being comes across as the restoration of an old problem (think *Hamlet*). However, it is less of an answer and more of a general condition of existence that Heidegger is seeking to

---

<sup>1</sup> At root, 'authentic' means "one's own," and according to Heidegger one cannot exist in a world "completely" without revealing one's own, authentic self. Authenticity is not about being isolated from others, but rather about finding a different way of relating to others such that one is not lost to the impositions of others that may conceal this authenticity.

explain, which he does through the invention of the term *Dasein*.<sup>2</sup> One way of looking at the word *Dasein* is to consider it as the label for the distinctive mode and manner of *being* which is realized by human beings. In other words, “*Dasein* encompasses the way we respond to the world, how we react to changes. *Dasein* is not to be understood as the ‘biological human being.’ Nor is it to be understood as the person” (King 6). *Dasein* is a way of life shared by the members of some community; it refers to the fundamental characteristics of a being that make it possible for one to situate oneself in a world. It is often referred to as the “*thereness*” of a being. In the case of the characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, their own relationships, behaviors, the settings they move through are their grounding *Dasein*. In Athens, they are grounded in the city and the relationships they have with those around them. In the wood, even when magic confuses their relationships, they are still grounded in *Dasein* because they still relate to each other on a basic human level and with their surroundings. In the beginning of the play, while the characters remain in Athens, their *Dasein* is illuminated in their strained relationships and the laws that bind them while there. Theseus and Egeus are related to as authority figures especially when they threaten Hermia with fatal punishment if she does not eschew her relationship with Lysander in favor of Demetrius. The physical settings (a city with boundaries that can be left) are also grounded in relation to the characters. Yet, even when Hermia and Lysander find themselves lost in the wood Hermia says, “Be it so, Lysander; find you out a bed,/ For I upon this bank will rest my head” (II.ii.45-46) she shows they have retained an understanding and relationship to the physical world around them. Their *Dasein* is shown again when Lysander attempts to lay with her in her makeshift bed and Hermia states, “Nay, good Lysander; for my sake dear,/ Lie farther off yet, do not lie so near” (II.ii.49-50). For in saying this, Hermia explicates the idea that while

---

<sup>2</sup> Formed from German *Da-sein*, meaning “there-being.”

their surroundings are *unfamiliar*, the essential, and associational aspects of their relationship are grounded in a recognized propriety. Hermia is able to communicate and show what her surroundings are useful for what is proper in regards to her relationship with Lysander. All of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* constitute a similar Dasein; whether they are Athenian or fairy, they operate and relate in the same grounded way, in generally the same (though overlapping) setting.

Shakespeare's formation of a complete Dasein allows Heidegger's idea of world disclosure to develop. To begin, world disclosure refers to how things become intelligible and meaningfully relevant to human beings, or become part of their ontological world which is a pre-interpreted background of meaning. This means of understanding is disclosed to humans (and within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, fairies) through their practical day-to-day encounters with others, with things in the world, and through language. Simply put, the idea of world disclosure assumes that the meaning of words and materials depends upon the setting and framework in which we encounter it. The two distinctions that arise in world disclosure are of the ontological and ontical world disclosure. Ontological world disclosure occurs when an existence and relationships within that existence become meaningful and relevant and accessible but occur after going through the process that will be explicated in this analysis. The second distinction is the *ontic* basis of world disclosure; one's relation to the physical objects and languages that compose the concrete physicality of a world. This distinction is important because, "all ontological concepts must have an ontic basis. If one, in a concrete existence did not always, by necessity, understand ourselves "in a world" the ontological inquiry would remain groundless" (King 52). The ontic concept of the world from which Heidegger's analysis begins is that of a world in which one factually lives, is grounded, and is able to practically relate to what is around

him. Heidegger, in one of his more uncomplicated moments, provides an instance of world disclosure using a pencil as an example. He surmises that nothing could be a pencil unless there were paper or some material on which to write, marks to be written, a system of communication wherein these marks derive their meaning, and some system of social relations to support the system of communication.

This practical, ontical notion of world disclosure illuminates *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as we encounter two holistically structured, yet *separate* worlds. The first world is that of the Athenians who live in a defined, familiar world of human society with a hierarchy and defined laws and customs which the Athenians abide by. It is a world that, for all intents and purposes, one can assume is similar, if not identical, to the world one finds themselves situated in presently. A pencil to them would hold the same purpose as for ourselves. The first indication of their world's familiarity occurs in the opening scene where the marriage of Hippolyta and Theseus is discussed. Theseus says in the opening lines of the play:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour,  
 Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in  
 Another moon. But oh, methinks how slow,  
 This old moon wanes! (I.i.1-4)

Theseus' reflections not only show a world where marriages and moons hold a known, commonplace value but his reaction to them contains an embedded and recognizable way of thinking as he exhibits anticipation and the frustration of time passing slowly in the face of that anticipation. All of this is directed toward marriage, an event that the reader also recognizes. The use of familiar reactions occurs again when Egeus enters the scene to complain about his daughter Hermia, who loves Demetrius despite Egeus' wishes. Not only are the familiar feelings

of frustration present, but Egeus states that Lysander wooed Hermia, “With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits, / Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats” (I.i.33-34). This presentation of factual objects and emotions make up the ontical world needed to ground the characters as they begin their ontological movement. It also presents idea Heidegger sees as crucial in the process of world disclosure. In *Being and Time* he states, “The less we just stare at the thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is” (75). In this sense, the more the characters are exposed to items, emotions, and reactions that they are familiar with, the more they are revealed to be part of a communally, ontically disclosed world.<sup>3</sup> These commonplace affinities continue to bolster this idea throughout the first scene as the feelings and characters put on display are varied but recognizable. Helena presents herself as the scorned lover, frustrated yet conniving. Demetrius displays passion and stubbornness.

Of course, expressing familiar emotions and encountering familiar objects is not out of the ordinary for any story. For this particular theoretical analysis, it provides an essential component of world disclosure in that it provides a backdrop that is “phenomenologically transparent,” meaning that the setting of the play is automatic for the characters. There is no special awareness taking place; there is only the experience of the ongoing world, before anything substantial changes.<sup>4</sup> This particular state of existence will become most influential when it is put into contrast with the exclusive world of the fairies inside the wood that will force

---

<sup>3</sup> To expand on this, Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, “In his ordinary, everyday existence, man lives in a state of implicit understanding of being as matter of course. It seems the greatest commonplace to him that to the merest glance a thing like a tree should present itself as something that is. He is usually too absorbed in his business with the tree itself to notice the remarkable fact that if the *is* were missing, the tree would disappear but also the tree *as* tree” (23).

<sup>4</sup> While Shakespeare provides a stark physical change of scenery to compliment this “thrownness,” with the Athenians physically leaving the city in favor of the wood, it must be noted that a physical departure is not necessary for “thrownness” to occur.

them to shift out of this complacency. However, there are elements of the play that show that phenomenological transparency may be more of an ideal, and that perhaps no activity is ever perfectly assimilated. This lapse in the phenomenological ideal can be seen when looking at the first lines of scene II. Here we are introduced to the world of the fairies whose day-to-day encounter with magic and potions have a separate but still ontically disclosed world. And it is opened with Puck's (the first introduced fairy) declaration that as a "merry wanderer of the night" he has often entered the world of Athens to cause mischief, saying,

And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl  
 In very likeness of a roasted crab,  
 And when she drinks, against her lips I bob  
 And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.  
 The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale  
 Sometime for three-foot stool mistake me.  
 Then I slip from her bum, down topples she,  
 And "Tailor!" cries, and falls into a cough,  
 And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh,  
 And waxen in their mirth, and sneeze, and swear  
 A merrier hour was never wasted there. (II.i.47-57)

Because Puck has infiltrated the Athenian world, the phenomenological workings of the Athenians are inferred to have never been completely separate from the faerie world.

As Scene II commences, Shakespeare moves away from Athens entirely and introduces a new ontical world; it is a magical realm of dewdrops and starlight, inhabited by creatures small enough to live in flowers yet able enough to "wander everywhere, / Swifter than the moon's

sphere” (II.i.6-7). The measure of fairy ontology is expansive and mysterious. One must calculate their size with cowslips, acorn cups, or snake skins. Nor can one pin the fairies down geographically as they wander everywhere. Oberon alludes to knowledge of the cosmos and Titania makes reference to enjoying “Neptune’s yellow sands” (II.i.126). Oberon and Titania, just recently in India, are now in an instant in the Athenian wood. Their locale, being fairly ubiquitous, becomes immaterial. The only location that is important, therefore, is in proximity to the human characters. Therefore, the forest as a setting forms as an ontological motif of a threshold between Athens and a place where the fairy magic is the structure and order that must be followed. And as Virgil Hutton states in his article “A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Tragedy in Comic Disguise” while they are magical, “they are not omnipotent and...the fairies’ lack of omnipotence enhances rather than diminishes the ideal status of their world. Their world is not subject to the irreconcilable moral and logical dilemmas that automatically arise whenever omnipotence is assigned to any being” (Hutton 301). It is magic that is the base of the drastic differences between the world disclosed to and by the fairies and the one disclosed to the Athenians.

## II. Entering Into the Wood: Thrownness, Fore-throw and Fallenness

The characters move into the wood which acts as a point of convergence and provides a platform where the Athenian lovers directly encounter the magic of fairies, and thereby must abandon their pre-defined, structured world in order to function within the magical world. This ontological movement, away from their existence in Athens represents a term that Heidegger coins as *Geworfenheit*, which is translated to “thrownness.” When we speak of thrownness, it is to generally imply that one has abandoned an ontological state, acknowledged it as inauthentic, and begun to move into a new state of existence. The all-important disclosure happens when one

“throws a world’ [off of] things, where which they can show themselves as and for the things they are” (King 56). For the Hermia and Lysander they are literally throwing off the rules and restraints of Athens in order to show themselves for what they are: lovers (or more boldly, husband and wife). Helena attempts to throw off the world in which Demetrius disdains her. In this instance, Shakespeare shirks theoretical nuance and subtlety for obvious, deliberate portrayals of thrownness. He follows the idea that, according to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, thrownness occurs once one has decided to leave the familiarity of one’s current ontological existence and subsequently, in the new and unfamiliar, one is unable to merely occur in the world “like a thing” (24). Passivity in a thrown state cannot exist, and one must move and adapt once the familiar has been left until a new ontological world has been disclosed.

However, before thrownness can occur one must *choose* to allow such a shift in one’s state of existence. This is simply called “fore-throw” and generally means that one prepares in advance to allow the details “after the throw” to make sense. Hermia and Lysander initiate fore-throw as they deliberately set out their plans to go to “...that place the sharp Athenian law/ Cannot pursue us” (I.i.163-4). They prepare themselves for a change in their lives, despite the fact that they are unaware of the existential changes that are inevitable once they leave the city boundaries. Their actions follow in line with the idea of fore-throwing because, according to Heidegger, “the fore-throw is initiated by the absence of possibilities, or by the presence of nothing” (128), or the lack of potential, which gives possibilities the chance to show themselves as they are in themselves. Lysander and Hermia, faced with the void of potential for their love, come to see their lives as finite and that they must act or face a life where they cannot be true to themselves. Lysander reflects on this idea stating:

Or, if 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 lightning in the collied night;  
 That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and Earth,  
 And ere man hath power to say "Behold!"  
 The jaws of darkness do devour it up.  
 So quick bright things come to confusion. (I.i.141-49)

This realization that life and love are easily lost illuminates the void in their situation and drives their need to find new possibility. Most important to this analysis is that this specific possibility becomes a world itself. Once a new possibility is reached, a world is available for discovery. For the lovers within the play, this discovery is made through the magic in the wood; it is with this discovery their love, and thereby their purpose for existence, come to fruition. Lysander and Hermia see only a potential life with each other; the fact that their marriage or union would not be validated in Athens eliminates the possibility of that favored existence and initiates their fore-throw. Hermia begins the progression stating to Helena:

And in the wood where often you and I  
 Upon faint primrose bed were wont to lie,  
 Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,  
 There my Lysander and myself shall meet:  
 And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,  
 To seek new friends and stranger companies. (I.i.214-19)

Helena simultaneously makes similar decisions under similar circumstances; her love for Demetrius does not flourish in Athens; therefore, her motives lack any possibilities or potential and luring Demetrius into the wood is her version of the fore-throw as she states, “I will tell him of fair Hermia’s flight / Then to the wood will he to-morrow night / Pursue her” (I.i.246-48). Demetrius follows Hermia and Lysander, and Helena follows all. Thus all the lovers flee to the wood with the intention of escaping the natural and patriarchal laws they find unfavorable in Athens to encounter an unknown new set of laws set by the fairies.

The Athenians upon entering the wood, move into the state described as “fallenness” where one who is in the process of thrownness loses the ability to recognize and assimilate the things they encounter. In the case of the lovers, their fallenness is a result of the magic of Puck and Oberon, who wield their magic in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for their ontological groundings to remain the same. For the characters, fallenness begins when they enter into the wood because that is when they begin to encounter the magic that they are unfamiliar with. Their fallenness technically begins when Helena follows a cold-hearted Demetrius into the wood and she pleads with him to love her. He refuses resolutely and she ends her declarations insisting that she will “follow thee, and make a heaven of hell, / To die upon the hand I love so well” (II.i.243-44). This acts as the catalyst for fallenness because Oberon, made invisible by his own magic, witnesses this one-sided devotion and orders Puck to anoint Demetrius’s eyes with the juice of a magical flower. Oberon describes the flower as one that was fallen upon by Cupid’s arrow. The juice of the pansy acts as a magical love potion, causing its recipient to fall in love with the person they lay sight on once they open their eyes. Oberon makes it explicitly clear that he intends to coerce Demetrius’s love thus aiming to meddle with and essentially change the current existential norm of the lovers; this becomes apparent when he tells Puck to

anoint Demetrius's eyes, "when the next thing he espies, / May be the lady" (II.i.262-63). In the next instant events diverge from Oberon's plans, as Lysander, not Demetrius receive the juice of the flower.

It is with Oberon's palsy that the characters have their first magical encounter that signifies this fallenness into the unknown. The lovers have experienced a fore-throw as they planned to escape the structures barring their happiness in Athens and have now "fallen" into the unknown (the unknown being the presence of Puck and Oberon's magic), where they must disown themselves and disown the illumination they thought they were capable of. Where they previously knew the means of disclosure in Athens, in the wood they have fallen away from the familiar. Lysander portrays this fallenness into the unknown with his initial declarations of love for Helena, "Content with Hermia? No: I do repent/ The tedious minutes I with her have spent" (II.ii.117-8). And is shown again in Helena's bemused response to his drastically changed behavior, "Good troth, you do me wrong,--good sooth, you do--/ In such disdainful manner me to woo./ I though you lord of more true gentleness" (II.ii.135-38). Neither character has any grounding or familiarity in their relationship, it has fallen into the category of indefinite and unknown. Shakespeare shows this fallenness in another moment of overt literal appropriation. Lysander has literally "fallen" in love with Helena; his love is disowned from his previous existence and he has fallen into his feelings with no anchoring to any reasonable motivation. Like ontological fallenness, Lysander falling in love is unrecognizable to the people and relationships he had previously held.

It is important to note that fallenness, as Heidegger states, "is not a fallen state of existence, a fall perhaps from a state of grace into corruption, but the existential *movement* of falling. The movement, moreover, is not one of the accidents that can befall one in his factual

existence but is one of the basic ways in which one can be-in-the-world: in the way of disowning himself” (134). This fallenness for the lovers in the play is the action of disowning their lives as they knew them, and falling into, and under, the influence of an interfering Oberon who assures an unhearing Helena that, “ ere he doth leave this grove,/ Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love” (II.i.245-46). Unknowingly to the lovers, his guarantee has begun their fall and their ontological movement away from what their existence was formerly in Athens.

It is at this point that tempestuous moods and feelings rise from the lovers’ fallenness as they come to bear the confusion that this new world brings. Because they are unaware of the forces being acted around them, a sense of helplessness and frustration prevails. However, in Heidegger’s definition of fallenness, “It is not intended that one is cast into a new ‘universe’ by a blind force or an indifferent fate, which immediately abandons them to their own devices. It means that their own real existence is manifest in the curious way that they can always and only find themselves already here” (King 176). In other words, although the lovers are at the hands of magical powers outside their understanding, they are not simply floating in a world, the fact that one can always find themselves points to an ability to acclimatize and familiarize themselves with a world—a kind of adaptation. However, Shakespeare takes a more literal, obvious approach to their adaptation as Puck and Oberon will eventually be the ones to bring the lovers back to a more harmonious conclusion. But even with an external hand helping the lovers adapt, Shakespeare still recognizes that the characters, immersed in the new world they have only the option to come to terms with their situation or back to Athens ontologically unchanged (as disclosure to this new existence hasn’t been completed). This adapting takes a subconscious role because the lovers are affected yet unaware of the magical forces that are being inflicted upon them.

### III. Confusion, Dread, and Attunement

At the height of magic's influence, specifically when Demetrius and Lysander have both been transformed to dote on Helena, their moods range from confusion to spite to helpless despair. Hermia embodies this sense of impotence and confusion when the two men turn their affection away from her; unable to come up with a reasonable explanation Hermia states, "You speak not as you think, it cannot be" (III.ii.192). Helena, on the other hand, feels a similar sense of powerlessness in suspicion thinking that the whole party has conspired to turn against her; her only explanation is to say, "Lo, she is one of this confederacy! / Now I perceive they have conjoined all three, / To fashion this false sport in spite of me" (III.ii.193-95). Lysander and Demetrius nearly come to fists in their confusion as they vie to win the love of Helena, after which Helena and Hermia hurl insults and threaten physical violence in their attempts to reconcile the confusion taking place. They are outwardly showing signs of experiencing fallenness, the limbo between the fore-throw and disclosure; but in this fallenness they are, more importantly (and subconsciously), coming face to face with what Heidegger refers to as *Angst*, translated to "dread."

In an ontological sense, dread does not fall into the standard definition of "fear" or "apprehension" rather it is, as Heidegger points out, "the nowhere and the nothing" (121). In order to explain a concept as intangible as Heidegger's dread, it is useful to look at the things that break down or disappear in the face of dread- these things are primarily what one can do something about. No matter how fearsome a thing is, one may not be totally helpless before it; one can at least try to run away or try to do something to help. Helena certainly tries to run away from the problems that magic has created and expresses such intention when she says, "I will not trust you, I:/ Nor longer stay in your curst company./ Your hands than mine are quicker for the fray; My legs are longer though, to run away" (III.ii.339-43). Of course, magic's influence has

altered their situation so intrinsically that they cannot escape it by simply changing location, thus showing what Heidegger means by *dread*.

Dread is the embodiment of an ontological situation that one *cannot* do anything about. One may experience, in one way or another at one time or another, the total impotence and helplessness of “I can do nothing to help.” In the face of this, things we *could* do something about shrink into utter insignificance and irrelevance. Perhaps, this is best shown when Hermia can do nothing but say, “I am amaz’d and know not what say” (III.ii.344). The unique power of dread lies precisely in bringing things into this mood of insignificance. Consequently, dread cannot be found anywhere within the world, it cannot approach from any definite place or direction in a certain neighborhood; it is in this sense that it is nowhere and nothing. Yet, in this nothingness and nowhere, Heidegger insists, that a world is disclosed and discovered.

To consider what Heidegger means when he says that the nowhere of dread discloses world itself one must consider that in one’s everyday experience, a place is a definite here and a there where people and things are at a certain distance and in a definable direction from each other. The relationships of the lovers before magic are definable and distinct; they are first in Athens, Hermia and Lysander are in love, while Helena loves Demetrius who does not reciprocate her feelings. But, in order to feel situated in a place or with a thing, one must be able to situate oneself in relation to *where* it is in the world. This *where* can refer to a physical location or, importantly in this instance, refer to the relationship one has with a person or thing; *where* is simply a way a referring to where something is grounded in relation to a being. In the midst of magic’s influences these relationships are not grounded because what they can do changes at the whims of Oberon, who has not finished his interfering, thus not allowing the characters to become grounded, or attuned to their relationships. However, what enables one to

ground oneself and the things around one is the disclosure of the world (and its relationships) itself. Yet Heidegger is adamant that this disclosure happens directly and elementally in the nowhere (or ungrounded-ness) that dread presents. To fully explain how the characters are in the nowhere during their most contentious moments it helps know that

The very indefiniteness of the nowhere brings to light purely the *where* solely by itself. It is only because the *where* is always manifest to us that we can and must relate ourselves to the things we meet by giving them a definite *where*, a grounding. Far from being a negation of all possible things, the dread presents the nowhere as the possibility of something because it makes possible the discovery of relationship and space that essentially belong to and constitute a world. (King 89)

It is the nothing of dread that opens up the horizon against and from which beings stand out. More than a negation of all things: this nothing gives things the possibility to show themselves as they are. This possibility, in Heidegger's interpretation, is ontological world disclosure. This is because a world is revealed in the *contrast* of the nothingness that dread represents. Dread points to the possibility and opportunity of disclosure because when faced with its nothingness a being who must (as a factual being) be grounded in a world, must search for that which grounds them; revelation and discovery can only result when being faced with the nothingness and nowhere that is dread.

Because dread is a strictly ontological concept it becomes difficult to find a way to portray it in an ontical way in relation to the physical action of the lovers. However, it occurs most obviously when the possibility of resolution and disclosure is at its most unattainable. The lovers have absolutely no way of grounding their relationships, or existence, because their

individual beings are at their most thrown and fallen state. With Oberon not facilitating their situation as they verbally combat each other, characters cannot define and disclose their surroundings at a certain distance and in a definable direction from each other. This is inhibiting because “What enables us to [overcome dread] is the disclosure of the place itself” (Heidegger 182). This disclosure, this assimilating of a new world, and reaching of a necessary possibility shows how Shakespeare turns disclosure into something that is ontologically necessary for the characters to experience if they are to *be* in a world. He complements the obscure quality of ontological dread by giving a feeling of conventional dread during the scene’s most powerful moments. This feeling of conventional dread is expressed by Hermia as she exclaims to Lysander, “Since night you lov’d me; yet since night you left me:/ Why then, you left me,--O, the gods forbid!--/ In earnest, shall I say?” (III.ii.275-77). Hermia is outwardly dreading what she fears most: losing the love of Lysander. This simultaneous occurrence of ontic and ontological dread reinforces the idea that in the depth of magic’s sway, the characters are faced with a lack of options which highlights the possibilities that can result.

After the fallenness and dread that the characters have faced, they must now surmount the issues that Oberon’s magic has created and the dread that they are facing. This prevailing would mark the next step in achieving the grounded, disclosed relationships they seek. To achieve this disclosure with the influence of magic, Heideggerian philosophy suggests that they must “somehow free [themselves] from [their] thralldom” (163). To do this the lovers must become attuned to the new world and the magic that exists therein. The Heideggerian notion of attunement is “a part of existence that rises from the depth of one’s thrownness and reveals that one is and has to be dependent upon a world” (Guignon 91). They have become dependent upon the magic in the world as it has now become the only means for them to resolve their amorous

differences. However, Shakespeare hastens this process by utilizing Oberon's magic as the means by which the lovers become attuned to their new, grounded relationships. Where Heidegger implies that one becomes attuned by adapting to their new existence on their own, Shakespeare has Oberon use the juice of the pansy so that, "When they next wake, all this derision,/ Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision;/ And back to Athens shall the lovers wend" (III.ii.369-71). Oberon's use of magic, or "sport" as he calls it, emerges now as less irresponsible than it once seemed and more as a necessary action for the characters' attunement to each other. Magic becomes intrinsically responsible for the world disclosure that the lovers are progressing toward, and ultimately will hasten the fact that, as Puck declares, "The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well" (III.ii.463).

While Oberon uses magic to help facilitate their attunement and world disclosing, the outside catalyst is less important than the essential idea of attunement that must occur: the lovers must adapt and be aware of not just their own moods and feelings, but of the moods and feelings of their romantic counterparts who also exist in this new world as "Moods and feelings attune one not as an isolated self; on the contrary, they bring one to oneself in such a way they find themselves in the midst of other beings" (King 56). In other words, the lovers' moods need to be relatable and meaningful to each other because this relationship is the basis of world disclosure. And while their actions and words up to this point, though brazen, mark a time when they share a mood of general confusion, this confusion, when all parties feel it simultaneously, becomes the first important, unifying aspect of the attunement that is occurring.

But what is the result of this attunement to the lovers' new relationships? What comes of this end to their fraught adventure in the wood and the magic that has acted upon the characters? According to Heidegger in attunement lies a most original and fundamental disclosure (truth) of

being, which reaches far beyond our powers of explicit knowing and explaining. By authentically revealing, the primary disclosing function of attunement is to bring Dasein before the “that” of his already-being-in-the-world. Shakespeare reveals the authentic relationships between the characters with Hermia and Lysander happily paired off, and Helena and Demetrius now a loving couple. These ostensible pairings are the beginning indications of world disclosure. For attunement to be fully realized, those facing existential change must be “approachable, concernible, touchable, strike-able, capable of being affected and moved whatever approaches from the world” (King 221). Thanks to Oberon’s *restorative* magic the lovers can see and approach their relationships in a meaningful, grounded manner, a harmonious manner based on the love they were seeking.<sup>5</sup> As grounded relationships provide the basis for world disclosure, Oberon’s help in attunement also paves the way for them to discover the new, authentic ontological state they have been progressing toward.

#### IV. Love as an Ontological State

As stated, attunement is characteristically the revealing aspect of world disclosure. When one is attuned to one’s existential surroundings, the use and relationships of the things one meets in the world are revealed. The attunement for the lovers reveals a state of *being* that shows and makes available their authentic relationships to each other. With every event and movement Shakespeare leads the lovers one step closer to getting to the answer of Heidegger’s question of what it means to exist within a world: by revealing, discovering, and, disclosing an *ontological* state in which the lovers can exist harmoniously *as* lovers, thereby reaching the possibility they

---

<sup>5</sup> It must be pointed out that Demetrius in his relationship with Helena acts as a grey area concerning attunement. His intention to flee his previous existence was to woo Hermia *not* Helena. So, when the lovers are harmoniously and existentially attuned in their respective pairings, it should be assumed that Oberon’s magic also shifted his original, fore-throwing intentions (or possibly revealed his subconscious desire for her which is implied when Demetrius states, “It is only Helena. To her my lord,/ Was I betroth’d ere I saw Hermia” [4.1.171-72]).

were seeking. And so, when Helena states that, “I have found Demetrius like a jewel./ Mine own, and not mine own” (IV.i.188-89), she refers to this necessary revelation of relationship that has happened as a direct result of the night’s events.

They move toward this disclosure in their thrownness, fallenness, dread, and attunement. The world and magic of the forest pushes the characters toward uncovering an ontological state where they exist as compatible lovers. This uncovering suggests that this state was always there for their discovery; yet it is the finding of that which already exists is paramount for Heidegger when disclosing a new world. In order to disclose a new ontological state one must “not be discovering but discover, and thus making things able to show themselves as and for what they are and take them out of hiddenness” (Heidegger 273). In this regard, it can be said that the lovers, until the point that they enter the woods were leading inauthentic lives because they had yet to discover the possibility of their authentic relationships. In Heidegger’s terms this revelation is a “clearing” or “opening” that has been made once their new relationships and authentic selves has been established and discovered. For the lovers this clearing occurs when Oberon and Puck administer the juice of the pansy for the last time. The erasure of the discord between the lovers and facilitating of kinship between them opens up an opportunity for disclosure. Oberon marks this opening of opportunity in the aforementioned line, “When they next wake, all this derision/ Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision” (III.ii.370-71). In correcting the magical mistakes Oberon opens up the opportunity for the lovers to discover their authentic relationships. According to Heidegger, “One’s ontological understanding of various ways of being opens a clearing in which particular entities can be encountered as entities to be used or as the referents of true assertions” (qtd. in Dreyfus 239). In this case, the clearing is properly established when the characters wake and immediately refer and relate to each other *as* lovers

revealing their authentic relationships to each other. Before being thrown into this new state of existence, their romantic relationships lacked meaning because the meaning was hidden by the constraints of the Athenian world. This clearing of restraints reflects the notion that “A clearing considers itself with unhiddenness, and the structure of the original framework in which ‘being there’ can occur...[T]he authenticity of existence and of the questions it is concerned with emerge in the clearing” (Guignon 63). Their “being there,” or their existence in the new world, depends upon them revealing themselves as lovers, embracing the change in their relationship. Their circumspection once out of the confusion of the wood allows them to see for the first time what their relationship is and what it is available for. Theseus is the first to notice this outward change of relational behavior, stating,

I know you two are rival enemies.  
 How comes this gentle concord in the world,  
 That hatred is so far from jealousy,  
 To sleep by hate and fear no enmity? (IV.i.140-43)

Lysander’s response to this cements the idea that their new existence is tied to their original motive as he says, “I cannot say truly how I came here./...I came with Hermia hither. Our intent,/ Was to be gone from Athens, where we might,/ Without the peril of Athenian law” (IV.i.146-51). While consciously, they struggle to find out *how* their world has been so changed, the reason it has been is clear--to escape the world of Athens where the possibility of love failed to exist. Demetrius echoes this sentiment:

My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,  
 Of this their purpose hither to this wood.  
 And I in fury hither followed them,

Fair Helena in fancy following me.  
 But, my good lord, I wot not by what power--  
 But by some power it is--my love to Hermia,  
 Metled as the snow, seems to me now  
 As the remembrance of an idle gaud  
 Which in my childhood I did dote upon.  
 And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,  
 The object and pleasure of mine eye,  
 Is only Helena. To her my lord,  
 Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia.  
 But like in sickness did I loathe this food.  
 But as in health, come to my natural taste,  
 Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,  
 And will ever be true to it. (IV.i.158-74)

Here, Demetrius brings the audience step-by-step through the process of new world disclosure. He lays out the motive of love, the lack of possibilities faced in Athens, and the change in existence that happened once they fell out of their previous way of existing, and finally, he confirms that through this process, a clearing has occurred so that he now relates to his companions in a new, significant, and accessible, way. While the details surrounding the events are hazy to the characters, the audience and reader will recognize that it is magic that has brought this world to fruition. This analysis aims to show that magic has provided a solution to the lovers' initial fore-throw, provided them with the relationships essential to their *being*.

Once the characters begin to relate to each other as lovers in this changed existence they become what Heidegger terms their “authentic” selves, and they are able to ontological disclose this new world, one established on the foundation of their love. Demetrius, shirking the inauthentic relationship he previously had with Helena prior, refers to this new authenticity saying, “But like a sickness, did I loathe this food;/ Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,/ And will evermore be true to it” (IV.i.170-73). Shakespeare shows the lovers’ authentic selves as beings in love, beings who value the newly revealed truth and validity of their relationships because it embodies the authentic way in which they now exist. Heidegger argues that those who inhabit a newly disclosed world/existence do so because they are able to identify with the things around them, “not in an unintelligible jumble of impressions, but in such a way that the world is accessible and useful” (King 97). This complete understanding is only possible when the characters can discover themselves as a coherent whole comprised of relationships that enable them to refer and relate to each other in the way defined by their desired possibility.

However, the lovers leave the wood and in so doing they leave the source of magic that facilitated their transformation. They are found by Egeus, Theseus, and Hippolyta who, at first discovering them, express that the laws that bound them in Athens are still in effect. Egeus shows his outrage that Hermia and Lysander are still in love, saying,

I beg the law upon his head.

They would have stolen away, they would, Demetrius,

Thereby defeated you and me:

You of your wife, and me of my consent,--

Of my consent that she should be your wife. (IV.i.152-56)

With Egeus's declaration it seems that their ontological shift was for naught; while the lovers hold to the process that has taken place in the wood, the laws of Athens remain unchanged. Hermia under her father's direction is still beholden to Demetrius not Lysander. However, through the ontological development of "care," one can see that their changes have become so inherent in their *being* that even those who uphold the law cannot deny it.

Because the lovers have undergone changes that were truly transformational, their love will continue outside of the wood and magic's influence. This establishes the ontological concept of "care" that has been developed between the lovers. Care, in this case, does not refer to the traditional definition of looking after something; rather it acts as the final step in world disclosure by being the complete founding and establishment of an existence within a new world. Care is the fully realized and disclosed existence, the culmination and comprehension of the previous steps. Heidegger explains care as follows:

One exists as a being for which, in its being, that being is in itself an *issue*.

Essentially ahead of itself, it has projected itself upon its ability to *be* before going on to any mere consideration of itself. In its projection it reveals itself as something which has been thrown. It has been thrownly abandoned to the world and falls into in concernfully as care--that is, as existing in the unity of the projection which has been fallingly thrown--and this entity has been disclosed.

(251)

Simply put, the act of thrownness, and the process and steps to disclosure that follows, produces an entity, one whose existence is immersed in the world, ontologically disclosing it, and is "the existential totality of one's ontological structural whole" (Dreyfus 239). The fairies' magic allowed a clearing away of the lovers' inauthentic selves, and the lovers formed themselves as

engaged entities within the newly disclosed world. And although each person does its own caring, “The result is one shared situation....The surrounding world is different in a certain way notwithstanding that one moves about it in a common world” (Dreyfus 241). The lovers have disclosed this world individually but exist within the same world as a group-being because the way they relate to *each other* was central in the process of disclosure and establishing care.<sup>6</sup> That their loving relationships are now factual, free-standing entities in themselves does not seem lost on Shakespeare’s direction of the next events. After Lysander and Demetrius outline the ontological shifts and events that have taken place the wood Theseus replies

Fair lovers, you are fortunately met:

Of this discourse we more will hear anon.--

Egeus, I will overbear your will;

For in the temple, by and by with us,

These couples shall eternally be knit. (IV.i.174-78)

The integrity of their relationships and the path they took are apparent enough that Theseus demands the previous demands against them be put aside. Shakespeare uses Theseus to reinforce the indisputable process that leads to world disclosure and in doing so emphasizes Heidegger’s logic as he answers the all-important question, “what does it mean to be in a world?”

---

<sup>6</sup> When Puck and Oberon are finally successful in pairing the lovers, Hermia and Lysander, and Helena and Demetrius, each pair act as separate groups because it is their separate loves for the other that their new ontology is based on.

## V. Critical Approach to Magic's Role: A Defense of Magic as an Ontological Catalyst

As has been established, magic has been the catalyst for and throughout the lovers' ontological shifts within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The magical juice of Oberon's pansy, and Puck as magical administer of such juice and other mischief, force the characters out of their discord and into a new existence based on the relationships that magic formed. Magic forced Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius to change the way they existed by changing the way they related to each other. In doing so, magic acts in an ontological capacity. Yet most critical approaches to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* see magic as an epistemological issue, arguing that it affects the reasoning and judgment of the characters of the play. Robert R. Dent states this idea succinctly in his article "Imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" when he says, "Nothing is more common than the observation that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about love, about lovers' lunacy, where 'reason and love keep little company together nowadays,' where the follies of imagination-dominated Demetrius and Lysander are reduced to their essential absurdity by the passion of Titania for an ass" (Dent 116). While this criticism is pervasive it proves to strengthen the ontological notion of magic's function, rather than diminish it. Michael Taylor, in his article titled "The Darker Purpose of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," states, "Oberon's pansy-juice makes the lovers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* swear and foreswear, hurl insults, reverse long-standing attitudes, plead that they are being reasonable when they are being at their most irrational, and in general, behave like lunatics" (Taylor 269). Instead of seeing magic as a catalyst for fundamental existential change, critics like Taylor approach magic as a catalyst for unreasonable thinking and an abandonment of what was once considered 'normal'. What is not being considered is the fact that the lovers leave the wood to escape the 'normal' existence of Athens; if their behavior is outside of the socially acceptable it is because their behavior toward

each other must change in order to effect an ontological change. Russel Brown, in his critique of the play, continues the epistemological analysis of magic but brings it closer to its ontological role. Brown states, “If one wished to describe the judgment which informs *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, one might do so very simply: The play suggests that lovers, like lunatics, have their own ‘truth’ which is established as they see the beauty of their beloved, and that they are confident in this truth for, although it seems the silliest stuff to an outsider, to them it is quite reasonable.” (90). Accordingly, this “truth” can only be realized through their experience in the wood and because they were subjected to the outside force of magic. The truth, therefore, is only coherent to the lovers. This tactic touches on the ontological approach as it concedes a fundamental change that those outside of the foursome would not understand, not having experienced it with them.

The other common epistemological explanation of magic places it in the realm of imagination. This is not to say that magic within the play is imaginary, but that it affects the imagination of the Athenians, causing them to see what is not there. The general consensus of this argument is voiced by Virgil Hutton in his article titled “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Tragedy in Comic Disguise*” wherein he states, “For many critics, the choice offered by the play is either between the rational and the irrational or between reason and the imagination. For those stressing the theme of love, rational love is said to triumph over irrational love as the young lovers, after their night of irrationality, return to the bonds of rational love....[H]owever, cool reason usually loses out to warmer imagination” (290). Imagination offers a simple and acceptable way to digest what happened within the wood, for while the magical events may have actually taken place, the lovers tally it up to an imagined dream that is half-remembered and unclear. Demetrius says as much when he states, “These things seem small and

undistinguishable,/ Like far-off mountains turned into clouds,” to which Hermia responds, “Methinks I see things with parted eye,/ When everything seems double” (IV.i.185-88). This assumes that the lovers were passive while being subjected to magic and accept the outcome with an air of awed (and overwhelmed) approval of the outcome. This notion stays in line with the epistemological way of dealing with magic in the play as it relies on a change in *awareness* of the characters rather than an existential alteration. Robert Dent sums up the argument of imagination saying, “we may well be ‘asses’ if we seek to infer from the play more than the suggestion of a mysterious ‘grace’ that sometimes blesses true love” (Dent 122). However, through the previous analysis we know that magic was less mysterious “grace” than an ontological catalyst.

Not every criticism of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* approaches magic and the wood in a strictly epistemological way. One of the most noted ontological approaches is that of the green world. The theory of the green world is ontologically grounded, and its premise aids in elaborating magic’s role as a catalyst for world disclosure. The theory contends that the action of the play begins in a “normal” world, moves into a “green” world where the comic resolution is achieved, and then returns to the normal world. Shakespeare’s comedies as a group show the same rhythmic movement from normal world to green world and back again, whether the green world is described as a forest, a pastoral world, or an island.<sup>7</sup> The green world in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is the place over hill and dale, through brush and brier; it is the wood where Oberon and Puck exhibit their magical prowess (and blunders) on the lovers. Northrop Frye, a proponent of this theory explains in his book *A Natural Perspective: The Development of*

---

<sup>7</sup> The green world concept, included in Shakespeare criticism surveys and recently even in a literary theory handbook, has been used by scholars in areas as wide-reaching as film criticism, psychology, and New Testament hermeneutics.

*Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* that the characters spend their lives “partly in a waking world considered normal and partly in the green world which they create out of their own desires....[The green world] is the place where the purely human world goes and in which the comic action moves begins to take shape” (Frye 118). This description reflects on the idea of world disclosure as it is laid out in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in that it is the characters’ desires and needs that are the catalyst to creating a separated, green world. Frye goes on to describe the green world as

[a] symbol of natural society, the word “natural” here referring to the original human society which is the proper home of man, not the physical world he now lives in but the “golden world” he is trying to regain. This natural society is associated with things which in the context of the ordinary world seem unnatural, but which are in fact attributes of nature as a miraculous and irresistible reviving power. These associations include dream, magic, and chastity or spiritual energy, as well as fertility and renewed natural energies. (125)

This renewal and reviving power of magic that is inherent in the green world is defined characteristically as a separate entity from the normal world, but this also acts as its alluring feature, drawing one in with its potential influence. For Hermia and Lysander it is the place through which they can “thence from Athens turn away our eyes,/ to seek new friends and stranger companies” (I.i.218-9). The draw of the green world, and what happens within it, lays out the ontological ideas of fallenness and attunement that occur after being thrown into a new world; writing on this aspect, Sherman Hawkins states, “The hero or heroine must undergo hardships to enter the green world. And there he discovers ritual trials or tests, but these serve only to reveal or perfect his essential good nature” (73). This suggestion of discovery echoes

Heidegger's idea that "discovering is another name for disclosing, the opening of a shared clearing, a local situation, a 'there' in which objects can be encountered" (qtd. in Foti 39), thus setting the groundwork for the idea of ontological disclosure. The trials and resolution correlate to fallenness and attunement caused by magic that is necessary to carry out such disclosure. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is the lovers discord and fighting and Oberon's resulting resolving of their issues. What the green world theory calls "essential good nature," Heidegger would call the "authentic self." Both theories lay out the process for one who, being thrown in a new world, begins to disclose it ontologically. Through this discovery and disclosing, the green world theory posits that "the wood acts as a rite of passage, through which the young assume their proper place in the adult world" (Frye 119). For the lovers, their place in the adult world is recognized when Theseus acknowledges their transformation and invites them not just to be married but married, "by and by with us." Not only are they allowed to marry but are invited to do so with Theseus and Hippolyta, the king and future queen. With Heidegger's theory we can elaborate on that idea and say that the characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are able to reach their harmonious ending, not because they are now a part of the "adult" world, but because they have disclosed a world where they can relate to each other *as* adults.<sup>8</sup> While it omits the intricacies of the ontological shifts that occur within the wood, the green world theory arrives at a similar conclusion, acknowledging that magic enacts the revelation of self and way of being that occurs within the wood.

---

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that the characters were not adults before their disclosure. I simply mean to imply that they can now act in a way that acceptably reflects the stereotype of adulthood, without quarrels and disobedience.

## VI. Theatrical Support

The basis of this analysis has come from a literary interpretation of the play's text. The text is also a script that is meant to be performed.<sup>9</sup> To conclude my analysis I will show how the pivotal concepts of Heidegger's question and process have visual representations in film adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, specifically within Michael Hoffman's 1999 and Adrian Noble's 1996 film versions. And while each of these films takes a drastically different cinematic approach, the ontological implications above remain evident in the performances.

First, it is necessary to explore the ontological and ontical groundings that are portrayed in each film in order to accurately track their ontological development. In Michael Hoffman's version the characters are introduced in the city of Athens, which is a traditional city with buildings, a marketplace, and citizens milling about. This provides an ontical reference as to what is normal for, and disclosed to, the characters in their existence before they enter the wood. The characters all wear what could be deemed as "traditional" clothing for the era being represented (approximately late 1800's or early 1900's). Adrian Noble's version is grounded in a much different way and sets the stage for a much different portrayal of their ontological developments. In Noble's movie the action between the characters begins in the dream world of a small boy. There is no city that is shown outside of the rooms in which the play takes place. In the room where Theseus, Egeus, and the lovers have their initial confrontation there are candlesticks and a table but little else to ground the characters in a particular time or place. Their costumes are nondescript and also fail to point to a physical location which to reference the play (other than the dream world of the boy if that can be deemed a physical location). These details in both films provide the necessary ontical groundings which help outline how and what things

---

<sup>9</sup> Film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with this medium a marked affinity for the visible world around us. Films come into their own when they record and reveal a physical reality.

are disclosed which thereby defines how and when the characters are thrown into the unknown, thereby starting their ontological development.

The opening scenes of both movies depict Heidegger's notion of fore-throw. In both, Egeus stands in front of Theseus complaining of his daughter Hermia's love for Lysander and her disregard of the man he has chosen for her, Demetrius. However, favored Demetrius stands off to the side while Lysander sits right next to Hermia, holding her hand and remaining intimately close to her throughout the scene. In doing so he is disregarding and alienating himself from the rules and constraints that are part of the Athenian disclosed world. It is this same world and constraints that inhibit the possibility of love with Hermia. When considered carefully, both films show Lysander rejecting propriety that would be standard in Athens: ignoring Egeus' protests by refusing to accept his authority by physically leaving Hermia's side. When speaking of fore-throw Heidegger mentions that it includes an element of alienation: "Alienation does not mean that one is in fact torn away from himself, but on the contrary, he is driven into the most extreme self-analysis and self-interpretations" (82). Lysander has clearly analyzed his own motives and ontological crisis to the extent that he deliberately alienates himself both physically and ontologically from his superiors and their suppression.

After the fore-throw, the characters throw themselves from Athens and thereby enter a state of fallenness (where the characters are unable to assimilate or understand the magic that they are subjected to) in the magic wood. To take an ontological concept and convey it to the screen, it is necessary to show how unfamiliar and starkly different the wood is from Athens; by doing this, it will be clear that the characters will be ungrounded at a fundamental level when in the wood and under the influence of magic that rules there. Adrian Noble takes a very literal approach to this by showing the little boy (whose dream the play is taking place in) falling

against a blank background from the room in Athens into the setting of the wood. It is here that we see the bare set that represents the wood. It is a wood floor with lightbulbs hanging down and nothing else. Single doors rise from the floor when a character enters into the wood, only to sink back down when they have entered. As the lovers enter the wood they enter through the appearing doors allowing the assumption that they have fallen from Athens as the boy has. Not only does Noble use actual falling to portray the ontological idea of fallenness but he also provides a completely unfamiliar setting where there is nothing that the lovers are outwardly accustomed to, giving a distinct sense of ungrounding and foreshadowing the strangeness of the magic that happen in the wood.

In Hoffman's movie, the fallenness into the wood is shown in two, more subtle ways. Hoffman aims to show how the wood is completely ungrounded from the Athenian world that the characters are be ontologically thrown from. To show this, he shows a distinct mood shift from the propriety that was shown in Athens. Where the lovers wore traditional clothing and acted with decorum, the first scene of the woods shows a fairy "party" where there is all manner of yelling, shouting, cheering, and hollering. The mood is generally jovial and Puck is seen playing tricks on his fellow fairies. The camera immediately cuts to Oberon and Titania entering in the wood with thunder, lightning, and wind accompanying them. Generally, Hoffman shows an obvious shift of settings and moods and weather to show how the magic and the wood are completely different from what they were accustomed to in Athens; as such, the distinct scene change shows the great extent to which the lovers will be groundless in the unfamiliar once they enter the wood. Hoffman's portrayal of fallenness is not as stark or obvious as Noble's, yet the point of fallenness is clear: the wood completely shakes the foundations of what the lovers thought they were comfortable with.

After experiencing fallenness upon their rough introduction to Oberon's magic, the characters face that nebulous ontological concept of dread in magic's discordant effects. The actors in both films portray the conventional idea of dread by showing the conventional, ontical distress that the characters are going through when the possibility of a resolution to their magical dilemma seem naught. However, Adrian Noble's film gets close to portraying the ontological concept of dread. Heidegger relates the concept of dread as coming face to face with "nowhere" and "nothing" in order to illuminate the distinctness, the "thereness" of a world or relationship. In Noble's film Helena breaks the fourth wall, delivering the lines "Lo, she is one of this confederacy!" directly into the camera. This is the first time in the film that any character has broken from their dialogue to look out of the screen. Because none of the action is taking place off stage, it portrays an absolute sense of helplessness for Helena's character; she cannot find any resolution in the action of the play and is facing "nothing," or a place where no help can be provided. As in the traditional reading, disclosure can only occur when the characters have attuned themselves to the things and people they meet within the world; Helena's turning to the screen illuminates the fact that any possibility of disclosure lies only within the wood, not in the face of dread.

After facing dread, the lovers must become attuned to each other and the magic within the wood. Hoffman's film visually embraces Heidegger's notion that in a state of attunement one must "understand the most foreign cultures and 'synthesize' them to lead to the thorough and first genuine enlightenment of one about oneself." (Heidegger 159). Hoffman depicts this synthesizing requirement through the use of fairies and their interactions with Athenian objects. Specifically, Hoffman uses bicycles. The bicycle entering into the magical realm signifies the intermingling of magic and non-magic entities that occur within the woods as the lovers are

thrown into their new existence. Puck is shown examining and inexpertly handling the bicycle as he figures out how it works, thus synthesizing a foreign concept of Athenian life. This is a visual representation of how the Athenians (and their equipment) act as a disturbance, or a deviance from the norm, for Puck and vice versa. This visual elaborates on the idea that within thrownness, “Disturbance makes us aware of the function of equipment (physical objects of a world) and the way it fits into a practical context” (Dreyfus 121).<sup>10</sup> Puck’s handling of the bicycle is a direct parallel to how he handles the Athenians while they are in their thrown state-- with much curiosity, ineptitude, and increasing attunement which corresponds to the ineptness of the Athenians as they struggle to adapt to magic’s influence. Puck begins to attune himself to the bicycle, riding it with ease, at the same time attuning himself to the struggles of the Athenians while concurrently, the lovers begin to attune themselves to the magic of the forest. Puck’s progression with the bicycle (and in parallel with the Athenians themselves) shows a direct portrayal of the attunement process that occurs within thrownness. Heidegger states that one who becomes attuned is able to state, “I know how to go about what I am doing, I am able to do what is appropriate in each situation” (330). Hoffman shows this very statement by use of Puck and the bicycle.<sup>11</sup>

After attunement, the lovers experiences what Heidegger calls a “clearing” or “the opening of a shared clearing, a local situation, an existence in which objects can be [meaningfully] encountered” (qtd. in Dreyfus 164). Both Hoffman and Noble use their films to visually represent this term and thereby give a visual and concrete proponent to an ontological

---

<sup>10</sup> On equipment, Heidegger says, “In breakdown the available is not thereby just *observed* and stared at as something occurent; the occurentness which makes itself known is still bound up in the availableness of equipment. Such equipment still does not veil itself in the guise of mere things” (267)

<sup>11</sup> In Noble’s film, Bottom and the mechanicals enter the forest on a motorcycle. This also signifies a merging of Athenian and ethereal, though the ontological implications are not followed through as thoroughly as in Hoffman’s version.

idea. Hoffman achieves an accurate portrayal by having the lovers wake up from Puck's magically-induced slumber just outside of the forest and completely naked except for flower petals that cover them and which one can assume were put there by the fairies. Not only are they waking up in an actual forest clearing, but they have been cleared of all evidence of the night's mishaps (most notably clothes and mud). The fairies, who were seen cleaning their clothes in forest's stream in the previous scene, have placed their clean clothes next to the lovers. This scene gives weight to the idea that it is the *magical* beings that must relieve the lovers of the magical mishaps and facilitate their disclosure in order for them to experience an ontological clearing; their cleaning and repairing the lovers' represent a kind of mending the problems that have occurred in order to restore order and thus reveal a state where disclosure is possible.

Adrian Noble takes a visually different, but still effective, approach to showing the clearing that takes place at the end of the lovers' adventure in the wood. After Oberon and Puck decide to use the pansy to set things right among the lovers, the set of bare floor and hanging light bulbs is shown to be a large, unending body of water. This shot shows a physical clearing away of the wood and thereby the evidence of the night's more unfortunate events which will allow the lovers to move forward ontologically in their relationships. As the shot pans back to the lovers, Puck lures them to sleep on to hammocks where they are lifted out of the wood, clearing them away from the magic and thus allowing them to disclose a world where they can relate as lovers unhampered by magic.

The last step of the lovers' world disclosure come by way of Heidegger's term, "care" or the fully realized and disclosed existence, the culmination and comprehension of the previous ontological steps that allow the lovers to reveal their authentic relationships to each other. As the text shows, there is little resistance from the world and people of Athens in accepting their newly

founded relationships. Both movies cut from the scene of the lovers in their respective “clearings” to them enjoying a banquet dinner and the mechanical’s play with Theseus and Hippolyta. Both films show that their relationships are fully disclosed by showing them as couples fully assimilated back in Athens with no resistance from the outside world. The people around them all smile jovially and the festivities go on with a celebratory atmosphere. If the directors chose to represent their relationships devoid of care, or not fully realized, they could have shown the lovers in dour moods toward each other to perhaps suggesting that magic forced them together unwillingly. However, we can see that care has been established in the fact that their harmonious relationship status is portrayed as undeniable and undisputed.

## VII. Conclusion

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* shows how existence can shift, be thrown, and be unveiled. In this regard, Heidegger and Shakespeare take the same approach when considering existence though their representations of it are very different. To this point, the analysis has been based on Heidegger’s theories and how they elaborate Shakespeare’s play. To conclude, I will show how Shakespeare and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* expound upon Heidegger and his views on ontology.

While Shakespeare did not foresee Heidegger and his theory of ontology, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has the unintentional effect of enlightening us about this very process that Heidegger lays out; this is because Shakespeare’s depiction of ontological development gives Heidegger’s theories a setting, face, and a tangible involvement. He elaborates upon Heidegger’s ontological notions by showing *how* they function on a human level, the process they create, and the results they produce. Most importantly, Shakespeare has the lovers face the possibility of *nothing*, the void that they will experience if they stay in the Athens-as-they-know-it. In doing

this, he provides us with characters who discover the finiteness of their existence; they come to understand that their purpose is to change their way of being or face a life that lacks the possibilities (love) they yearn for. In this he echoes Heidegger's words that

An understanding of being, and with it, an understanding of meaning and purpose, is possible only to a finite existence. One exists finitely, not because he does not in fact last forever, but because to him *nothing* is in advance revealed, and this harsh, inexorable *nothing* alone has the revelatory power to enable him to understand being and so bring him into the dignity and uniqueness of a finitely free existence. (Qtd in King 186)

Shakespeare, in putting his characters face to face with the possibility of *nothing* shows the impetus of the all-important throw; and it is thrownness that brings one into the bright opportunity that is world and so originates the movement of his being.

While Heidegger insists that *Dasein* must have a factual (a physical presence) engagement with the world, Shakespeare shows this engagement in an incredibly detailed way; he gives us the presence of characters in a world where they face contradictions and complications, and where they share problems that are relatable and tangible and where they strive for existential understanding. When considering once more the disclosing function of existential understanding, Shakespeare shows its remarkable achievement is to forethrow possibilities. Shakespeare gave presence to the idea that

To understand being means something like this: To forethrow a possibility in which this sheer "other" to any beings somehow reveals itself. This possibility evidently cannot be one among many others, but must be unique and incomparable. What is the unique possibility that reveals itself in *Dasein*'s here-

being's existence? It is the extreme possibility of the sheer *impossibility* of being-in-the-world-anymore. In this "*impossible*" a *not* is revealed which in advance closes all other possibilities of existence. This *not* belongs to each Dasein alone: it is solely his own being that is at stake, and not another's. The harshness of this *not* is so incomparable and in the strictest sense of the word abysmal that it can only rise from the abyss of Dasein's being, from his thrownness into a world.

(Qtd. in King 365)

Rising from thrownness, Shakespeare shows just how concrete the idea of world disclosure can be. The four characters emerge from their thrownness to show completely revealed, authentic selves, who have clearly achieved triumph over the dread and *nothing* they confronted. The disclosure of being calls one to the task of existing as the place of illumination in the world in face of a despite of this dread. This disclosure, however, cannot happen to some abstract being in general, but only to a factually existing entity, an entity Shakespeare puts before us. The circularity of the problem of being has now come fully to light: the manifestness of *nothing* made it possible for the lovers to understand being, even though their own factual self was needed to make manifest this *nothing*. This is the ground for Heidegger's thesis that ontology cannot be founded upon an "ideal" subject, but only upon the factually existing Dasein, because he and he alone, in his own finite existence, is the place of the transcendental.

Shakespeare, in creating a world where "the course of true love never did run smooth" provides the means and motives for four lovers to exist in, engage with, and transcend the world of *nothing*, to a new plane of existence that is not defined by *who* they love but *how* they discover this love.

## VIII. Bibliography

- Aldama, Frederick Luis. "Race, Cognition, and Emotion: Shakespeare on Film." *College Literature* 33.1 (2006) 197-213. JSTOR. Web. 13 June 2015.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Heidegger and the Modes of World-Disclosure." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 40.2 (1979): 212- 36. JSTOR. Web. 20 May 2014.
- Bretzius, Stephen. *Shakespeare in Theory*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000. Print.
- Brown, John Russell. *Shakespeare and the Theatrical Event*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002. Print.
- Cerf, Walter H. "An Approach to Heidegger's Ontology." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1.2 (1940): 177-90. JSTOR. Web. 30 June 2014.
- Comtois, M.E. "The Hardiness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Theatre Journal* 32.3 (1980): 305-11. JSTOR. Web. 15 June 2014.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991. Print.
- Falk, Florence. "Dream and Ritual Process in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Comparative Drama* 14.3 (1980): 263-79. JSTOR. Web. 30 June 2014.
- Foti, Veronique M. *Heidegger and the Poets*. Atlantic Heights, New Jersey: Humanities Press Int'l, 1992. Print.
- Fuegi, John. "Explorations in No Man's Land: Shakespeare's Poetry as Theatrical Film." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23.1 (1972): 37-49. JSTOR. Web. 14 June 2015.
- Grande, Troni Y., and Garry Sherbert, eds. *Northrop Frye's Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. Print.
- Grassi, Ernesto. *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism*. Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1983. Print.

- Guignon, Charles B. *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Print.
- Hawkins, Sherman. "The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy." *Shakespeare Studies* 3.1 (1967): 62-80. EBSCO. Web. 1 July 2015.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row, 2008. Print.
- Hunt, Maurice. "Individuation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *South Central Review* (1986): 1-13. JSTOR. Web. 14 August 2014.
- Hutcheon, Linda. "On the Art of Adaptation." *Daedalus* 133.2 (2004): 108-11. JSTOR. Web. 5 July 2015.
- Hutton, Virgil. "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Tragedy in Comic Disguise." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 25.2 (1985): 289-305. JSTOR. Web. 4 March 2015.
- Kahn, Coppelia, and Murray M. Schwartz. *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Print.
- King, Magda. *A Guide To Martin Heidegger's Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. Print.
- Leitch, Thomas. "The Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory." *Criticism* 45.2 (2003): 149-71. 1 March 2015.
- Mutter, Matthew. "The Power to Enchant That Comes from Disillusion: W.H. Auden's Criticism of Magical Poetics." *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.1 (2010): 58-85. JSTOR. Web. 16 June 2015.
- Robinson, James E. "The Ritual and Rhetoric of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *PMLA* 83.2 (1968): 380-91. JSTOR. Web. 15 March 2014.

- Schalkwyk, David. "The Role of the Imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 66.1 (1986): 51-65. JSTOR. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Schrader, George A. "Heidegger's Ontology of Human Existence." *The Review of Metaphysics* 10.1 (1956): 35-56. JSTOR. Web. 15 August 2014.
- Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Woodbury, NY: Barron's, 1985. Print.
- Simmons, J. L. "Shakespearean Rhetoric and Realism." *The Georgia Review* 24.4 (1970): 453-71. JSTOR. Web. 6 July 2014.
- Taylor, Michael. "A Darker Purpose in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 9.2 (1969): 259-73. JSTOR. Web. 3 June 2014.
- Upton, John. *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*. 1748 New York: AMS Press, 1973. Print.