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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Textual Practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtpr20>

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Published online: 15 Mar 2010.

To cite this article: Rebecca Ann Bach (2010) The animal continuum in A Midsummer Night's Dream , Textual Practice, 24:1, 123-147, DOI: [10.1080/09502360903471714](https://doi.org/10.1080/09502360903471714)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502360903471714>

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Rebecca Ann Bach

The animal continuum in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

I make this allusion to Hamlet in order to recall in passing that that play is an extraordinary zoology: its animal figures are innumerable, which is somewhat the case all through Shakespeare—more to follow.

Jacques Derrida 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)'

Nonhuman animals are linguistically present everywhere in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a fact acknowledged in the play's centrality in Bruce Boehrer's work on Shakespearean animals and in Jeanne Addison Roberts' feminist work on the Shakespearean wild.¹ Although both of these critics are interested in moments in plays where humans become or are characterized as animals, they both also take for granted that the plays 'assume that human nature is in constant danger of corruption from the bestial and/or female other, and that it must therefore be continuously and rigorously policed'.² I want to ask what happens when we abandon this assumption, when we abandon our beliefs that Shakespeare's plays display any sort of undifferentiated human subject ('human nature' that could be corrupted) or display that subject as categorically different from any sort of undifferentiated animal. What if *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is instead displaying a world with many categories of mortals: some with wings, some that crawl, some that swim, some that prey, some that hunt, some that sing, some from places far from England, some that have non-Christian religious identities, some with hair and four legs, and some imaginary? Of course, this list does not exhaust the possible categories of mortals that the play displays. What the list does do, however, is it refuses to categorize all humans as possessors of 'human nature', a category that most critical work insists on even when that work talks about how distinctions between humans and animals blur at times. But *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a whole does not seem to believe in a singular 'human nature' that belongs to mortals with human bodies. While the play might assert that fairies are

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categorically different than mortals because fairies do not die, it envisions a world with an animal continuum, a world in which a distinction between mortals such as a lion and a crow might be as significant as a distinction between the kinds of 'humane mortals' (B4v; 2.1.101) such as aristocratic patriarchs and ploughmen and more significant than any distinction between 'the human' as a general category and 'the animal'.³

I want to suggest that this animal continuum is especially visible in *Midsummer* due to the profusion of animals in the play and also due to the play's focus on music and musicality, a focus reflected in *Midsummer's* operatic history.⁴ Perhaps oddly to modern eyes, the pervasive musicality in *Midsummer* will point us to a Renaissance world that refuses any primacy to an animal/human distinction. However, the critical history of the play, the history of its editing, of commentary on its characters, and even, in the twentieth century, of its presentation in the theatre, is a miniature history of the instantiation of the animal/human distinction as primary. Paradoxically, over the course of its history, *Midsummer* has come to be seen as a play that celebrates human nature particularly in its portrayal of Bottom and his fellow workmen. This is a paradox precisely because in the play, Bottom and his fellows are sometimes characterized as nonhuman animals. As the line between human animals and nonhuman animals has become what Derrida calls an 'abyssal rupture', the Renaissance animality of the workmen has been misrecognized as a sign of essential humanity.⁵ This misrecognition has occurred both in critical discourse about the play and in twentieth-century productions of the play, the most famous of which is Peter Brook's 1970 RSC *Midsummer*. A contemporary commentator says about Brook's company rehearsing the play, 'As Brook had intended, the actors now become all animal impulse, the beast in man the spur to renewal'.⁶ In Shakespeare's play, however, there is no essential man who contains a beast that can renew his nature. Rather, the play displays particular kinds of animals, both human and nonhuman.

Workers as nonhuman animals

Midsummer takes what are clearly intended to be amusing pains to indicate just how significant the distinctions are between its aristocrats and its workers, and at the same time that it emphasizes those distinctions; the play often aligns its workers with nonhuman animals.⁷ We see this particularly when the play's aristocrats and workers interact. For example, when Snug assures his audience that he will not endanger the 'Ladies' with 'gentle hearts' because he is not really a lion but rather '*Snug* the Ioyner', Theseus responds, 'A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience'

(H2; 5.1.222). Of course, Theseus is joking, but his joke has many layers. Both Snug and Theseus use the word 'gentle' in this interaction. Snug calls the ladies' hearts 'gentle', signifying both the women's feminine timidity and their nobility, their social status. Theseus, in contrast, calls Snug 'gentle' to indicate ironically Snug's lack of gentility. Snug, like the 'Ladies', is timid, but unlike the 'Ladies', he is far from 'gentle' in status terms; he is instead, in the play's terms, one of its 'beast[s]'. He defers to his betters, but he lacks their gentility. We may miss one of the layers in Theseus's joke because the meaning of the word 'conscience' has changed since Theseus used it. I think it is very likely that the 'conscience' Theseus is granting Snug here is one of the obsolete meanings of the word: 'Conscientious observance or reverence of, or regard to' (III 5). Thus, rather than granting Snug a distinctly human rationality, Theseus may be calling him a dutiful beast.

Snug's social distance from gentility shows in the speech conditions that the play stages at this moment. Snug talks to his 'gentle' audience, but Theseus does not address Snug. Though he sits near Snug, Theseus speaks only to the embedded audience of aristocratic men and women around him. In this social relation, Snug may not reply to Theseus's discourse, but not because Snug understands the conventions of acting in front of an audience. The play makes copious humour out of Snug's and his cohorts' misunderstanding of those conventions. Rather, Snug does not respond because in the situation he is 'beneath social notice altogether'.⁸ But Theseus may freely respond to Snug; indeed, Theseus may comment on him as if he were the nonhuman 'beast' his costume represents. The scene likens him to a nonhuman animal both in his lack of capacity to respond and in his inability to comprehend the multi-layered social situation in which he is placed.⁹ In his inability to respond to ironic humour, Snug is more like a nonhuman animal than he is like Theseus in this scene. Many brilliant critics, such as Kenneth Burke and Annabel Patterson, have eloquently advocated for the workmen's point of view; however, *Midsummer* frequently refuses to grant its workmen the capacity to respond articulately.¹⁰ Nothing in the play indicates that Snug is prevented from responding, or that he is suffocating a response; instead, the play positions him as a grounded beast.

In its imagery and descriptive language, as well, *Midsummer* aligns workers and grounded beasts. We can see this particularly when the play's fairies speak of the mortal world. Titania tells Oberon that their quarrel has caused torrential rains with agricultural consequences: 'The Oxe hath therefore stretcht his yoake in vaine, /The Ploughman lost his sweat' (B4; 2.1.93-4). As she illustrates these consequences, Titania does not differentiate categorically between ox and ploughman; both are embodied workers, and each has an equal relationship to his labour's results.

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Both are mortals who have worked their bodies fruitlessly. Likewise, the ploughman appears among grounded animals in Robin's list of night noises: 'Now the hungry Lyons roares, /And the wolfe beholds the Moone, /Whilst the heauie ploughman snores, /All with weary taske fore-doone' (H3v; 5.2.1-4). Both the lion and the ploughman are grounded animals who make noise at night.¹¹ Like the other animals that these speeches associate with the ploughman, this kind of human animal is remarkable because of his bodily labour and his body's productions.

In both *Midsummer* and in *Troilus and Cressida*, the only other Shakespeare play to mention the proverbial ploughman, the ploughman stands for the quintessential embodied worker. In that latter play, Troilus uses the ploughman's hand as a figure for the hardest animal substance: compared to Cressida's grasp, he says, 'The Cignets Downe is harsh, and spirit of Sense/Hard as the palme of Plough-man' (TLN 92-93; 1.1.55-56).¹² Troilus's comparison places Cressida's grasp on a continuum of animal substances: her grasp is the softest; the swan's down is comparatively hard; and even the bodily 'spirit' that carries 'Sense' messages is as hard as the hardest substance: the ploughman's 'palme'. *Midsummer* as a whole suggests that this material animal continuum is no idiosyncratic characteristic of Troilus's imagination. Whereas Troilus places Cressida far above the ploughman, as Boehrer and Roberts suggest, *Midsummer* often categorizes women as nonhuman animals. And the play also presents men who work with their hands, whose work marks their bodies, as even further away than some women from a noble humanity that could be categorically separable from animality. Like the ploughman in both *Midsummer* and *Troilus*, the 'handy-craft' men are, as Egeus terms them, 'Hard handed men' (G2, G3v; 4.2.9, 5.1.72).¹³

Midsummer displays this type of man as distinctively different from an aristocratic man, as different from that kind of man as a lark is from a lion, for example, or as a lion is from an aristocrat. The difference between aristocrats and workmen is one purport of the dialogue between Theseus and Hippolyta that precedes Snug's entrance in act five:

HIPPOLYTA: This is the silliest stuffe that euer I heard.

THESEUS: The best, in this kinde, are but shadowes: and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

HIPPOLYTA: It must be your imagination, then; & not theirs.

THESEUS: If we imagine no worse of them, than they of themselves, they may passe for excellent men. Here come two noble beasts in, a man and a Lyon.

(Hv; 5.1.210-13)

As the footnotes in the twentieth-century editions of the play indicate, the bulk of recent commentary on these lines concentrates on their metadramatic implications. But if Hippolyta and Theseus speak about the power of the dramatic contract between audience, players, and playwrights, they speak as well about Snug's and Starveling's beastly status. As aristocrats, Theseus and Hippolyta possess imaginations that can amend the worst dramatic production. Their imaginations can transcend and transform sensual reality. In contrast, the workmen's imaginations, Theseus says, make them believe they can 'passe for excellent men' when in reality they are 'noble beasts'.

The footnotes in today's editions make it seem as if these lines have always been discussed in relation to dramatic craftsmanship, but the critical apparatus in Horace Howard Furness's *New Variorum Edition* of the play (1895) suggests that such discussion began in the nineteenth century. Furness's note on the dialogue cites William Maginn's (1860), Edward Dowden's (1875), and G. G. Gervinus's (1849) commentary on Shakespeare's dramatic art in relation to Theseus's and Hippolyta's lines.¹⁴ The discussion of these lines prior to the nineteenth century looks more like an embarrassed contention over Shakespeare's classification of the workmen as beasts. Furness's other note, attached specifically to 'in a man', records an eighteenth-century discussion of 'beasts'.¹⁵ Perhaps in an attempt to deny altogether that Theseus is classifying the workmen as beasts, Lewis Theobald (1726) speculated that Shakespeare really wrote 'in a *moon* and a lion'. Theobald comments about the entrance, 'The one having a crescent and a lanthorn before him, and representing the man in the moon; and the other in a lion's hide'. Presumably, then, Theobald could countenance the spectacle of Starveling in costume being called a 'beast' but not Starveling himself having that designation (according to Furness's collation, many editors adopted Theobald's reading). In 1767, Richard Farmer concurred essentially with Theobald, seeing 'man' as a misreading of 'moon-calf'. Edmond Malone countered in 1790 that 'Theseus only means to say that the "man" who represented the moon, and came in at the same time, with a lanthorn in his hand and a bush of thorns at his back, was as much a beast as he who performed the part of the lion'. Furness comments on the critical controversy, 'Possibly the choice between "man" and *moon* will lie in the degree of absurdity which strikes us in calling either the one or the other a beast'. As Furness's own evidence suggests, however, Malone did not see this as absurd.

What the commentary as a whole may suggest is that in Shakespeare's play, as Malone argues, Snug and Starveling are like beasts, and that the status of these men as beasts became difficult for many people to swallow in the eighteenth century and even absurd in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That reading of the criticism would help to illustrate

Erica Fudge's claim that during the course of the eighteenth century, Descartes's 'notion of the reasonable nature of *all* human beings did gain power'.¹⁶ It may also be that the history of punctuating Theseus's line – 'Here come two noble beasts in: a man and a lion' – would contribute to this miniature history of human/animal identity. In the previous sentence, I have reproduced the line as the *Norton Shakespeare* punctuates it. Other twentieth-century editions – the Pelican edition, copyright 1959; the fourth edition of David Bevington's *Complete Works*; and both the first and the second editions of *The Riverside Shakespeare* – put a comma instead of a colon between 'in' and 'a man'. However, all of the seventeenth century quarto and folio editions of the play punctuate the line differently, placing a comma after 'beasts' and before 'in': 'Here come two noble beasts, in a man and a Lyon'. Arguments about deliberate punctuation in Shakespeare are difficult to support, but it seems reasonable to believe that the punctuation in this scene was authorial, given that the jokes directed at Quince a bit earlier in the scene depend on his inability to properly punctuate his prologue (G4; 5.1.108-125). One way to read the original punctuation – 'Here come two noble beasts, in a man and a Lyon' – is that both beasts are in costume, one as a man and one as a lion. This is the reading that the modern punctuation of the line forecloses. The commentary on these lines and their punctuation over time have worked together to produce a firm distinction between humans and beasts that the play in its seventeenth-century forms does not support.

1. Vile and juvenile things

In the scene's discussion of Quince's poor punctuation, punctuation that makes him say the opposite of what he means to say, Lysander compares Quince to 'a rough Colte' and Hippolyta compares him to 'a child' who plays an instrument and produces ungoverned noise (G4v; 5.1.119,122-23).¹⁷ As Paster suggests, 'the mechanicals . . . seem to represent an early stage of psychosocial development, the patriarchal Theseus its maturity'.¹⁸ *Midsummer's* tendency to associate young human animals with nonhuman animals is another aspect of the play that challenges the idea that it displays any singular 'human' that is categorically opposed to any singular 'animal'. When Lysander speaks of childhood, he describes it as a category of mortal life without access to reason.¹⁹ Explaining his newly born love to Helena, Lysander says, 'So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason. /And touching now, the point of humane skill, /Reason becomes the Marshall to my will' (C4v; 2.2.124-26). Of course, at this moment in the play, Lysander is acting under the spell of the love juice, not under the auspices of reason, but his argument takes for granted that young men cannot access reason. Lysander's

phrase, 'the point of humane skill' seems in most editions to be glossed in order to rule out the possibility that he is saying that he has now reached the age of human reason. But what justifies glossing 'point' as 'summit'²⁰ or as 'highest point'²¹ (*Norton Shakespeare*) except for the difficulty that modern people might have with Lysander using 'point' to mean 'A location in time; a moment, juncture, or stage'? (*OED* 'point' 6). It is at least equally likely that Lysander means that children are more like 'rough Colte[s]' than they are like adult aristocratic men.²²

Peter Quince's hilariously ludicrous script as read by Flute also connects horses and youth. Speaking as Thisbe, Flute praises her lover:

Most radiant *Pyramus*, most lillie white of hewe,
Of colour like the redrose, on triumphant bryer;
Most brisky Iuvenall, and eeke most louely Iewe,
As true as truest horse, that yet would neuer tyre

(D2v; 3.1.80-84)

Flute compliments Pyramus's beauty and calls him a sharp youth and a good-looking Jew, and Flute also compares Pyramus to a reliable horse. The humour of this speech depends on the ways Quince's script misuses conventions of poetry, gender, and beauty. Petrarchan poems praise white skin and red lips, but Flute praises Pyramus as having simultaneously white and red skin. The comparison of Pyramus to a 'truest horse' is a confusion of convention that might have gender implications: women, like boys, were conventionally compared to uncontrollable horses.²³ Likewise, the speech invokes the cultural oxymoron, a 'louely Iewe'. Pyramus is a pretty Jew and a tame, dependable horse, culturally improbable mortals, both comparably distant from proper aristocratic men. As it displays Quince's script's laughable confusions, Shakespeare's script reinforces the consonance of youth and nonhuman animality.

The racial/religious slur on Jews embedded in Flute's speech anticipates the series of slurs that Lysander uses to dismiss Hermia: 'Away, you *Ethiop*'; 'Hang of[f], thou cat, thou bur: vile thing, let loose; /Or I will shake thee from mee like a serpent'; 'Out, tawny *Tartar*, out' (E3v; 3.2.258, 261-62, 264). That series of slurs, like Flute's speech, connects racialized human animals with nonhuman animals: When Hermia is undesirable she is a dark-skinned foreigner, and she is also a cat and a 'vile thing'. Commenting on Lysander's slurs, Kim Hall suggests that in *Midsummer*, 'blackness is associated with femaleness, foreignness, political upheaval, and chaos'.²⁴ In order to demonstrate the similar ways that women and Africans became objects on display 'to express European luxury, wealth, and beauty', Hall invokes a historical incident when a 'blackmoor' was substituted for a tamed lion in an entertainment for James's son Henry. As Hall

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suggests, ‘the entertainment demonstrates the “aesthetic” uses of enslaved black people’.²⁵ It also shows us how culturally pervasive the association was between racialized others and nonhuman animals. In the English court, a ‘blackmoor’ can stand in for a lion. In the play and in the court, in the eyes of aristocratic observers, the human animal is an animal body.

The phrase ‘vile thing’ appears for the first time in *Midsummer* in Oberon’s speech when he drops the love juice on Titania’s eyes:

Be it Ounce, or Catte, or Beare,
Pard, or Boare with bristled haire,
In thy eye that shall appeare,
When thou wak’st, it is thy deare:
Wake, when some vile thing is neere.

(C3-C3v; 2.2.36-40)

Of course, the ‘vile thing’ that comes near is the ass/man Bottom. Immediately before he transforms into the bodily manifestation of his name’s synonym, Bottom advises Snug to say to his audience, ‘I am a man as other men are’ (Dv; 3.1.38). The play, however, invites us to see Bottom’s belief in an essential man as just as big a mistake as his other asinine beliefs, as a misunderstanding of the human animal world. Just as Bottom thinks that a lamentable story of death is a ‘merry’ work, he believes that all men are the same. But the play suggests that Bottom, one of its grounded animals, is as different from the human mortal Theseus as the ‘Ounce’ and ‘Catte’, and ‘Beare’ of Oberon’s fantasy are from ‘the clamorous Owle, that nightly hootes and wonders’ and the nightingale that sings with Titania’s fairies (C3; 2.2.6, 13-14). Ounces, cats, and bears, women, and workmen are ‘vile things’, grounded animals, whereas owls and nightingales fly, sing, and interact with both mortals and immortals. Bottom cannot sing like a lark, nor can he fly, and, the play says, he cannot think or speak like an aristocratic man.

2. Language: human animal and nonhuman animal

When Bottom’s friends run away from his ‘translated’ self, he interprets their flight as an attempt to ‘make [him] an asse’ (D2v; 3.1.106). To show them that he is not afraid, he sings a song filled with birds. That song’s final lines provoke him to comment on the interactions between birds and men:

The plainsong Cuckow gray:
Whose note, full many a man doth marke,

And dares not answere, nay.
 For indeede, who would set his wit to so foolish a birde? Who would
 giue a bird the ly, though hee cry Cuckow neuer so?.

(D3; 3.1.116-120)

Bottom sings a song about men who are both cuckolds and afraid that the noise made by birds applies to them. Men, the song says, can misinterpret birds' noise as personal commentary in human animal language. Bird song signifies in the human animal perceptual world, much as misinterpreted or misspoken human animal language does in that world; both are heard, and both imperfectly convey meaning. Bottom also misinterprets the song: the song describes men who are afraid to respond because their response would implicate them; Bottom interprets their lack of response as their refusal to engage a 'foolish birde'. In the song, birds are not without language; the plainsong cuckoo's language, however, doubly defeats the human animal, provoking fear when he hears it as addressed to him and precluding a response to that misinterpretation. But the plainsong cuckoo's song triply defeats Bottom, provoking his misinterpretation of other men's responses. Bottom's acts of interpretation, as a self-described more knowing human animal, are also deeply challenged when he sings. For the word that listening cuckolds 'dare not' utter, 'nay', is the homonym for the language produced by horses, and Bottom, 'translated', speaks ass as he speaks as an ass.²⁶ As Griffiths notes, 'Bottom's "nay" is an open invitation for the actor to elongate it into a neigh'.²⁷ The nonhuman animal sound 'neigh' has already been heard on stage in Robin's line 20 lines earlier (D2v; 3.1.98), but where Robin deliberately produces his 'neigh', Bottom speaks this way naturally and inadvertently. Bottom's friends are not trying to 'make [him] an asse'; he is an ass.

Of course, Bottom speaks in words as well as neighs, and the ability of human animals to speak in words, to use language, has historically been a measure of the difference between the human animal and all other animals.²⁸ However, that determination of difference limits language to its semantic properties, whereas it is not clear that *Midsummer* shares the focus on the semantic properties of language that underlie that potential difference between 'the human' and 'the animal'.²⁹ Rather, *Midsummer* is a play invested in both the musicality of language and in music itself, although the script is probably a misleading account of how much music the play contained in its Renaissance staging.³⁰ Music and the extra- or anti-semantic properties of language, as Bruce Smith suggests, were substantial parts of what he terms the *Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, a world quite evident in the play; and that world did not consistently divide human and nonhuman animals on the basis of the sounds they make.³¹ We can see this in Francis Bacon's *Natural History*, a text in which

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Bacon describes his experiments regarding music and sound. Bacon classifies 'the voice[s] of man or birds' as 'articulate sounds'.³² Likewise, he classifies human 'singing' and 'singing-birds' with 'musical sounds' while 'the voice in speaking . . . all voices of beasts and birds, (except they be singing-birds)' belong to other 'immusical sounds'.³³ *Midsummer* presents a world of sound in which the panoply of animals are grouped together and distinguished from one another not necessarily because one produces human language and another animal noise but rather on the basis of musicality.

The musicality of Hermia's language is the focus of Helena's despair when she laments that Demetrius loves Hermia:

Your eyes are loadstarres, and your tongues sweete aire
More tunable than larke to sheepeheards eare . . .
Sickness is catching: O, were fauour so,
Your words I catch, faire *Hermia*, ere I goe,
My eare should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongues sweete melody.
(A4v; 1.1.183-89)

Helena may be saying that if one could catch physical features as one catches illness, she could catch Hermia's words (this is the meaning editors have heard when they change 'I catch' to 'Ide catch').³⁴ She also seems to say that though she can repeat Hermia's words, as one does when one sings a 'catch', she cannot reproduce Hermia's 'voice', her 'tongues sweete melody' (*OED* 'catch' n.1 14.). The repetition of the word 'catch' three times in three lines makes this second meaning likely, as a 'catch' is a song for three or more voices, each singing the same melody as well as the same words. Unlike Bottom, Hermia sings like a lark, but Helena cannot replicate her melody.³⁵

Likewise, although much of the play's humour depends on semantics, the fundamental joke in the initial interaction between Bottom and Titania may depend on the audience valuing musicality above semantic content. Bottom sings his song full of birds, and Titania responds, 'I pray thee, gentle mortall, sing againe. /Myne eare is much enamoured of thy note: /So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape' (D3; 121-23). The script here requires Bottom to have sung very poorly.³⁶ His singing must be as unlike the song produced by the birds he sings about as his 'shape' is unlike that of a 'gentle mortall'.³⁷ Of course, the joke on Titania's mistake about status depends on semantics – the double resonance of the word 'gentle'. But the more fundamental joke depends on Bottom's poor singing voice. The audience should hear the difference between the beautiful musical voices of wrens, throistles, and larks and the horrible grounded voice of Bottom the ass/man. Unlike the audience, Titania

was blinded and deafened by the 'juice' her husband has dropped in her eyes, and cannot hear that difference when Bottom's song wakes her. She hears the 'immusical' voice of the grounded animal as if it were the musical voice of singing birds. But even the love juice may not be powerful enough to transform Bottom's voice for long, which could explain Titania's request that her fairies 'Ty up [Bottom's] tongue' on the way to her bower (D4; 3.1.182).

The play also asks its audience to differentiate between voices of grounded animals. Just before the lovers awake, Theseus invites Hippolyta to hear the 'musicke' of his 'hounds'. He asks her to 'marke the[ir] musicall confusion'. When she replies that she has never heard 'Such gallant chiding . . . So musical a discord, such sweete thunder' as she heard from 'hounds of *Sparta*' once, Theseus replies that his hounds are bred from Spartan hounds and are 'matcht in mouth like bels'. 'A cry more tunable', he says, 'Was neuer hollowd to, nor cheerd with horne' (F4-F4v; 4.1.104-120). This little set-piece description is framed by the sound of horns, and it represents discord and concord rhetorically, as the former enemies, Theseus and Hippolyta, come to an agreement, as it also introduces the newly born concord of the lovers. In addition, the play contrasts this set piece, a gorgeous auditory image, to the very immusical and rhetorically awkward production of the workmen's play. For their aristocratic audience, Theseus's hounds are better, more attractive, and entrancing performers than the workmen, even though (and maybe even because) the hounds sing, whereas the workmen speak.

Midsummer often values the musical voice above the 'immusical' speaking voice. In addition, the play does not value human language *per se*. That is, the ability to use words does not define a single group of mortals as equally human. Instead, rhetorical ability divides men who can speak well from men who are akin to beasts. The play's interest in musicality is deeply linked to its investment in rhetoric. Patricia Parker points to *Midsummer's* 'explicit allusions to the rhetorical tradition', and she quotes Thomas Wilson: 'For a man were little better than a brute beast, if he could but onely apprehende seuerall woordes, hauing no gifte, or aptenesse to ioigne them in ordre, and so iuge how thinges are iogned together'.³⁸ Likewise, in *Timber: or, Discoveries*, Ben Jonson asserts that 'Speech is the only benefit man hath to expresse his excellencie of mind above other creatures'.³⁹ Kathryn Perry takes this to mean that for Jonson and others in the Renaissance, 'Speech is liminal; it marks the threshold to humanity'.⁴⁰ However, Jonson follows his pronouncement with many pages of rhetorical advice that make it clear that he is writing not of the basic ability to speak but of the ability to speak carefully and beautifully. For Jonson and Wilson, it is rhetorical ability that enables a man to distinguish himself from other animals. As Parker observes, the

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play's workmen 'mangle by their failed and untutored imitations the very rules' of 'discursive joining and construction'.⁴¹ This failure to properly imitate rhetorical beauty connects the workmen with untutored beasts. When Bacon considers 'the imitation of sounds' he thinks first of 'how children, and some birds, learn to imitate speech'. Bacon explains that 'in men and other creatures' there is 'a predisposition to imitate',⁴² and he argues that 'the aptness of birds is not so much in the conformity of their organs of speech, as in their attention'.⁴³ The play displays its workmen as inattentive to the musicality of language.

When Robin calls Bottom 'my Mimmick' he refers to Bottom's and his cohorts' inability to imitate in their 'tedious briefe Scene' (D4, 3.2.19; G3v, 5.1.56).⁴⁴ In their rhetorical imitation, the workmen not only fail to use language meaningfully, but they also fail to imitate what George Puttenham considers integral to the 'beauty' of English 'poesy', its 'rhyme, and tunable concords or symphony'.⁴⁵ (pp. 95–96). The workmen's scene fails on these levels of sound as much as it fails semantically, and it is this failure as much as any silliness in the scene's meaning that *Midsummer* plays for laughs. We are meant, I think, to hear immediately the musical contrast not just between the aristocrats' elegant blank verse and the workmen's awkward rhyme and rhythm, but also the contrast between the aristocrats' earlier musical use of rhyme and rhythm and the workmen's pedestrian poetry.⁴⁶ Since *Midsummer* is so devoted to the 'tunable' aspects of poetry, illustrations of this point abound. For example, Lysander, deep in his fruitless, fairy-led chase after Demetrius, practically sings:

He goes before me, and still dares me on:
When I come where he calles, then he is gon.
The villaine is much lighter heeld than I;
I followed fast: but faster he did fly;
That fallen am I in darke uneauen way,
And here will rest me.
Come thou gentle daye,
For if but once, thou shewe me thy gray light,
Ille finde *Demetrius*, and reuenge this spight.

(F2; 3.3.1-8)

Even when the workmen produce pentameter such as this, their poetry is distinctly less musical. Bottom as Pyramus famously laments,

O grim lookt night, o night, with hue so blacke,
O night, which euer art, when day is not:
O night, O night, alacke, alacke, alacke,
I feare my *Thisbyes* promise is forgot.

And thou, ô wall, ô sweete, ô louely wall,
 That standst betweene her fathers ground and mine,
 Thou wall, ô wall, O sweete and louely wall,
 Showe mee thy chinke, to blink through, with mine eyne.
 (H; 5.1.169-75)

Both of these characters produce rhymed verse, but Shakespeare has Bottom use egregiously ‘untrue orthography to wrench his words to help his rhyme’ (‘mine’ ‘eyne’).⁴⁷ Lysander’s speech is arguably light in terms of content, and it employs mostly simple one-syllable words; however it is written in a pattern of varied stresses, waking up the ear; and the speech uses complex rhetorical schemes, including parallelism, alliteration, anastrophe (‘fallen am I’), and polyptoton (‘fast’ ‘faster’). In evident contrast, Bottom’s speech is plodding and repetitive, boringly metrically regular, and it emphasizes the eye and ear-sore rhyme ‘mine’ ‘eyne’ by including two internal rhymes, one repetitive and one mouth-stopping (‘chinke’ ‘blink’). The workmen produce distinctly ‘immusical’ verse, placing their voices on a scale below the singing birds and hounds that populate the play.

Parker does not want to argue that the play endorses a worldview that subordinates those men, but if we attend to the play’s presentation of a full spectrum of mortals that produce sound and see that spectrum in light of how Shakespeare’s world understood sound, we can see that this play values some dogs over some men on the basis of musical ability.⁴⁸ And we can also see that the relative rhetorical beauty of language divides human animals from one another and categorizes some as ‘little better than’ beasts and some as not as good as singing birds and hounds. Laughing at Quince’s prologue, Theseus says to Demetrius, ‘I wonder, if the Lyon be to speake’, and Demetrius replies, ‘No wonder, my Lord. One Lyon may, when many Asses doe’ (H; 5.1.151-53). *Midsummer* often characterizes its speaking workmen as remarkable speaking nonhuman animals who are like grounded beasts because of how poorly they speak. If we suspend our belief that the animal world is, and has always been, divided strictly between human animals and the nonhuman animal kingdom and attend instead to musicality and rhetorical ability, we can see in *Midsummer* a large group of mortals, some of whom are musical and some immusical.

3. Kinds of nonhuman animals

Just as *Midsummer* differentiates between kinds of human animals, it is equally interested in seeing the essential differences between kinds of non-human animals; and the play differentiates between those nonhuman

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animals on the same bases as it differentiates between kinds of human animals. When Theseus introduces Snug and Starveling as 'two noble beasts', the audience sees not two, but three actual mortals. Snug and Starveling appear with Starveling's dog, the play's only embodied nonhuman animal. That real nonhuman animal's absence, however, from Theseus's list of 'beasts' suggests that Starveling's dog is not a 'noble beast'. That is, Theseus's list places the human animal and the lion in the category of 'noble beasts' and ignores Starveling's dog entirely. Since Theseus has recently described his musical hounds in great detail (F4-F4v; 4.1.116-124), Starveling's dog is clearly not the same kind of animal as Theseus's hounds, even though all of these mortals are broadly classed as dogs.⁴⁹ *Midsummer* makes it clear that Theseus's hounds are as different from Starveling's dog as Theseus is from Starveling. In addition, the differences between these dogs seem allied to the differences between these men: some men sing, hunt, and are worthy of notice; and some are immusical, do not hunt, and are 'beneath social notice'. Likewise, some dogs sing, hunt, and are worthy of notice; and some only fawn, and are negligible, such as Starveling's dog.⁵⁰

This logic undergirds the divisions among *Midsummer*'s dogs and among dogs in other Shakespeare's plays. It is the logic behind the prideful exchange between Demetrius and Hermia:

HERMIA: Whats this to my *Lysander*? Where is hee?

Ah good *Demetrius*, wilt thou giue him mee?

DEMETRIUS: I had rather giue his carcasse to my hounds.

HERMIA: Out dog, out, curre: Thou driu'st me past the bounds of maidens patience.

(D4v; 3.2.62-66)

In this exchange, Demetrius's hounds become his dog-realm surrogates, onto whom he can displace his own desire to destroy Lysander. Those hounds would accompany Demetrius on hunts and would serve both as signs of his status and agents of his desires. Hermia demeans Demetrius by calling him not a hound but a generalized dog and then degrading that insult, calling him a 'low-bred' dog (*OED* 'cur' 1.). Of course, this difference between dogs depends on their relative utility for men, but it also seems to be a difference in kind, akin to the differences between men that are likewise differences in kind. This is made abundantly clear in *Macbeth*'s discourse when he speaks to the murderers he employs to kill Banquo and his son:

I, in the Catalogue ye goe for men,

As Hounds, and Greyhounds, Mungrels, Spaniels, Curses,

Slowghes, Water-Rugs, and Demy-Wolues are clipt
All by the Name of Dogges.

(*Macbeth* TLN 1092-1095; 3.1.93-6)

Macbeth divides the realm of dogs into dogs of quality – hounds and greyhounds – and dogs that do not rate a distinctive name (just as his murderers remain nameless); *Midsummer* also divides dogs into spaniels that fawn (C2; 2.1.204), hounds that sing, and useless, nameless dogs like Starveling's that, even when embodied, remain unmentioned by aristocrats.

As with the play's dogs, the play's birds are categorically differentiated in relation to their voices. *Midsummer's* privileging of singing animals accounts partially for the prodigious presence of birds in the play. In addition, the play's birds suggest that birds in the Renaissance were central to daily bodily experience and were seen as like people.⁵¹ Birds' centrality to people's bodily experience becomes apparent when Oberon commands Robin to meet him 'ere the first Cock crowe' (C3; 2.1.267), and later when the two leave the stage after Robin hears 'the morning Larke' (F4; 4.1.91). It seems likely that the lark's call in this case was actually produced on stage, so that either an instrument used by a human animal or a human animal voice mimicked bird language. Birds also function symbolically in the play. For example, in the opening scene of the play, Hermia swears by 'Venus doues' (A4v; 1.1.171). Carrion birds, ravens and crows, also appear as symbols in the play, standing for degraded blackness. Lysander compares the dark-haired Hermia to a raven: 'Who will not change a Rauen for a doue?' (C4v; 2.2.120). And Demetrius awakes to his spellbound vision of Helena, the whiteness of whose hand 'turnes' mountain snow 'to a crowe' (E2; 3.2.143). Although the crow's and raven's feathers' colour obviously accounts for this symbolic use of the birds, this use also aligns carrion birds with the racialized others (the *Ethiop* and 'tawny Tartar') and the grounded nonhuman animals (the cat and 'vile thing') that Lysander compares Hermia to later in the scene. Carrion birds do not sing, and are, therefore, more akin to grounded beings than they are to singing birds whose language is beautiful and meaningful.

The play invites its audience to laugh at Bottom's failure to distinguish between men, and it may also ask us to laugh at his inability to tell the difference between nonhuman animals. Bottom does not know what noises animals make, nor can he distinguish between grounded and flying animals.⁵² When the company of workmen fear the noble women's reactions to a lion's roar, Bottom says, 'I will aggrauate my voice so, that I wil roare you as gently, as any sucking doue: I will roare you an 'twere any Nightingale' (B2v; 1.2. 67-8). Not only does Bottom

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‘confuse “sitting dove” and “sucking lamb”’, he also seems unable to understand what kind of a noise a roar is.⁵³ As Bacon suggests in his discussion of the ‘resemblance’ between the sounds made by nonhuman animals and ‘the articulate letters’, there can be no confusion between a roar and a noise made by a nightingale or a dove.⁵⁴ Bottom shows how inattentive he is to sound. He also seems altogether unaware of a lion’s characteristics. He tells his friends that ‘there is not a more fearefull wilde foule then your Lyon liuing’ (Dv; 3.1.29-30). Again Bottom seems to be unable to distinguish between flying and grounded animals.

This distinction appears to be primary to many in the play. When Oberon, the king of the (flying) fairies, conceives of the most horrific love objects for his queen, he lists only hairy, grounded animals. Alone on the stage, he tells the audience of his plan to make Titania ‘pursue’ the ‘next thing then she waking lookes vpon/(Be it on Lyon, Beare, or Wolfe, or Bull, /On medling Monky, or on busie Ape)’ (Cv; 2.1.179-81). And with the love juice in his hand, Oberon invokes the ‘Beare’ again, but adds an ‘Ounce’, ‘Catte’, ‘Pard’, and ‘Boare’ to his list of ‘thing[s]’ she might see when she awakes (C3-C3v; 2.2.36-37). Unlike the play’s dogs and birds, the nonhuman animals Oberon lists seem relatively undistinguishable – they are all ‘thing[s]’ and all horrific love objects for the flying Titania. Although the ‘Monky’ and the ‘Ape’ appear with associated behavioural characteristics, they are as likely and as repulsive love objects as any of the other hairy animals that Oberon imagines. In his survey of today’s attitudes toward animals, Cary Wolfe criticizes the Great Ape Project for limiting the extension of rights to apes as ‘those who are (symptomatically) “most like us”’.⁵⁵ As James Knowles suggests, apes and monkeys, particularly marmosets, provoked and symbolized fears of human animality in Renaissance texts.⁵⁶ But Knowles also points to a wide variety of grounded nonhuman animals, including hares, hogs, lions, and hounds, that could stand for bestial humans.⁵⁷ *Midsummer* shows us that Renaissance human animals did not categorize other animals as we do. There was, first and foremost, no ‘us’ in the post-enlightenment (and especially in the post-civil rights) sense. And some birds might have more in common with some men and women than all apes had with all people.

4. Bottom’s vanity: the sixteenth-century animal becomes the quintessential human

Bottom, of course, occupies a unique position on *Midsummer*’s animal continuum. With his ass-head on, Bottom looks like a monster to his friends because he has the trunk and limbs of a human animal and the head of a non-human animal. His monstrous translation might seem to

challenge the idea of a Renaissance animal continuum since it could be seen as pointing to distinct differences between the human and the animal. If a combination makes a monster, then the categories would appear to be essentially different. But to the immortals in the play, and to its aristocrats, Bottom is only and always an ass. Awakened from her love-juice dream, Titania does not say she was in love with a monster; instead she says, 'Me thought I was enamoured of an Asse' (F3v; 4.1.74). And at the end of the play, Theseus holds out hope that 'With the helpe of a Surgeon, he might yet recouer and prooue an Asse' (H3; 5.1.298-299). Furthermore, even in Bottom's human animal condition, before and after his translation, both his name and his personality mark him as closer to an ass than he is to an ideal aristocratic man. For Bottom is, by all accounts, the most self-promoting of characters, and he was created in a culture that discouraged self-promotion. For example, Jonson warns writers to be very careful when they are writing to the powerful, 'lest any spice of rashness, folly, or self-love appear'.⁵⁸ Bottom, full of 'folly' and 'self-love', reveals himself as essentially the ass that Robin makes him.⁵⁹ Observing Bottom's overweening vanity and bumbling incompetence, Robin only actualizes Bottom's ass identity.⁶⁰ In Renaissance iconography, the ass appears as 'an image of vanity'; so Bottom's most salient personal quality also signalled his ass identity iconographically to his original audiences.⁶¹ In *Midsummer*, Bottom is vain because he is an ass, and just as the ass is the essence of his name, his vanity is the essence of his ass identity.

However, since the early nineteenth century, that vanity has come to be seen as signalling instead as his essential humanity.⁶² William Hazlitt initiated the modern reaction to Bottom in his commentary on the character, which, tellingly, begins with a claim to reconsider: 'Bottom the Weaver is a character that has not had justice done him. He is the most romantic of mechanics'.⁶³ Writing in 1817, Hazlitt revalued the character in relation to Hazlitt's own Romantic convictions. He recognized Bottom's class status in the play, but he transformed Shakespeare's 'rude mechanical' into a 'romantic' 'mechanic'. Shakespeare seems to be using 'mechanical' in a sense the *OED* terms 'now rare': 'Belonging to or characteristic of people engaged in manual work, esp. regarded as a class, artisanal; vulgar, coarse' (p. 3). Hazlitt cleanses Bottom's social status of its vulgarity by calling him 'romantic' in the sense of 'Having a bent or tendency towards romance; readily influenced by the imagination' (*OED* 4.a.). However, Hazlitt appears to massively misread the character who C.L. Barber terms the most 'literal-minded' of characters;⁶⁴ and Hazlitt's misreading goes along with his refusal to actually see Bottom in his nonhuman animal guise. Hazlitt says, 'Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage, it is an ass's head, and nothing more; certainly a very strange costume for a gentleman to appear in'.⁶⁵ Perhaps, Hazlitt is

calling the actor who might portray Bottom 'a gentleman' who would be demeaned by appearing with an ass's head. Or Hazlitt may be identifying Bottom with the character he plays in Quince's play: 'a most lovely gentlemanlike man' (B2v; 1.2.71). What Hazlitt is refusing, however, is any non-human animal identity for Bottom. Thus 'justice' for vain Bottom means his elevation to a pure human status. Later in the nineteenth century, Charles Knight continued in Hazlitt's line. Dorothea Kehler says of Knight, 'Acknowledging Bottom's self-confidence, authority, and self-love, Knight maintains, "Why, Bottom the weaver is the representative of the whole human race"'.⁶⁶ If Hazlitt is Bottom's first promoter, Knight may be his most enthusiastic, taking the qualities that made Bottom a Renaissance ass as the qualities that make him the exemplary man.

In the twentieth century, critics and directors eagerly took Knight's cue. For example, Frank Sidgwick in 1908 sees little humanity in anyone in the play besides Bottom: 'The characters are mostly puppets, and scarcely any except Bottom has the least psychological interest for the reader'.⁶⁷ A generation later, in G. Wilson Knight's prefatory note to a reissue of his 1932 treatment of Shakespeare's symbolism, *The Shakespearean Tempest*, he says that in 'the general challenge of Shakespeare's broad humanity and humour in relation to kings (we remember Falstaff and Bottom)'.⁶⁸ Although Barber (in 1959) astutely recognizes Bottom's literal-mindedness, he also says that 'Bottom's charming combination of ignorant exuberance and oblivious imaginativeness make him the most humanly credible and appealing personality Shakespeare had yet created from the incongruous qualities required for the clown's role'.⁶⁹ Likewise, Harold Bloom says that 'Bottom the natural man is also the transcendental Bottom'.⁷⁰ And Deborah Wyrick, in her article about every aspect of the 'ass motif', agrees entirely: 'Bottom serves as a clear comic everyman – a mirror in which the playgoer can see the human condition'.⁷¹ (p. 447). Thus even a scholar who has investigated the material and symbolic purport of asses lauds Bottom's essential humanity. David Selbourne, who closely observed and recorded the rehearsals for Brook's New York production of *Midsummer*, documents Brook's direction in relation to Bottom's transformation: 'Brook is saying, as I enter, that "the prop of the ass's head cannot be more than a token, . . . "No conceivable object", Brook is calmly telling them, "can turn a man into a believable animal"'.⁷² Writing in the early nineteenth century, Hazlitt refused to admit that the fantasy of *Midsummer* could be adequately represented in the theatre, but like Hazlitt, Brook, the most famous modern director of the play, refuses to see Bottom as an animal. For nineteenth and twentieth-century critics and dramatists, vain Bottom is only a human, and even the quintessential human.

Derrida says that there is ‘a supposed discontinuity, rupture, or even abyss’ between ‘those who call themselves men and what so-called men, those who name themselves men, call the animal’. He also suggests that ‘[t]he multiple and heterogeneous border of this abyssal rupture has a history’.⁷³ I have been arguing that we should see *Midsummer*’s displays of mortals as a part of that history. The play, I suggest, does not distinguish absolutely between all humans and a singular category of animals. It does not construct or abide by ‘the limit between Man with a capital M and Animal with a capital A’,⁷⁴ for its singing birds are not categorizable as ‘vile things’, whereas some of its human animals are. In the conclusion to her latest essential book on animals, Fudge criticizes a number of early modernists’ discussions of the Renaissance self. Those discussions, Fudge observes, largely leave animals out of the picture, as if it were possible to understand Renaissance humans apart from animals. She shows instead that ‘thinking about humans in the early modern period *is* thinking about animals’.⁷⁵ But Fudge herself at times constructs ‘an abyss’ between humans and animals. Although her own work often leads her to question an absolute distinction, she shares Boehrer’s assumption that it must be present even when under pressure.⁷⁶ But if the human can exclude women, working men, Jews, Ethiopes, and children, can we really see an essential Renaissance human nature truly separated from nonhuman animals? *Midsummer*’s display of the mortal world suggests otherwise.

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Notes

- 1 Bruce Boehrer, *Shakespeare Among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). Jeanne Addison Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).
- 2 Boehrer, *Shakespeare*, p. 44.
- 3 All quotations from *Midsummer* will be cited from Q1 by signature followed by the act, scene, and line numbers from William Shakespeare, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, *The Norton Shakespeare*, Gen. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 814–863.
- 4 See Gary Jay Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night’s Dream in the Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), especially chapter two, and Trevor R. Griffiths, ‘Introduction’, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Shakespeare in Production*. William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially pp. 12–25.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, ‘The animal that therefore I am (more to follow)’, trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2002), pp. 369–418 (399).

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- 6 David Selbourne, *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Eye-witness Account of Peter Brook's Production From First Rehearsal to First Night* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 227.
- 7 As Stephen Greenblatt notes, one Q1 stage direction reads, 'Enter Quince, Flute, Thisby and the rabble' (G2), 'Introduction', *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. William Shakespeare. *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 805–813 (806). The *OED* defines 'rabble' as 'A pack, string, swarm (of animals). *Obs.*' and as 'the common, low, or disorderly part of the populace' (A.n. 1, 2c).
- 8 Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 33.
- 9 Of course, Bottom does respond to Theseus during the play, but his response demonstrates his deep misunderstanding of Theseus's position in relation to the representation.
- 10 Kenneth Burke, 'Why A Midsummer Night's Dream?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57 (2006), pp. 297–308. Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989). See also Greenblatt's comment in his introduction to the play in the *Norton Shakespeare*: 'we are invited at once to join in the mockery of the inept performers and to distance ourselves from the mockers. That is, the audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not simply mirrored in the play's upper classes; the real audience is given a broader perspective, a more capacious understanding than anyone onstage' (p. 841). Also, see Richard Wilson's fine essay: 'The Kindly Ones: The Death of the Author in Shakespearean Athens', in Richard Dutton (ed.), *A Midsummer Night's Dream: New Casebooks*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996), pp. 198–222. I share the utopian goals of some critics, although my reading of the play's workmen obviously differs. Patterson offers compelling evidence that the play asked its contemporary audience to care about food shortages and unemployment (see especially pp. 55–57). Of course, seeing people as animals does not necessitate starving or mistreating those people. The play could be criticizing or at least acknowledging starvation and unemployment and still categorizing the workmen on a lower end of the animal continuum than some nonhuman animals.
- 11 According to Horace Howard Furness, Warburton amended 'beholds' to 'behows'. William Shakespeare, *A Midsommer Night's Dreame*, A New Variorum Edition, in Horace Howard Furness (ed.) (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1895). The *Norton* follows Warburton and his followers. Warburton's emendation would add the wolf to the list of mortals who make noise at night.
- 12 This is the folio reading with through line numbers followed by the *Norton* act, scene, and line numbers. The *Troilus* 1609 quarto reading is 'the cignets downe is harsh, and spirit of sence/hard as the palme of plow-man' (A2v).
- 13 Philostratus is the speaker in Q.
- 14 William Shakespeare, *A Midsommer Night's Dreame*, A New Variorum Edition, in Horace Howard Furness (ed.) (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1895), note to his line 224, p. 222.

- 15 Furness, note to his line 230, pp. 223–224.
- 16 Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 175. Fudge's claim here risks discounting the historically simultaneous rise of African slavery in the British Empire.
- 17 Lysander's simile seems to place Quince as the rider of the horse, but his comment, 'he knows not the stop', may make Quince the horse.
- 18 Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 128.
- 19 See Erica Fudge's discussion, *Brutal*, pp. 42–50. See also Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 43.
- 20 This is the gloss in William Shakespeare, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', *The Riverside Shakespeare*, in G. Blakemore Evans (ed.) (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 2nd edn, pp. 251–283; and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, in David Bevington (ed.) (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 4th edn, pp. 147–177.
- 21 This is the gloss in *A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Norton Shakespeare*, in Gen. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 814–863.
- 22 See also Helena's comments on the easily 'beguil'd' and 'periu'r'd' boy Cupid (Bv; 1.1.239, 241).
- 23 On women as horses see Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild*, pp. 64–67; see also Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000). For a discussion of the workmen's confusion of gender in regards to facial hair, see Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 91–93.
- 24 *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 23.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 26 Unlike in the modern world, people in the Renaissance did not completely differentiate between the noise produced by asses and the noise produced by horses. See the *OED* 'bray' v superscript 1 2. It is probably telling that Bottom enters twice with his ass-head on, both times to cue lines with 'horse[s]' in them.
- 27 *Midsummer*, p. 148.
- 28 See Boehrer's discussion of the varied classical opinions on the relation of speech to definitions of the human: *Parrot Culture: Our 2,500-Year-Long Fascination with the World's Most Talkative Bird* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 8–10. See also Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), especially chapter two, where he discusses ways to 'unsettle the ontological difference between human and animal, a difference expressed in the philosophical tradition by the capacity for language' (p. 47). And see Derrida's comments in response to Jean-Luc Nancy's question, 'in the shift, which you judge to be necessary, from man

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- to animal . . . what happens to language?’ in “Eating Well’, or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida by Jean-Luc Nancy, *Who Comes After the Subject?*, Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds) (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 116. Also see R. W. Serjeantson, ‘The passions and animal language, 1540-1700’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001), pp. 425–444. Serjeantson surveys the English and European views. He claims that ‘early modern natural philosophers almost universally insisted that only humans were capable of language and speech’ (p. 425). However, he refers to ‘a popular belief in early modern England that “in the olde tymes” animals could speak’ (p. 426).
- 29 See Brian Cummings, ‘Pliny’s Literate Elephant and the Idea of Animal Language in Renaissance Thought’ in Erica Fudge (ed.), *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans and Other Wonderful Creatures*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 164–185, on Renaissance ideas about animals that can use or understand human semantics.
- 30 See also C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 138.
- 31 Bruce Smith, ‘Hearing Green’ in Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary-Floyd-Wilson (eds), *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 147–168. See also Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 32 Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum: Or A Natural History. The Works of Francis Bacon*, in James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (eds) (St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1969), vol 4, p. 263.
- 33 Bacon, p. 225.
- 34 See the Variorum’s collation: William Shakespeare, *A Midsommer Night’s Dreame*, A New Variorum Edition, in Horace Howard Furness (ed.) (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1895), p. 25.
- 35 On voice in the play, see Maurice Hunt, ‘The Voices of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, *Shakespearean Criticism Yearbook 1992* (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1994), vol 22, pp. 39-47. I agree with Hunt that ‘Shakespeare’s choice of the word “auditor” rather than “spectator” as a term for playgoer 3.1.67 suggests that he valued dramatic appeals to playgoer’s ears as much (or more) than those designed for their eyes’ (p. 39).
- 36 Of course, Quince tells his friends that Bottom is ‘a very Paramour for a sweete voice’ (G2; 4.2.11-12). Quince’s line should get a laugh here not just because he mistakes ‘Paramour’ for ‘paragon’ but because the audience has recently heard how bad Bottom’s voice really is. See also Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Fovre-Footed Beastes* (London, 1607). Topsell says that ‘the Asse is called . . . of some *Megamucos* because of his vnpleasant voyce’ (p. 20).
- 37 The play makes the same joke when Titania enters with Bottom and offers to kiss him: ‘And kisse thy faire large eares, my gentle ioy’ (F2v; 4.1.4).
- 38 Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 121. Wilson as quoted in Parker, p. 117.

- 39 Ben Jonson, *Timber; or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter*. Ben Jonson, in C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), rpt. 1965, vol 8, pp. 620–621.
- 40 Kathryn Perry, 'Unpicking the Seam: Talking Animals and Reader Pleasure in Early Modern Satire', *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans and Other Wonderful Creatures*, in Erica Fudge (ed.) (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 18–36.
- 41 Parker, p. 124.
- 42 Bacon, p. 280.
- 43 Bacon, p. 282.
- 44 'Mimmick' is the folio reading (TLN 1041). Q1 has 'Minnick', Q2 'Minnock' (D4). The *OED* lists 'minnick' as a variant spelling of 'mimic'.
- 45 George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, in Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (eds) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 95–96.
- 46 See R. W. Dent's comment: 'the language – in its grotesque combination of muddled syntax, padded lines, mind-offending tropes, ear-offending schemes – does violence even to what would otherwise be woefully inadequate' [quoted in *Shakespeare*, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. *A Casebook*, in Antony Price (ed.) (London: Macmillan Press, 1983, p. 135). Many critics see Bottom as particularly human and compelling when he speaks about his dream vision after he awakes without his ass head (Gv-G2; 4.1.196-211). However, Bottom mangles not only the sense but also the musicality of 1 Corinthians in that speech.
- 47 Puttenham, p. 170.
- 48 See also Parker's reading of joinery in the third chapter of *Shakespeare From the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Parker makes a strong case for the bad joinery practiced by the mechanicals as making visible the oppressive 'hierarchies' that 'smooth discourse . . . forges and the orders it constructs' (p. 115).
- 49 See Mark S. R. Jenner, 'The Great Dog Massacre'. *Fear in Early Modern Society*, in William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts (eds) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 44–61. Jenner notes that although the English slaughtered dogs in times of plague. 'it was *dogs* that they slaughtered, not other members of the canine commonwealth. Ladies lap-dogs and hounds of the gentry were specifically excluded from these regulations' (p. 55).
- 50 See also Michael Dobson, 'A dog at all things: the transformation of the onstage canine, 1550–1850', *Performance Research*, 5 (2000), pp. 116–24. Dobson offers evidence of hunting dogs displayed at great expense in University and court productions. His evidence points to a significant distinction between these dogs and the clown's dog in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. See also Alan Stewart on how highly James I valued his hunting dogs: 'Government by Beagle: The Impersonal Rule of James VI and I', *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans and Other Wonderful Creatures*, in Erica Fudge (ed.) (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 101–115. According to Stewart, James saw his favourite bitch's death as more significant than the accidental hunting death of a keeper.

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- 51 See also Thomas A. Hamill, 'Cockfighting as cultural allegory in early modern England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 39 (2009), pp. 375–406, on the 'very intimate set of relations' between cock breeders and their gamecocks (p. 390).
- 52 See also G. Wilson Knight: 'the bird-beast opposition is vivid here ... Bottom's heavy wit or blundering ignorance gives us other examples ... The humour in these clearly depends on the bird-beast contrast' (quoted in Price, p. 67).
- 53 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', *The Norton Shakespeare*, Gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 814–863 (821n.1).
- 54 Bacon, pp. 265–266.
- 55 Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Post-humanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 192.
- 56 See also Kim F. Hall, "'Troubling Doubles": Apes, Africans, and Blackface in *Mr. Moore's Revels*', *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance*, in Joyce Green MacDonald (ed.) (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), pp. 120–144.
- 57 James Knowles, "'Can ye not tell a man from a marmoset?": Apes and Others on the Early Modern Stage', *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans and Other Wonderful Creatures*, in Erica Fudge (ed.) (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp.138–163 (151). See also Erica Fudge's chapter on bearbaiting in *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Although Fudge claims a special significance for apes and monkeys at one point in the chapter (pp. 12–13), she also points to the practice of giving the bears 'human names' (p. 16).
- 58 Ben Jonson, *Timber; Or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter*, in C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), rpt. 1965, vol 8, p. 566.
- 59 See Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), especially pp.13–24, for a concise summary of challenges to the idea of a stable self as a Renaissance ideal or as emerging in the Renaissance.
- 60 Trevor R. Griffiths, Introduction, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Shakespeare in Production*. William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), provides a telling history of press commentary on Bottom in productions (see pp. 102–105).
- 61 Deborah Baker Wyrick, 'The ass motif in *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33 (1982), pp. 432–448 (433).
- 62 Bottom is not the only 'mechanical' whom the nineteenth century transformed into the essential man. See S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Prawer shows how Karl Marx often looked to Snug as he thought about men of his day. In an article about Abraham Lincoln, Marx compares Lincoln to Snug – both are examples of 'an average man of good will' (Prawer, p. 269).
- 63 William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, 1817* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 98.

- 64 C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 148.
- 65 Hazlitt, p. 103.
- 66 Dorothea Kehler, 'A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Bibliographic Survey of the Criticism', *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, in Dorothea Kehler (ed.) (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 3–76 (9).
- 67 Frank Sidgwick, *The Sources and Analogues of 'A Midsummer-night's dream' compiled by Frank Sidgwick* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), p. 2.
- 68 G. Wilson Knight, *The Shakespearean Tempest, 1932* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. xv.
- 69 Barber, p. 156.
- 70 Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p. 151.
- 71 Wyrick, p. 447.
- 72 David Selbourne, *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Eye-witness Account of Peter Brook's Production From First Rehearsal to First Night* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 223.
- 73 Jacques Derrida, 'The animal that therefore I am (more to follow)', trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2002), pp. 369–418 (399).
- 74 Derrida, p. 398.
- 75 Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 186.
- 76 See, for example, her discussion of her differences with Paster (*Humoring the Body*) on this question (108–109). The primary text on animals in the Renaissance is, of course, Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1983). Like Fudge, Thomas insists on the primacy of the distinction between human and animal in the period. But Thomas also, like Fudge, provides a lot of evidence that when reconsidered might help us to question that primacy.