Ulrike Küpper

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* IN THE HISTORY OF MUSIC THEATER

William Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) has survived and flourished as a drama for over five centuries. The work has also enjoyed immense popularity in music. Its lyrical verse, its constant use of musical terminology, and its references to and deployment of songs and dances have served to attract major composers over more than four centuries. The book compares their libretti with the original text, and analyzes how alterations in text and structure have affected the nature of Shakespeare's original play – its plot, characterization and lyricism. The study also deals with the constituent elements of music theater, including instrumental music, and, to a lesser extent, with artistic and cinematic representations of Shakespeare's comedy.

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William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
in the History of Music Theater

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"What masque, what music? How shall we beguile
The lazy time, if not with some delight?"
A Midsummer Night's Dream (V.1.40f.)

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INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) has survived and flourished as a drama for over five centuries, and productions are still regularly mounted throughout the world. The work has also enjoyed an important life in music. Its lyrical verse, whose tone closely resembles that of song, its constant use of musical terminology, and its references to and deployment of songs and dances have served to attract major composers over more than four centuries. Shakespeare's comedy has been an important source for the libretti for their lieder and operas, and an inspiration for their instrumental compositions.

The aim of the present dissertation is to compare these libretti with the original text, and to analyze how alterations in text and structure have affected the nature of Shakespeare's original play – its plot, characterization and lyricism. There will be discussion of the ways in which composers of different periods created their individual versions of the play, whether by concentrating on individual scenes or by portraying its totality in music. The present thesis also deals with the constituent elements of 'music theater', including instrumental music, and, to a lesser extent, with artistic and cinematic representations of Shakespeare's comedy.

A: Outline of research

'Shakespeare and music' is a field of research that has been treated in many scholarly publications over the last two centuries. Edward Naylor's *Shakespeare and Music* (1896) was a pioneering work that deals not only with Elizabethan musical history and practice but also explores knowledge of music, songs, dance and the stage as revealed in the works of Shakespeare and of his contemporaries. Shakespeare's knowledge of music was the focus of Sir Frederick Bridge's *Shakespearean Music in the Plays and Early Operas* (1923); as its title suggests, the book concentrates on the songs in Shakespeare's plays and in selected operatic transformations. A slightly different emphasis is discernible in John H. Long's *Shakespeare's Use of Music* (1955), in which the author provides a survey of songs and instrumental music in Elizabethan drama, and examines the role of music as a dramatic device in seven of Shakespeare's comedies. Phyllis Hartnoll is the editor of *Shakespeare in Music* (1964), a thorough study in which well-known scholars such as Roger Fiske and Winton Dean explore Elizabethan stage music, settings of Shakespearean lyrics over the last 400 years,

Shakespeare in opera, and incidental music for performances of the Bard's plays.[1]

While the studies just mentioned sought to be all-encompassing, it is noteworthy that after the turn of the millennium Shakespeare scholars seem to have addressed more specific issues in relation to the theme of 'Shakespeare and Music'. As Stephen Orgel says in the foreword to Ross Duffin's *Shakespeare's Songbook* (2004), the author has undertaken "a remarkable project of recovery"[2] with his unique collection of songs that were popular in the Renaissance era. Duffin deals with the song texts immediately taken from Shakespeare's plays, as well as with borrowed tunes, and the songs that Shakespeare merely alludes to in his plays. Duffin also illustrates how certain songs are embedded in the texture of Shakespeare's dramatic language. In contrast, David Lindley's *Shakespeare and Music* (2006) deals with musical theory and practice in Shakespeare's time. The author analyzes instrumental music and dance in the Elizabethan era in general, before concentrating on *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*. A similar play-related focus is discernible in Daniel Albright's *Musicking Shakespeare* (2007), which concentrates exclusively on three plays: *Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth and A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After initial discussion of several theories and strategies of comparative arts, Albright eventually concentrates on musical transformations of these plays by Berlioz, Purcell, Lampe, Mendelssohn, Korngold and Britten. Julie Sanders examines several facets of musical theater in *Shakespeare and Music* (2007), including adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for ballet, opera (with a focus on Verdi and Britten) and musicals. The treatment of Shakespeare and his plays in film and popular culture is a further major concern of this book.

Moreover, it is noticeable that recent Shakespeare handbooks have tended to include a section devoted to musical transformations of the plays, as with the volumes edited by Ina Schabert (2000),[3] Andrew Dickson (2005)[4] and Martin White (2009).[5] In reviewing publications in the field of 'Shakespeare and Music' it becomes obvious that for all their differences of focus, all such studies try to outline Shakespeare's overall achievement, or deal with a selection of individual plays. Among the works most commonly treated are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.

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[1] Roger Fiske, "Shakespeare in the Concert Hall" (pp. 177-241) and Winton Dean "Shakespeare and Opera" (pp. 89-175), in: Phyllis Hartnoll (ed.), *Shakespeare in Music*, London: Macmillan, 1966.

[2] Stephen Orgel, "Foreword"(pp. 11-14), in: Ross W. Duffin, *Shakespeare's Songbook*, New York: Norton, 2004, p. 14.

[3] Ina Schabert, *Shakespeare-Handbuch*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2000.

[4] Andrew Dickson, *The Rough Guide to Shakespeare*, London: Rough Guides, 2005.

[5] Martin White, *The Shakespeare Handbooks – A Midsummer Night's Dream*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

A Midsummer Night's Dream has received limited attention so far, however. Only Gary Jay Williams's *Our Moonlight Revels* (1997) and Francis Guinle's *The Concord of this Discord* (2003) have dealt exclusively with transformations and treatments of the play in the sister arts. It is therefore the aim of the present thesis to examine the treatment of Shakespeare's early comedy in both the temporal, and, to a more limited extent, the spatial arts over the last five centuries. In order to clarify the methodology adopted in the present discussion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the history of music theater, the concepts of intertextuality, intermediality and interfigurality will first be briefly outlined and classified.

B. Methodological considerations

In methodological terms Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the basic text for the present thesis. From it derive secondary texts such as, in music theater, the libretti. The relation between a basic text and its derivatives manifests itself in categories developed as part of intertextual theory. In terms of these categories Shakespeare's play represents a significant pre-text, the reference unit for its sequels. Over time, this reference unit did not remain as A = A', but exhibited variations such as A1, A2, A3, etc. which are definable more precisely in a grammar of textual secondarity. The same units make these criteria and categories available, which, given the generation of derivative texts, can be developed as transformations of the pre-text. The methods of transformation are:

1. Addition of text units, leading to an amplification of the pre-text;
2. Subtraction of text units, leading to an abbreviation of the pre-text;
3. Permutation of text units, leading to a readjustment of parts of the pre-text;
4. Substitution of text units, leading to a replacement of parts of the pre-text by different, external textual entities.

These transformational procedures generate rhetorical figures, which Quintilian categorized in his opus *Institutio Oratoria* I.5.38 as follows: 1. *adiectio*, 2. *detractio*, 3. *transmutatio*, 4. *immutatio*. These descriptive categories have recently helped in the construction of a modernized model of rhetorical figures on a semiotic-linguistic basis, as Wolfram Ax has shown.[6]

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[6] Wolfram Ax, "*Quadripertita ratio*: Bemerkungen zur Geschichte eines aktuellen Kategoriensystems (*adiectio*, *detractio*, *transmutatio, immutatio*" 1984), in: Id., *Lexis und Logos: Studien zur antiken Grammatik und Rhetorik*. Farouk Grewing (ed.). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000, pp. 190-208. Ax refers to Heinrich F. Plett's "System der rhetorischen Stilistik" in *Textwissenschaft und Textanalyse: Semiotik, Linguistik, Rhetorik*. Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, ²1979. This has been republished in *Systematische Rhetorik: Konzepte und Analysen*. München: Fink, 2000.

The same concept can be applied to the classification of quotations,[7] another intextual phenomenon. In the case of the libretti, the derivational transformations have the following effect:

In the case of an addition (*adiectio*) of new text units to the pre-text *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an expansion is discernible, which can be achieved through additional episodes. In the case of a deletion (*detactio*) of original text units, episodes or an entire strand of the pre-text, as for example the mechanicals' play-within-a-play, are eliminated. The inversion (*transmutatio*) of textual segments of the pre-text can affect the chronological order of events, as is the case in Homer's *Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid*. In these examples, the plot is not presented from the beginning (*ab ovo*), but *mediis in rebus* and thereby portraying past events in flashback mode. In the case of a substitution (*immutatio*) of text units, original passages of the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* pre-text are replaced by text units 'borrowed' from another pre-text, which serve to transform the sequel text into a pastiche or a collage.

The system of pre-text transformations described here may be presented as follows:

Model I: Intertextuality

transformations	pre-text: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
1. addition (*adiectio*)	amplification, expansion
2. deletion (*detractio*)	abbreviation, omission
3. permutation (*transmutatio*)	inversion of text segments
4. substitution (*immutatio*)	beginning not *ab ovo* but *mediis in rebus*; by different pre-text; collage / pastiche

Taking into account that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not just a concatenation of linguistic text units, but also contains songs – that is, musical settings of texts – the methodological approach gains a further dimension that goes beyond mere intertextuality.

Since diverse media are referred to, intermediality seems to be the more appropriate term. Two basic types are discernible here:

a) Intermediality and its interaction with temporal arts
b) Intermediality and its interaction with temporal and spatial arts

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[7] Cf. Heinrich F. Plett, "The Poetics of Quotatio", in: Id., *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae.* Sectio Linguistica 17 (1986), pp. 293-313; Heinrich F. Plett, "Intertextualities", in: Id., (ed.), *Intertextuality*. Berlin//New York: W. de Gruyter: 1991, pp. 1-29, here: pp. 12-19.

This classification follows Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's aesthetic theory in *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen von Malerei und Poesie* (1766). According to this theory poetry is a temporal art, because its contents can only be perceived and appreciated in its linguistic sequence through a process of sequential reading and listening.

This is different, however, in the visual arts, whose object is solely perceived through instant or repeated visual examination. Concerning intermediality of the temporal arts literature and music, several modes of transformation exist:

Model II: Intermediality
a) literature and music

1. synthesis of music and word	integrated in Shakespeare's original; masque, singspiel, musical, ode
2. word + word / music	music theater (opera, musical)
3. vocal music	songs
4. music only	instrumental music (program music / absolute music), textless portrayal

b) literature and the visual arts

A. painting (spatial art)	*kairos*, book illustrations
B. film (temporal art)	adaptations; same modes of transformation as in *Model I*

Ad a 1.) a synthesis of text and music remains, as in Shakespeare's original, but in an alternative mode, i.e. with different texts and different music, as in masques, singspiels and musicals.
Ad a 2.) addition: parts of Shakespeare's text that have not hitherto been set to music, are now set to music, i.e. in an opera or musical;
Ad a 3.) subtraction: Shakespeare's lyrics (songs: vocal music) are separated from the music and reduced to mere text, whereas other text passages are transformed into song;
Ad a 4.) substitution: Shakespeare's text is entirely replaced by program music or absolute music; a textless portrayal.

With reference to the intermediality of spatial arts, texts and visual arts, there is only one mode of transformation: the substitution of text through the selection of a creative moment and rendering it fixed in the *kairos* of a visual depiction (i.e.: painting, book illustrations). Taking into account that visual arts, too, possess a spatial variant, namely modern film, an intriguing parallel between the two art forms becomes discernible, that operates with the same modes of transformation

(addition, subtraction and permutation) as examined in Model I. They are intended to provide the present thesis with a mutual enlightenment of the arts.

Model III: Interfigurality

interfigurality	a literary figure is taken from its original context and inserted into a new fictional context (i.e.: Falstaff)

A special kind of intertextuality is interfigurality, a term coined by Wolfgang G. Müller, which applies "whenever a literary figure is extricated from its original fictional context and inserted into a new fictional context." [8] Müller notes that it is essential to realize that "such figures are more than duplicates [because] they are marked by a characteristic tension between similarity and dissimilarity with their models from the pre-texts."[9] This, as well as the various procedures of pre-text transformation identified above, will be alluded to in the relevant chapters of the present thesis.

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[8] Wolfgang G. Müller, "Interfigurality", in: Heinrich F. Plett (ed.), *Intertextuality*, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991, p. 107.
[9] Id., p. 109.

I. PROLOGUE: *SHAKESPEARE'S A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM AS LIBRETTO*

John H. Long has noted that "Elizabethan drama occupies a unique position in the history of both drama and music in that it is an art form which has firmly integrated the sister arts – poetry, drama, dance and music."[1] During the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) the English language as well as English achievements in music, sacred and secular, vocal and instrumental, reached a remarkable creative high point. It was through the efforts of composers such as William Byrd and Thomas Morley, not least their support for the cultivation and practice of music in Elizabethan and Jacobean society, that the English Renaissance came also to be known as "the Golden Age of English Music".[2] The newly developed printing press also helped to ensure that all kinds of instrumental and vocal music, especially contemporary English airs, were enjoyed "by all ranks of society and played a continuously active part in all social life."[3]

1. Shakespeare's knowledge of music

So numerous and varied are the musical references and allusions in Shakespeare's plays that few aspects of contemporary musical knowledge fail to find memorable expression. Shakespeare's frequent use of musical terminology in his dramatic writing suggests that he had a more than superficial knowledge of both the art of composition and the design of musical instruments. His knowledge, both theoretical and practical, included familiarity with the idea of the music of the spheres, and an interest in the curative power of music and its effect on human emotions. His "understanding of the dramatic and lyrical effects of actual song, dance, and instrumental performance"[4] is discernible in several of his plays. Though the main sources of Shakespeare's musical awareness cannot be identified for certain, Thomas Morley and John Dowland are two Renaissance composers whose names are often mentioned by scholars when the question of Shakespeare's musical associations is addressed. Certainly, Shakespeare was familiar with Morley's *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597), though this work is unlikely to have been the sole source of his knowledge.

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[1] John H. Long, *Shakespeare in Music*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961, p. 195.
[2] Lewis Lockwood, *Renaissance*, in: Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 21, London: Macmillan, 2001, p. 179.
[3] Reginald W. Ingram, *The True Concord of Well-Tuned Sounds: Shakespeare and Music*, Review of National Literatures 3:2, 1978, p. 140.
[4] Nan Cooke Carpenter, "Shakespeare and Music: Unexplored Areas", in: Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Arts*, New York: Garland, 1999, p. 125.

Louis Marder's *The Story of Shakespeare's Reputation*[5] notes that the playwright's school years as well as his subsequent life in London contributed significantly to his musical education. It is very likely that Shakespeare studied Pythagoras's treatise on the music of the spheres, Ficino's works on magic and music, as well as the same author's theories about the influence of music on man's spirit. Shakespeare's schoolmasters at Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School seem to have adhered to the principle of "bene le bene con bene can",[6] with music regarded as an important element in the overall education of a gentleman.

Moreover, through his acquaintance with musicians, composers and scholars such as John Daniel, Will Kemp, Henry Lawes and John Bull, Shakespeare will have heard discussions on instruments, composition, modes of playing and singing, and in this way developed still further his musical knowledge. Contemporary theatrical practice will also have influenced him, notably the singing of professional minstrels, the interpolation of popular songs, and the frequent use of music before and after performances. The effect of these and other influences was to generate a remarkable variety of musical allusions in Shakespeare's plays, with some pattern of use discernible. As Edward Naylor points out:

> The musical references in the text are most commonly found in the comedies, and are generally the occasion or instrument of word-quibbling and witticisms; while the musical stage directions belong chiefly to the tragedies, and are mostly of military nature.[7]

In the following discussion Shakespeare's use of musical terms, his choice of songs and instrumental music, and their dramatic function in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be examined in some detail.

2. Musical passages in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and their function

The artistry of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is many-faceted, with its intricate "blend of low comedy and high comedy, of the supernatural and the natural, the masque form and the dramatic form, of prose, poetry, and music."[8] Yet, for all their diversity, these elements are deftly combined in the play and achieve a convincing dramatic unity. There is good reason to suggest that in its structure *A Midsummer Night's Dream* resembles a musical composition. In his book *The Concord of this Discord* Francis Guinle argues that with its four dramatic

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[5] Louis Marder, *His Exits and his Entrances: The Story of Shakespeare's Reputation*, London: Murray, 1964.
[6] Translation: Write well, translate well and sing well.
[7] Edward W. Naylor, *Shakespeare and Music*, New York: DaCapoPress, 1965, pp. 3f.
[8] John H. Long, *Shakespeare in Music*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961, p. 82.

settings Shakespeare's play resembles at times the polyphonic style[9] of composition practiced in the Renaissance era. While the ducal couple, young lovers, fairies, and mechanicals are four apparently independent entities, their plots are constantly interlaced. In the following analysis, a series of musical scenes from the play will be explored which may be said to contribute to the play's overall "architecture polyphonique".[10]

The spoken verse in the play is various in form and lyrical in tone, as can be seen, for example, in the fairy's "Over hill, over dale" (II.1.2-15) self-introduction as a servant of Titania, or in Oberon's scheming description of Titania's bower in "I know a bank" (II.2.249-58). The transition between lyrical verses and songs is smoothly managed in this comedy, and the songs and dances are as much an integral part of the drama as the set speeches.

In general, it may be said that Shakespeare's purpose in using music in the play is to differentiate between the worlds of the fairies and the mortals. Brooks identifies an interesting dramatic interplay between mortal and fairy music. Titania falls asleep to the fairies' artful lullaby, and awakes to the folk-song of the "translated" Bottom, 'The ousel cock, so black of hue' (III.1.120-28). Bottom's down-to-earth taste in music is made clear in the play: "I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the tongs and the bones" (VI.1.28f.). The lullaby directed at the Fairy Queen, the popular air 'You spotted snakes' (II.2.9-23), is an integral part of the dramatic action. Titania must sleep, otherwise Oberon might not have been able to cast the love-juice spell on her. The song and dance of her fairies as requested by Titania's "Come, now a roundel and a fairy song" (II.2.1) serves as a ritual to protect the sleeping Fairy Queen from harm ("Weaving spiders come not near", II.2.19).[11]

A recent editor notes that "This pattern of mortal music which awakens, fairy music which induces sleep, is repeated in the instrumental music at the dénouement."[12] While Oberon and Titania "rock the ground" (IV.1.85) in reconciliation, the four lovers and Bottom still lie sleeping, overcome by Titania's request for "Soft music [...] such as charmeth sleep!" (IV.1.82). It is the curative power of the fairy music that restores the sleeping mortals to their senses. In order to enhance the supernatural illusion, the performing musicians

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[9] In music, polyphony (from the Greek πολύς /po´lis/ many and φωνή /fo´ni/ voice) is a texture consisting of two or more independent melodic voices, as opposed to music with just a single voice (monophony). Polyphony consists of "several parts of equal importance": Wolf Frobenius, "Polyphony", in: Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 20, London: Macmillan, 2001, p. 75.

[10] Francis Guinle, *The Concord of this Discord – La structure musicale du 'Songe d'une nuit d'été'*, Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2003, p. 42.

[11] A *roundel* is a seventeenth-century English dance, in which the participants took each other by the hand and formed a circle. The most popular of these roundels were called Ronde, Tresque and Carole.

[12] Harold Brooks (ed.), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, London: Thomson, 2001, p. cxxiii.

were probably hidden from the audience.[13] In addition to this demonstration of the fairies' magical powers, Shakespeare introduces music at this point in order to emphasize that "the end of the fairy strife and the disenchantment of the mortals clearly mark the turning point of the comedy."[14] The young lovers are finally roused by the off-stage wound hunting horns of Theseus, the herald of a new day; "The hunting horns end the [fairy] spell and return the lovers to a world of reality."[15] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play that musically and dramatically follows the principle of order and disorder. When discord occurs in the fairy world, human affairs are similarly disrupted. The fairy rulers' dance is not only a sign of their personal reconciliation but also symbolizes the restored annual cycle of the four seasons which depends upon them,[16] and at the same time it foreshadows the concord still to be achieved by the mortals.

The "very tragical mirth" (V.1.57) of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, enacted by the mechanicals for the wedding festivities at Theseus's court in Athens ("What masque, what music?" V.1.40), is a play-within-a-play at the end of Shakespeare's comedy. The mechanicals' "tedious brief" (V.1.56) scene of *Pyramus and Thisbe* offers an inversion, in both matter and manner, of the framing of the lovers' plot, and mirrors the tragic potential of the conflict between Egeus and the couple Lysander and Hermia, even though this goes unnoticed by the stage audience. The performance ends with a "bergomask" (V.1.347), an element taken from masque tradition and the only dance in the play not performed by the fairies. Though popular, the bergomask was often supposed to be a clumsy and "ridiculous imitation of the movements of the peasants of Bergamo".[17] So, once again, Shakespeare has used an artistic device to highlight clearly the distinction between the natural and supernatural worlds. At the end of the dance, a bell announces the midnight hour: "'tis almost fairy time" (V.1.350). Its tolling separates the court solemnities from the fairies' masque of blessing that follows.

Shakespeare deploys other elements from the masque tradition, later identified by Ben Jonson (see Chapter II.3) as the ultimate masque and anti-masque antithetical pattern. The resolution of discord and the reestablishment and confirmation of universal concord, which is central to the structure of a masque, can be found in all four plot strands within the comedy: Titania and Oberon's quarrel in the fairy world is eventually resolved, and so are the worldly marriage confusions of Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius. Theseus's wooing quest for Hippolyta has already achieved a happy ending in the play's prelude, "I woo'd thee with my sword,/ And won thy love doing thee injuries"

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[13] John H. Long, *Shakespeare in Music*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961, p. 91.
[14] Id., p. 93.
[15] Id., p. 95.
[16] Harold Brooks (ed.), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, London: Thomson, 2001, p. cxxiii.
[17] Alan Brissenden, *Shakespeare and Dance*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 45.

(I.1.16-17). And the mechanicals can perform their "very tragical mirth" (V.1.57) when Bottom rejoins them after Puck has delivered him from the ass's head.

As Harold Brooks has remarked, "For Shakespeare and in the thought of his time the harmony of music and movement in the dance signified concord."[18] In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as in several of his other plays, Shakespeare deployed these elements "to prepare or accompany the supernatural".[19] He knew precisely when and how to make music serve a dramatic end. Unfortunately, not a single contemporary melody from any of the original *A Midsummer Night's Dream* songs has survived. In *Shakespeare's Songbook*, Ross Duffin's remarkable study in textual and melodic reconstruction, he admits that most of the song texts included in Shakespeare's plays survived "without any indication of [their] original melody".[20]

Nevertheless, the interplay of natural and supernatural elements, the multi-stranded plot with its different character groups, its story of star-crossed lovers, and its fast-changing relationships between the sexes and within the social classes served to attract several operatic and symphonic composers over the following centuries, all of them keen to draw on elements from Shakespeare's comedy in preparing the libretto for their compositions. The following chapters seek to analyze the nature of these musical responses – the extent to which they served Shakespeare's dramatic purposes or were more focused on promoting the composers' independent musical aims.

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[18] Harold Brooks (ed.), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, London: Thomson, 2001, p. cxxiv.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ross W. Duffin, *Shakespeare's Songbook*, New York: Norton, 2004, p. 480.

II. OBERON: FROM EDMUND SPENSER'S *FAERIE QUEENE* (1590) TO HENRY PURCELL'S *THE FAIRY QUEEN* (1692)

1. The Jacobean court masque: history and development

The modern reader may regard the court masque as a form of drama because, for the most part, only the texts of these elaborate entertainments survive. But to the contemporary spectator a masque was much more than its text. A seventeenth-century audience would witness a performance of three hours, consisting largely of music, dancing, pageantry and spectacular scenic effects. It is not until the time of James I that court entertainments begin to be designed by playwrights on a regular basis. The best and most characteristic Tudor and Elizabethan masques are the work of musicians and poets.

English masques are rooted in various traditional court entertainments such as intermedi and elaborate pageants, as well as popular customs such as folk and mystery plays, guisings, mummings and dumb shows.
A masque is an open form of play that, as a courtly entertainment, appeals to its audience directly. Not only can its topic be the actual court in which it is performed, but also the masquers will be members of that royal or aristocratic audience and can frequently descend from the stage and join the audience during the final dance. These revels signal the "breakdown of the barrier between stage and spectator",[1] between performance and reality, and serve to make allegorical and symbolic elements considerably more meaningful.

The word masque was often used in the sixteenth century simply to mean masquerade. At the time the form served both as a celebration of the court and an aristocratic entertainment. For Jacobean poets like Ben Jonson the idealization of virtue as embodied by king and aristocracy was a moral act. Accordingly the Jonsonian masque was a "celebration of the court's virtues"[2] and must be seen in the light of poems like *To Penshurst* (1616), which aim to instruct through praise. Every masque closed by merging spectator with performer, absorbing the courtly audience into the idealized world of the poet's vision. At the court of James I the masque was a celebration of his authority, an assertion of royal will, and an indication of the monarch's sense of his place within the commonwealth, and, ultimately, the universe. The Stuart monarchy thus "used the masque to foster an exalted conception of the divine right of kings."[3]

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[1] Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 26.
[2] Mary Chan, *Music in the Theatre of Ben Jonson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 136.
[3] John Creaser, "'The present aid of this occasion': the setting of *Comus*", in David Lindley (ed.) *The Court Masque*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 118.

The masque, both as Jonson received it from his Elizabethan predecessors[4] and as he developed it, is invariably about the dissolution of discord and the reestablishment or confirmation of a social, political and, in macrocosmic terms, universal concord. Antitheses, paradoxes and the transition from disorder to order are fundamental to its nature. The monarch is always the central figure[5] and even in cases where Queen Anne or Prince Henry was the nominal protagonist (as in *The Masque of Queens*, 1609 and *Oberon – The Fairy Prince*, 1611), the force animating the idealizing vision is unmistakably the king. Royal Christmas festivities and wedding ceremonies were appropriate occasions for the performance of masques; Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*, for example, was presented on Twelfth Night 1605.

Although the Jonsonian masque underwent structural changes over three decades, it can generally be defined as a sequence consisting of anti-masque – masque – revels.[6] The anti-masque element involves physical ugliness and menace, a grotesque acrobatic entertainment, and represents the antithesis of the masque and revels. The transition from anti-masque to masque is a metamorphosis from a world of chaos to the ideal harmony of the micro- and macrocosms as personified by the king's realm. The social dances that followed were the revels. They usually began with pavanes, slow stately dances in quadruple time that are referred to in masque texts as "measures". These were followed by livelier dances such as galliards, corantos and voltas. There was no fixed duration for such revels; they could last for an hour or more until one of the actors drew attention to the elegance of the dancers and the lateness of the hour.[7]

It is true that the masque combined self-congratulation and conspicuous consumption on a grand scale. It was not uncommon for the king to spend £3000 – the equivalent of several hundred thousand dollars today – on a production that would be performed only once or twice and witnessed by no more than a thousand people.

For Jonson the form was didactic and moral rather than dramatically spectacular, providing a logical concomitant to satiric comedy on the one hand and eulogistic poetry on the other. The type of masque that had been popular in England for almost a century before the emergence of the Jonsonian tradition took the form of an allegorical procession with long didactic speeches, as in Samuel Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, which the royal court had seen in 1604. The primary qualities of the traditional English masque were music and dancing. Though the Elizabethans began to view masque in more literary terms,

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[4] For a discussion of the usual structure or form of the Stuart masque, see Andrew Sabol, *Songs and Dances from the Stuart Masque*, Brown University Press, 1959, p. 1.
[5] Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 37.
[6] Mary Chan, *Music in the Theatre of Ben Jonson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 140.
[7] Ibid.

the court entertainment was primarily regarded as the product of musician, choreographer and costumer. Dialogue was at best peripheral. These early masques opened with a lengthy prologue, sung by a solo voice accompanied by a lute, in which the contents, form and ideological agenda of the masque were identified. Other characteristics of the early English masque included elaborate stage directions that were read out aloud, and relied on the audience's theatrical imagination to augment the limited range of stage effects. The text and production of these masques tended to be curiously independent from each other. Ben Jonson provided descriptions of costumes and scenic devices in his masques. In addition to the demands of its own generic form, the masque also had to conform to the complex rules of court protocol and decorum. It was permissible for masquers to be dancers because dancing was the prerogative of every lady and gentleman worthy of the name. Acting, however, was out of question; hence all the speaking parts were performed by professional actors. The contributions of royal masquers such as Queen Anne in *The Masque of Queens* or Prince Henry in *Oberon – The Fairy Prince* were confined to non-speaking roles.

When Ben Jonson first incorporated the anti-masque, with its grotesque and acrobatic elements, into *The Masque of Queens* in 1609 the theatrical world became firmly established within the form's ethical and dramatic structure. Jonson's anti-masque figures are "hags or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, etc. the opposites to good Fame."[8] They are intended to serve as the antithesis of those virtues represented by the personified figures of the main masque. The negativity of the anti-masque world helps to explain and validate the truth of the revels, for it is through the anti-masque that the audience comprehends the ways in which the masque's ideal world is real. Thus conceived, the worlds of the anti-masque and revels are mutually exclusive and no confrontation and communication between them is possible.

Moral victory in a Jonsonian masque, the triumph of virtue, is achieved not only through the work of the poet and playwright, but also by means of the visual effects created by the brilliant architect and stage designer Inigo Jones. It was he who introduced for the first time to the English stage the full resources of Italian theatrical technology. Furthermore, the elaborate music of composers such as Alfonso Ferrabosco II, Anthony Holborne and Robert Johnson served to complete Jonson's masques as spectacular entertainments. An example of the necessity for and effectiveness of Inigo Jones's ingenious and elaborate stage machinery is the scene change at the end of the anti-masque in

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[8] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens*, ll. 15f.

The Masque of Queens:

In the heat of their dance on the sudden was heard a sound of loud music, as if many instruments had made a blast; with which not only the hags themselves but the hell into which they ran quite vanished, and the whole face of the scene altered, scarce suffering the memory of such a thing. But in the place appeared a glorious and magnificent building figuring the House of Fame.[9]

The process of transition from anti-masque to masque is a key metamorphosis and the theatrical machinery is crucial to its successful accomplishment. The stage technology no longer constitutes a separate entity, but has become an integral part of the dramatic form. After 1609 Jonson began to conceive of the anti-masque not as a simple antithesis to the world of the revels, but essentially as another aspect of it, a world that can ultimately be accommodated by, or even included within, the idealized world of the main masque.

2. Oberon: Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Elizabethan literature

The figure of Oberon as represented in Shakespeare's comedy, Jonson's masque and Purcell's semi-opera, lacks the mythological associations of figures such as Proteus, Theseus or Mercutio, all of whom are "literary representations of named personages from mythology, legend, earlier literature or history".[10] Although the medieval origins of Oberon can be identified, he never achieved the legendary status of King Arthur or Sir Gawain.

Oberon's ancestry is Germanic: it derives from Alberich, a legendary sorcerer and king of elves who can be found in the mythology and epic sagas of the Frankish Merovingian Dynasty of the fifth and eighth centuries AD. In the *Nibelungenlied*, a late-twelfth-century Middle High German epic poem, he is a dwarf who guards the treasure of the Nibelungen, but is overcome by Siegfried. In his opera *Rheingold* (1869) Richard Wagner includes the dwarf Alberich from the Nibelungen cycle as guardian of the Rhinegold treasure. Under the name Elberich, Oberon's ancestor also appears as a dwarf in *Das Heldenbuch*, a collection of German epic poetry from the thirteenth century.

These origins are complex and can be traced to literary sources and analogues. Among the sources are early Germanic or Celtic tales. The analogues are more elusive and indicate that aspects of the figure may derive from wisps of Christian tradition, European mythology and history. From these early roots Oberon emerges in French literature as Auberon in the fifteenth-century prose romance *Huon de Bordeaux* and finally enters English literature in 1515 as Oberon in Lord Berners' *Huon of Bordeaux*. For over 300 years thereafter, playwrights, poets and prose writers continued to appropriate Oberon, as with

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[9] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens*, ll. 334ff.

[10] Siegbert Salomon Prawer, *Comparative Literary Studies*, London: Duckworth, 1973, pp. 99f.

his contrasting representation in Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* (1590) and Margaret Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* (1653). James Robinson Planché's libretto, written in 1826 for Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Oberon: or the Elf King's Oath*, marks the diminutive monarch's final appearance in an English work.

In an examination of the various appearances of Oberon in English literature, the following issues merit attention: What elements of the Oberon figure remain the same? How do the representations of Oberon vary over time? And in what ways do these various depictions reflect particular cultural and historical contexts? Oberon proved to be a usefully flexible figure for appropriation as a representative of political and cultural values, especially by Renaissance and seventeenth-century authors. Different sources emphasize different aspects of Oberon's character, and this variety provided a stimulus for many authors. Vernon L. Harward draws attention to Oberon's "physical beauty and supernatural power, as well as [his authority over] wealthy and vast kingdoms";[11] while William Calin argues that he incorporates aspects of a figure of nature who represents the "benign, protective power of destiny."[12]

The unique lineage and familial connections of Oberon are explained in two of his appearances in medieval French romance: the late-thirteenth-century poem *Le Roman D'Auberon* and (already mentioned) the fifteenth-century prose *Huon de Bordeaux*. The prologue to the former work states that Oberon's great-grandfather was Judas Maccabaeus, his father Julius Caesar and his mother Morgan le Fay. In this lineage Oberon has a twin brother, Saint George. In the prose work, Oberon's genealogy is somewhat simplified, but no less intriguing, since, while his father is still Julius Caesar, his mother is now a fairy lady from a secret island. We also learn that Oberon is the step-uncle of Alexander the Great.

These two different genealogies accompany Oberon during his emergence as a significant figure in English literature. He comes with a past, and is then soon reinvented within a variety of complex Renaissance cultural, political and historical contexts. Some of Oberon's residual associations remain, but he soon takes on new meaning in relation, for example, to King Henry VIII and the Tudor monarchy. These new resonances serve to problematize the figure fruitfully and to encourage subsequent authors to explore new possibilities.
In 1590, 75 years after Oberon's debut, the figure re-emerges in Book II, Canto I, 6 of Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene*: "When with king *Oberon* he [a

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[11] Patricia Brooke Worrall, *The Figure of Oberon in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Literature*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998, p. 6.
[12] William Calin, *The Epic Quest: Studies in Four Old French Chansons de Geste*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1966, p. 207.