

How Shall We Find the Concord of Discord?*

– Bottom and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Deconstructors
and Weavers in Bottomless World

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** 단독저자, 명지대학교 영문학과 조교수, jinlee@mju.ac.kr

셰익스피어(William Shakespere)의 희곡 『한여름 밤의 꿈』(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)에 등장하는 Nick Bottom은 신체가 변하기도 하고 아테네의 귀족 계급, 노동자 계급, 그리고 요정 등 다양한 세계를 경험하는 유일한 인물이다. Bottom은 직공, 배우, 그리고 요정 여왕의 연인으로서 남다른 경험을 하게 되는데, 이를 통해 자유롭고, 대담하고, 유머가 넘치면서도 복잡한 태도를 보이게 된다. 배우로서, 그리고 희곡을 대하는 한 독자로서, Bottom은 작가/독자, 배우/관객과 같은 관습적인 경계를 허문다. 결과적으로 그는 본인이 배우로 역할을 맡은 『피라모스와 티스베』(*Pyramus and Thisbe*)의 장르를 바꾸며 비극/희극의 장르의 경계마저도 허물게 된다. 게다가, 『한여름밤의 꿈』을 통해, Bottom은 상상/현실의 경계를 허물며 극 중에 발생하는 여러 불협화음들을 화합으로 이끄는 데 일조한다. 그의 이름과 직업이 나타내듯이, 그는 극에서 중요한 기초이자 직공으로 불화로 보이는 이야기들과 세계들을 조화롭고 연합하도록 만든다. 이러한 Bottom을 해석하기 위해서는 기호학적인 접근이 매우 유용하지만 현재까지 『한여름밤의 꿈』을 기호학적으로 해석한 연구는 많지 않다. 본 논문에서는 데리다(Jacques Derrida)의 해체주의적 접근을 바탕으로 연극과 희곡에 대한 케어 일람(Keir Elam)의 기호학적 분석, 그리고 로버트 이니스(Robert E. Innis)의 자아 인식으로서의 재현이라는 개념을 통해 Bottom이 『한여름밤의 꿈』에서 보여주는 특별한 태도와 역할을 분석한다.

열쇠어 : 한여름 밤의 꿈, 데리다, 케어 일람, 로버트 이니스, 해체주의, 연극 기호학, 재현

I. Introduction

In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Nick Bottom is a very interesting character. He is the only one in the play who was physically transformed and who experienced all the different worlds, such those of the Athenian nobility, the mechanicals, and the fairies. Due to his experience as a weaver, an actor, and the Fairy Queen's beloved with an ass's head, Bottom shows his free and daring, mirthful, and complex attitudes in all the worlds. As an actor and a reader, he deconstructs the

conventional borders between author and reader, actor and audience.¹⁾ As a result, he changes the genre of the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* and deconstructs the conventional opposition between tragedy and comedy. Furthermore, through *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he also deconstructs the opposition between imagination and reality and on the whole weaves the discordances among the different stories into concord. Like his name and occupation, he becomes a significant bottom (foundation) and a weaver²⁾ who makes the seemingly discordant stories and worlds concordant and united.

While semiotic reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be helpful to understand Bottom's unique characteristics, only a few articles have taken such approach to the play. Drawing upon rhetorical and semiotic theories, SunHee Kim Gertz discusses how the tensions between dramatic and performance texts create authorial audiences in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.³⁾ Sabrina Mazzali-Lurati explores the semiotic-communicative structure in the hypertextual transpositions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* produced by BBC Education in 1996.⁴⁾ Bernard Dauenhauer challenges Derridean and Barthesian notions of

1) My reading of Bottom as deconstructing these conventional borders has drawn upon SunHee Kim Gertz's illuminating article, "Authorial Audiences in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Semiotica* 106:1/2, 1995, pp.153~70.

2) David Marshall points out the mechanicals' occupations as follows: "[A]ll of the mechanicals are concerned with some form or manner of joining. Carpenter, joiner, weaver, bellows mender, tinker, tailor; their occupations enact the preoccupations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Two construct or put together, two mend and repair, one weaves and one sews. All join apart or mend what has been rent, broken, or sundered." Marshall, David, "Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *ELH* 49:3, 1982, p.562.

3) Gertz, 1995.

4) Mazzali-Lurati, Sabrina, "Here is the Author! Hyperlinks as Constitutive Rules of Hypertextual Communication," *Semiotica* 167:1/4, 2007, pp.135~68.

“author” and “text” by examining the 1980 staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the University of Georgia.⁵⁾ In this article, I will use Derrida's deconstructionist approach, Keir Elam's semiotic analysis of theater and drama, and Robert E. Innis's notion of representation as a self-recognition to understand Bottom's attitudes and roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

II. A Brief Summary of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The play, written in 1594-1595, contains five acts in two different locations, Athens and the woods outside Athens, as it follows two pairs of young lovers trying to sort out their relationships, a group of amateur actors who also belong to the working class, as well as two older pairs of lovers, Athens' Theseus and his bride-to-be Hippolyta, as well as the Fairy King and Queen. The play begins with Theseus, Duke of Athens, looking forward to his upcoming marriage to Hippolyta. His happiness is disrupted when his servant, Egeus complains that this daughter will not marry Demetrius, but prefers Lysander. Lysander and Hermia plan to elope. Helena, who loves Demetrius, learns of their plan and decides to report this to Lysander. They all survive in the woods, where the King and Queen of Fairies argue over the possession of a young boy.

The young Athenian lovers have gone through difficulties and discordances throughout the play. From the beginning, because of her love of Lysander, Hermia would be put to death or forced to live the austere single life as a nun forever if she refuses to wed Demetrius

5) Dauenhauer, Bernard, "Authors, Audiences, and Texts," *Human Studies* 5, 1982, pp.137~46.

whom she does not love at all. On the other hand, Helena loves Demetrius who loves not her but Hermia. Helena has to put up with disgrace as a lady because her wooing Demetrius does not conventionally belong to a female role. What is worse, in the woods, due to Puck's mistake not theirs, the four lovers find themselves mismatched without knowing the reason. Though they are well-matched and happy in the end, their experience in the play is both tragic and comic on the whole.

The older lovers, Theseus and Hippolyta do not seem to be only happy and in concord with each other. As Theseus says, he “wooed [her] with [his] sword” and “won [her] love doing injuries to [her]” (1.1.16-17). Thus, Hippolyta will marry someone who was once an enemy and she still might have bitterness in her heart. David Marshall points out that “Hippolyta speaks only once in the first scene” and “she doesn't speak again until the fourth act.”⁶⁾ Also, in contrast to Theseus's impatience to marry her, Hippolyta does not show “any sign of either happiness or willingness.”⁷⁾ Furthermore, from Theseus' saying to Philostrate that “Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments, / Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth, / Turn melancholy forth to funerals; / The pale companion is not for our pomp” (1.1.12-15), Marshall infers that Theseus says thus because “he has heard and seen a mournful melancholy in his bride-to-be, not a happy willingness.”⁸⁾

Likewise, from the beginning, the fairy couple, Oberon and Titania, argue with each other. Oberon is jealous of the changeling boy whom Titania does not surrender to him. While arguing for the boy, they

6) Marshall, p.548.

7) Ibid., p.548.

8) Ibid., p.549.

accuse each other of infidelity. To resolve their conflict—to get the changeling boy from her Oberon makes her fall in love with another creature and puts up with another kind of her infidelity. On the other, Titania is charmed and in love with Bottom by the love potion.

In contrast to the lovers, the mechanicals do not seem to have any problem with their lovers. Without knowing the Athenian lovers' difficulties, they work hard in order to celebrate the Athenian lovers' nuptial day and entertain them. While rehearsing *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Bottom is translated and beloved by the fairy queen, Titania. By means of Bottom, Titania and Oberon get along again in the end and the newly weds can have a good time in their wedding day.

III. Looking at Meaning in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by means of Deconstruction and Semiotics

1. Relevant Theories

1) Derrida and Loosening Signifieds and Signifiers

Although Derrida's essay on "Différance" is not specifically related to theater, there are aspects that are relevant here. The theater presents what is written in the dramatic texts, "what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible."⁹⁾ When the dramatic text is translated/transformed into theater, we have to acknowledge that the "original" characters or the "original" production created by the author is not necessarily present and what we see on stage is just one of the possible productions that has in

9) Derrida, Jacques, "Différance," *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p.279.

all likelihood never been and will never be identical to the “original.” The original signified is presently impossible and differed. In this sense, the verb “to differ” that Jacques Derrida defines in his essay “Différance” can help to understand the staged reality of the theater.

The verb “to differ” [*différer*] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until “later” what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible...

In the one case “to differ” signifies nonidentity; in the other case, it signifies the order of the same. Yet there must be a common, although entirely different [*différente*], root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another.¹⁰⁾

Differed meaning and text can be explained in terms of the relation between the signified and the signifier. In “Différance,” Derrida explains how the signified (the concept part of language) does not coincide with the signifier (the “material or physical image” of language).¹¹⁾ Based on the Saussurean idea of the arbitrariness of signs and the differential character of signs, Derrida argues as follows:

The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of

10) Ibid., p.279.

11) Ibid., 2004, p.285.

differences. Such a play, then—différance—is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general.¹²⁾

Thus, in general, the signified is not necessarily embedded in the signifier, but has a loose relationship with it. Furthermore, the signified of one word can become the signifier of another, the signified of which could become the signifier of another, etc. When we apply this pattern to other kinds of signs such as those in theater, the infinite chain of signifiers and signifieds also occurs: the signifier of the dramatic text (the performance) is differed and does not exactly correspond to the dramatic text, the signified created by the author. In this way, we can infer that *Pyramus and Thisbe* never appeared in any play exactly identical to the *Pyramus and Thisbe* created by Ovid.¹³⁾ The mechanicals' *A Tedious Brief Scene of Young Pyramus and His Love Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a hyperbolic version of this theatrical truth.

While the mechanicals clumsily deal with how to perform *Pyramus and Thisbe* without any possibility of making the audience believe that the lion and death in the play are real, the audience can see the process of the performance being differed from the original text.

BOTTOM. I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that

12) Ibid., 2004, pp.285 ~ 86.

13) Some scholars like Madeleine Forey argue that Shakespeare were familiar with Golding's rendition of the 'Pyramus and Thisbe' episode. Forey, Madeleine, "Bless Thee, Bottom, Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated!: Ovid, Golding, and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" *The Modern Language Review* 93:2, 1998, p.324. We can infer that the mechanicals' 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is deferred from Golding's text which is also deferred from Ovid's text: there are at least two layers of intertextual meaning.

Pyramus is not killed indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear. (3.1.15-20)

BOTTOM. Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck, and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect: "Ladies"—or "Fair ladies—I would wish you"—or "I would request you"—or "I would entreat you—not to fear, not to tremble; my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing; I am a man as other men are." And there indeed let him name his name and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner. (3.1.35-43)

We find it laughable that they are ignorant of the custom that "we enjoy being brazenly lied to" and "welcome for the sake of pleasure what we know to be untrue."¹⁴⁾ However, what the mechanicals do is important in the view of Semiotics and Deconstruction. The mechanicals show that the referents or the signifieds in *Pyramus and Thisbe* do not coincide with the signifiers, that is, with the mechanicals themselves as well as with their language. Obviously, Bottom who acts Pyramus is not Pyramus, and Snug who acts a lion is not a lion. However, to the audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom is also not Bottom and Snug is also not Snug: they are actors. We can see the infinite chain of signifiers and signifieds: an actor is a signifier of Bottom who is also a signifier of Pyramus. Thus, meaning is constructed while interplaying with various contexts.

For Derrida, writing is the "free play"¹⁵⁾ and "the endless displacement

14) Greenblatt, Stephen, "Shakespeare and the Exorcists," *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p.607.

15) Derrida explains his notion of "free play" in his essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Derrida, Jacques, *Twentieth-Century Literary*

of meaning which both governs language and places it forever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge.”¹⁶⁾ Thus, deconstruction is “a way of reading” and “challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of ... language and meaning.”¹⁷⁾ In this sense, Bottom and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* read and write *Pyramus and Thisbe* in their own ways and challenge the stability of the authorial meaning and the conventional interpretations of texts.

2) Keir Elam and His Semiotic Approach to Theater and Drama

As we have observed, in theater, the two movements of the dramatic text and the performance differing to one another are so obvious that we cannot consider them as the same texts. In this situation, Keir Elam’s semiotic analysis of plays provides us with useful ways of looking at the dramatic text and the performance. Elam separates the performance from the dramatic text. For him, “the dramatic text is more or less constant,” whereas “the performance text varies in crucial aspects, from theaters to staging to acting.”¹⁸⁾

In the performance text, “semiotic factors are intensified” and everything on the stage can have significance and show connotations in a relation.¹⁹⁾ As an example, SunHee Kim Gertz shows that the mirror used by the monarch in the fourth act of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* can signify

Theory: An Introductory Anthology, ed., Vassilis Lambropoulos and David Neal Miller, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp.35~58.

16) Rabkin, Gerald, “The Play of Meaning: Text/Theatre/Deconstruction,” *Performing Arts Journal* 7:1, 1983, p.48.

17) Habib, M.A.R, *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p.649.

18) Gertz, SunHee Kim, *Chaucer to Shakespeare, 1337-1580*, Palgrave, 2001, p.122.

19) *Ibid.*, pp.122~23.

not only all mirrors, but also “a whole complex of secondary signs,” such as these: “tragedy brings an individual to self-reflection, kingship is merely an image, and life is a shadowy reflection of greater forces.”²⁰⁾ In the same way, when Bottom and other mechanicals try to signify themselves not as Pyramus, Thisbe, a Wall, the Moonshine, a Lion but as Bottom, Flute, Snout, Starveling, and Snug, due to the connotations in relations to theater, each becomes another kind of a character and a text such as, “the wittiest partition” (5.1.166) and “a very gentle beast” “of a good conscience” (5.1.226) to the Athenian audience. Also, the mechanicals, especially Bottom, can connote those who have an eye for seeing the whole with various viewpoints rather than parts. In contrast to the Athenian nobles, they care not only about Pyramus and Thisbe, but also the wall, the lion, and moonshine²¹⁾ which, if the Athenian nobles were directors, would have been overlooked. Moreover, Bottom is the one who sees first both the text and the context (the audience’s possible response) and says that Pyramus’ killing scene will never please. Also, viewing the drama on the whole, beyond linearity, he lets the audience know the whole plot before the beginning of the play.

Thus, depending on their relations to various contexts, the objects in theater can have various signifieds.²²⁾ Furthermore, from Elam’s analysis, it can be inferred that “the worlds of text convey relations to ... our world.”²³⁾ For example, one’s reporting only some selected part of events and “putting them together” can reflect one’s own viewpoint “with certain

20) Ibid., 2001, p.123.

21) Connected to the next section, this can be viewed as reflection of their occupations and class—they are familiar with objects and nature. Also, in the fairy world, materials such as, honey, grains, and peas, interest Bottom more than the fairy queen does.

22) Gertz, 2001, p.124.

23) Ibid., p.122.

goals in mind.”²⁴⁾ This can be elaborated more with Robert E. Innis’s “representation” in the next section.

3) Robert E. Innis and Representation as a Self–recognition

Robert E. Innis’s concept of “representation” can supplement the inference in the former section that “the worlds of text convey relations to our world.”²⁵⁾ When we see how the original, referents, or the signifieds, are represented in the representation, we can also observe the viewpoint and relations to the world. Through perspectives and relations, the worlds of text have certain meanings to us and in our world. As Innis explains:

Aristotle connected imitation with the joy of recognition. “Recognition conforms and bears witness to the fact that mimetic behavior makes something present. However, this does not imply that when we recognize what is represented, we should try to determine the degree of similarity between the original and its mimetic representation” (Gadamer 1986, p.98). Nevertheless, Gadamer goes on to assert that “the essence of imitation consists precisely in the recognition of the represented in the representation” (p.99) without any advertence to a “real” distinction between representation and the represented. They share, in Langer’s sense, the same logical form. Imitation, in Gadamer’s analysis, reveals “the real essence of the thing”; representation is intrinsically connected with recognition, that is, the cognition of something *as* something. This process of “cognizing as” is part of a process of self-recognition, of developing familiarity with the world and hence with ourselves ... Self and world are correlative; neither the self nor the world is a thing or stable substance. They are meaning fields.²⁶⁾

24) Ibid., p.122.

25) Ibid., p.122.

26) Innis, Robert E., “Dimensions of an Aesthetic Encounter,” *Semiotic Rotations*, ed., SunHee Kim Gertz, Jaan Valsiner, and Jean-Paul Breaux, Charlotte, IAP, 2007, pp.132

Likewise, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the mechanicals' *Pyramus and Thisbe* reflects their views on and relations to our world. They generate "meaning fields." They translate the original tragedy *Pyramus and Thisbe* into a "tragical mirth" and "lamentable comedy."²⁷⁾ They see not just simple meaning "tragedy" but also silly and humorous material in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Nonetheless, for them, life is not a simple text which has only one meaning. They kept trying to adjust the text to their audience. In other words, they find out multi-layered-meanings in life, comic materials even in tragical situations. This echoes and dovetails with both the tragic and comic aspects of experience of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

2. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in view of Deconstruction and Semiotics

1) Bottom as a Deconstructor and a Weaver

Bottom deconstructs the boundaries between the conventional roles of author and of reader. The conventional role of reader is considered to find out the original meaning embedded in the text regardless of other aspects such as what it means to various readers. Thus, the authorial intention and meaning are regarded as intact and stable. In contrast to this literary convention, it seems that Bottom and other mechanicals do not care about the author's original intention or privilege. Bottom not only reads *Pyramus and Thisbe* but also (re)writes a new version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* conforming to their and the audience's circumstances. Considering the

~33.

27) Their misunderstanding of the word "comedy" sets up a concordance of tragedy, as viewed by the mechanicals, being seen as a comedy, as viewed by the nobles.

context in which they will present the play—in front of the Athenian nobles including ladies—the concern that they will be hanged if they offend or scare the audience makes Bottom suggest writing a prologue that “seem[s] to say” that they will do no harm and that it is just a play, not a reality. Also, Bottom (and Quince) put(s) new roles into the play such as the Wall, the Lion, and the Moonshine and give(s) them their speeches, which is absent from “the original script.” Becoming both the reader and writer of the play, Bottom deconstructs the dichotomy between author and reader and weaves them together.

In addition, Bottom deconstructs the conventional borders between actors and audience. In the literary convention, there are certain invisible borders between actors and audience in theater. Thus, even when the audience responds to actors, the actors do not usually respond to the audience directly. Rather, they often pretend that they cannot hear anything from the audience. In contrast to this convention, when performing *Pyramus and Thisbe* in front of the nobles, Bottom and the other mechanicals respond to the audience directly without any hesitation. They are so sensitive and responsive to the audience that they change and improvise lines and actions as they see the need. For example, even when Pyramus and Thisbe are “dead” and expected to be motionless and speechless, Bottom (and Flute) suddenly start(s) up and say(s), “No, I assure you, the wall is down that parted their father” (5.1.347-48) in response to the audience’ comments. Furthermore, Bottom even asks the audience directly if they want to see the epilogue or a Bergomask dance. To these actors, the audience also talks and responds, which leads the audience to exist as some actors in the play. As a result, Bottom sees the status of the audience almost as equal to that of the author or to the

actors of the play; indeed, he weaves the actors and the audience together and makes them a new (interpretive) community²⁸) during the play.

Likewise, while deconstructing some literary conventions, the borders between actor and audience, and the boundaries between the roles of author and of reader, Bottom challenges another literary convention, the opposition between tragedy and comedy. Conventionally, these tragedies dealing with especially the death of the protagonists are not supposed to be funny and laughable. Even if there are some laughable and mirthful aspects in the tragedies, they are not supposed to be made during or right after the death. Bottom does not seem to misunderstand that the play has to have tragic elements. Rather, in Act 1, Scene 2, after given the role of Pyramus, he is anxious to make the audience lament and cry.

QUINCE. You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM. What is Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?

QUINCE. A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM. That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I will move storms; I will condole in some measure. (18-23)

In spite of and/or due to his seriousness about what he is doing in the theater, he creates a lot of laughter not only before the death of Pyramus and Thisbe but also in the middle of and right after the death scene.²⁹)

28) This term, “interpretive community,” is from Stanley Fish’s essay, “Interpretive Communities.” Fish, Stanley, “Interpretive Communities,” *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp.217 ~221. It seems that along with Bottom the audience begins to understand the creative role of readers (audience). When Hippolyta says, “This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard,” Theseus responds, “The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them” (5.1.209-11).

Thus, Bottom questions and deconstructs the conventional assumption of the incompatibility of tragedy and comedy and weaves them together in one drama.

Bottom's representation of Ovid's *Pyramus and Thisbe* reflects his relations to and his viewpoints on the world in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. First, his deconstructing the borders between authors and readers, and actors and audience dovetails with his experience in various worlds. Among all the characters, Bottom is also the only one who experienced three different kinds of worlds—Athenian civil society, the fairy world, and the literary/imaginary world. In addition, Bottom is the only one who is transformed to an ass. Compared to others, Bottom's experience itself does not recognize limitations of borders between different worlds. We can infer that if one has been able to cross several borders, which was not possible for others, then one would think it less difficult to cross another kind. Indeed, though foreshadowed from the beginning of the play, Bottom's free attitude toward crossing borders becomes more active and direct after he experiences the fairy world than before. Before the translation, he does not think of disturbing the audience with his own voice. Rather, he gets Peter Quince to write a prologue that "seem[s] to say" thus and thus in Act 3, Scene 1. Saying that "let the epilogue *seem to say* ..." can imply an indirect speech, less activeness and less directness than saying that "let the epilogue *say*." After transformation, he directly talks to the audience without hesitating, which seems not to have been in the script and also which induces the audience's

29) In the dramatic text, it is not clear whether the audience laughs during and right after the death scene. The movie production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Adrian Noble can be helpful to observe the laughable and humorous aspects even in the middle of and right after the death scene.

participation in the play.

Furthermore, how Bottom directs *Pyramus and Thisbe* dovetails with how he views the worlds in a nonlinear fashion and from multiple perspectives. A good Aristotelian plot has to be linear, so that the audience can feel pity and fear on their journey from exposition to climax to denouement. However, contrary to this, in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Bottom performs in a nonlinear manner: in the beginning of the play, he lets the audience know the whole plot through the prologue; also, regardless of the elapsed time in the play, he shows the same action twice, once in his foreshadowing speech, another in his performance.

THESEUS. The wall, methinks, being sensible, should curse again.

PYRAMUS. No, in truth, sir he should not. “Deceiving me” is Thisbe’s cue:
she is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall. You
shall see, it will fall pat as I told you. Younder she comes.

[Enter *Thisbe*] ...

PYRAMUS. I see a voice. (5.1.181-91)

Even though he already said to the audience what would happen to him, Bottom pretends ignorance and surprises when Thisbe appears. Thus, the audience would be able to view the circumstances happening in the drama on the whole while having a sense of going back and forth in a non-linear system of time, which, according to Augustine, could be related to viewpoints of God.

Experiencing a changeless present, the divine is simple, pure and constant, attitudes which Augustine extols. Likewise attributable to this changeless present, God knows all that has happened, is happening, and will happen all at once, in

his limitless—timeless— ‘present.’ Indeed, time in and of itself belongs to and, actually, *defines* the mortal world, the world we live in, which is characterized by variety, complexity, mutability and lack of permanence, attributes which Augustine deems we should tame as much as possible.³⁰⁾

The analogy to the divine is not exact, but it suggests that Bottom has escaped simple, linear time. In fact, we do not have any clear evidence that Bottom achieved that insight into nonlinear time from his experience in the fairy world, since even Oberon and Titania, the king and the queen of fairies, show a sense of being in linear time and they are not omniscient: Oberon does not know that Puck will mistake Lysander for Demetrius; Titania does not know why she was in love with Bottom and has to ask Oberon about it. However, though limited, the fairy king and queen know more about the past, the present, and the future than mortals do. In addition, from Bottom’s reflection after waking from the fantastic experience, nonlinearity in his experience in the fairy land transcends ordinary human senses.

BOTTOM. I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was—and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called “Bottom’s Dream,” because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death. (4.2.203-217)

30) Gertz, 2001, pp.20~21.

Moreover, Bottom's representing *Pyramus and Thisbe* as a tragicomedy reflects his multiple perspectives—his views on life as a tragicomedy. When his head is translated into an ass head and other mechanicals fled from him, he says boldly that he will sing and not stir. Even when he knows his transformation, he considers his hairy face as “marvelous” and himself as “a tender ass” (4.1.24-25). While the other mechanicals view him as pitiful, Bottom does not view himself as pitiful at all. Also, for some people, entering fairies and not being able to come back home³¹⁾ can be tragic, but Bottom seems to enjoy the life while he is in the fairy land.

In fact, as a human being, it is not easy for one to say to oneself or someone else that “you can think it rather comic” while encountering the death of one's beloved. When we have hardships and difficulties, we often find them neither enjoyable nor comic at all. However, if they have passed away long ago, one can remember some funny or comic aspects in their past lives. From our own experience, we know that life is not simply tragic or comic, but both. I think we can understand Bottom in that sense. He might be able to view tragic situation as “tragical mirth” when putting himself beyond the linear time frame and somewhat detached from the situation, as an actor does.

These views on life and on the world as tragicomedy can become the common ground that echoes and dovetails with the discordances throughout

31) About “the theme of a nymph wooing a reluctant boy” in Ovid, Walter F. Staten, Jr. points that “[Ovidian] women forcibly detain somewhat reluctant lovers” and “boast of supernatural power.” Staten, Jr. Walter F., “Ovidian Elements in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 26:2, 1963, p.175. Likewise, when Bottom first meets Titania and says that he wants to know the way to get out of the woods, Titania answers, “Out of this wood do not desire to go. / Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no. / I am a spirit of no common rate. / ...And I do love thee. Therefore go with me” (3.1.146-50), which implies that he might not be able to come back home forever.

A Midsummer Night's Dream. To some extent, the discordances between lovers are resolved happily after the woods scene: ill-matched young lovers become all well-matched by Puck's antidote; Titania surrenders the changeling boy to Oberon, who, then, releases her from the charm by an antidote and the two once again get along well; Hippolyta seems to be more cheerful on her nuptial day. However, there are still other kinds of discordances—each story of the different groups of lovers plus Bottom's episode in the woods lack unity as a whole in a drama and discord one another. To end *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with well-united lovers' stories, at this moment, in Act 5, Scene 1, we need something to unite all the stories. For this, reflected in *Bottom's Dream* and the vague ending of both plays, Bottom's viewpoints in a nonlinear fashion and from multiple perspectives, his ability to see things on the whole deconstruct those discordances and disparities among the different stories and weave them in concord. This will be discussed in the next section.

2) Whose Dream Is It? *Bottom's Dream* and the Seamless, Opened/Closed Structure of Imagination

As both literature and “dream,” *Bottom's Dream* has much in common with the imagination. By definition, imagination is:

1. b. An inner image or idea of an object or objects *not actually present* to the senses; often with the implication that the idea *does not correspond to the reality of things*. Also: the action or an act of forming such an image or idea.
3. The mental consideration of future or potential actions or events.
(“imagination,” my italics)

Thus, in terms of deconstruction and semiotics, the imagination consists of pure signifiers and no substance/signified corresponding to each signifier. This relates to when Bottom wakes from his “dream” (i.e. his fantastic experience in the fairy land). By means of Oberon’s treatment, Bottom finds out (or recognizes) no reality, substance, and signified corresponding to his experience and considers the experience just a dream. Since he cannot reveal his experience/dream as reality, he decides to (get Peter Quince to) write a ballad of the dream. On the way from his experience to his dream, from reality to imagination/literature, he loses the origin or the center³²⁾ of his experience/dream—the fairies, including Oberon, at this point, no longer exist as authentic origins or centers; they become but visions with no substance. As quoted earlier in page 106, he says that his dream (and his ballad) has no bottom,³³⁾ that is, no foundation, no origin, no center. Thus, at least for him, literature is analogous to the imagination.

Parallel to Bottom’s journey from experience to dream, from reality to imagination (literature), the Athenian young lovers enter the imaginary sphere from reality when they consider their experience as dreams.³⁴⁾

32) Derrida discusses “center” in “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.”

33) The definition of “bottom” includes “the lowest part of a material thing; the surface of an object on which it stands or rests; the underside, the base”; “A thing on which something is built or rests; a foundation.” “Bottom,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2023. Oxford English Dictionary, 17 March 2023, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21923?rskey=idDA9G&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> Bottomless means “[t]hat has no bottom”; “[w]ithout a firm foundation, baseless.” (“bottomless”).

34) After their experience in the woods, they view things as (indistinguishably) both real and imaginary in “parted eye.” When Demetrius says, “These things seem small and undistinguishable,/Like far-off mountains turned into clouds,” Hermia concurs: “So methinks,/And I see these things with *parted eye*,/When everything seems double” (4.1.186-89, my italics).

Also, the Athenian lovers enter the imaginary realm from reality when they are in the theater. Since there is no center in imagination and literature, the “free play” begins when *Pyramus and Thisbe* starts.

In addition, the problematic endings of both plays blur the boundaries between reality and imagination, and thus between the different stories of lovers (including those of Bottom and of Pyramus and Thisbe). First, when Thisbe and Pyramus are “dead” and Bottom asks whether the audience wants to see the epilogue or “hear” a Bergomask dance, Theseus chooses not the epilogue but the dance. If we are reminded of Bottom’s having said that he will “sing” *Bottom’s Dream* in the latter end of a play before the Duke, and of his asking to the nobles whether they prefer to “hear” the dance, *Bottom’s Dream* might have been translated into some part of *Pyramus and Thisbe* or into the dance. Thus, the boundaries between Bottom’s dream (or fantastic experience) and the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* are blurred again.

Furthermore, along with *Bottom’s Dream* and Puck’s epilogue, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* weaves those discordances and disparities among the different stories into a seamless dream, a connected whole drama. While the epilogue is left and the dance is being performed, the clock strikes twelve. At this moment, people go through a transition from theater to bed, from one kind of imagination to another with Theseus’ words, “Lovers, to bed, ‘tis almost fairy time” (5.1.359). After the Athenian lovers and the mechanicals exit, Puck and the other fairies enter. Until now, we would have no doubt that the Athenian lovers and Bottom were influenced by the fairy land and afterwards returned to Athenian reality. We are very familiar with this way of regarding some unrealistic experience as just a dream or fantasy. However, in the epilogue, Puck paradoxically subverts this system

of reason, which opposes imagination and reality.

PUCK. [To the audience]

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends. [*Exit.*] (5.1.417-33)

While talking directly to the audience, as “an honest Puck,” rather than as an actor, he calls all the fairies, Athenian nobles, and mechanics “we shadows.” At this moment, what was once considered “reality” turns out to be a shadow and imagination, and the boundaries between the fairy land and the Athenian world are blurred. In addition, if the audience is offended by the play, Puck asks them to think it but a *dream*. This can be problematic if we are reminded of what Oberon and Puck did to the young lovers and Bottom. If we think it just a dream, it seems that we are beguiled by Puck and Oberon. On the other hand, if we consider it a “reality,” it seems unreasonable to believe the fairies

and the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be real. Puck's last words are analogous to the problem when we believe in a liar's saying that "Everybody lies." Trapped in imagination, in this bottomless world, we find neither way lead us outside of this imaginary land, like Bottom warned by Titania, "Out of this wood do not desire to go. / Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no" (3.1.146-47). At this moment of imagination, the "free play" occurs again. The center is floating between reality and imagination, which, somehow, echoes Theseus' saying, "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact" (5.1.7-8). Thus, those discordances and disparities among the different stories are melted and weaved in concord.

IV. Conclusion/Epilogue

No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs
no excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all
dead, there need none to be blamed. (5. 1. 351-53)

Bottom did a great work in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He deconstructs conventional boundaries between author and reader, actor and audience, tragedy and comedy, and imagination and reality, and weaves them together. Bottom's directing *Pyramus and Thisbe* embodies the theatrical truth about the staged reality of the theater, reflecting the infinite chain of signifiers and signifieds in Derridean terms and the performance different from the dramatic text in Elam's view. Furthermore, as Innis's notion of "representation" and Gertz's reading of Elam can suggest, Bottom's stage production reflects his views on and

relations to the world: he perceives multi-layered meanings in life, thereby translating tragic situations to “tragical mirth.” These views on life and on the world as tragicomedy bring forth a common thread that weaves the discordances throughout *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Thus, as a bottom of the play, he deconstructs all the discordances and disparities among the different stories and weaves them in concord. Importantly, the boundaries between *Bottom’s dream* and the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* are blurred when *Bottom’s Dream*, which is a ballad about his fantastic experience in the fairy land, seems to have been incorporated into the dance in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Last but not least, the boundaries between the fantastic worlds in the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and our world are challenged when Puck calls all the other characters “we shadows” and asks us to think what we have just seen but a dream if we are offended by the play. While *Bottom’s Dream*, apart from Oberon, has no center nor acknowledges itself as a result or product of previous center, Oberon³⁵⁾ even though it was initiated by him, we, like Puck, only have to conclude that the players are all “dead,” all “shadows,” imaginations and dreams. Then, “there need none to be blamed” and we “have but slumbered here while these visions did appear” (5.1.418-21).

35) I paraphrase and apply to the play, the words about “difference” in Habib’s *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*. Habib, p.664. Also, this problem, though not exactly, but to some extent, reflects Derrida’s dilemma—he had to “employ the very language of metaphysics to criticize it.” Habib, p.656.

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How Shall We Find the Concord of Discord?:
Bottom and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Deconstructors
and Weavers in Bottomless World

Lee, Jin

In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Nick Bottom is the only one in the play who was physically transformed and who experienced all the different worlds, such those of the Athenian nobility, the mechanicals, and the fairies. Due to his experience as a weaver, an actor, and the Fairy Queen's beloved with an ass's head, Bottom shows his free and daring, mirthful, and complex attitudes in all the worlds. As an actor and a reader, he deconstructs the conventional borders between author and reader, actor and audience. As a result, he changes the genre of the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* and deconstructs the conventional opposition between tragedy and comedy. He also deconstructs the opposition between imagination and reality and on the whole weaves the discordances among the different stories into concord. Like his name and occupation, he becomes a significant bottom (foundation) and a weaver who makes the seemingly discordant stories and worlds concordant and united. While semiotic reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be helpful to understand Bottom's unique characteristics, only a few articles have taken such approach to the play. In this article, I will use Derrida's deconstructionist approach, Keir Elam's semiotic analysis of theater and drama, and Robert E. Innis's notion of representation as a self-recognition to understand Bottom's attitudes and roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Keywords : *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Jacques Derrida, Keir Elam, Robert E. Innis,
Deconstruction, Semiotics of theatre and drama, Representation

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