**Metaphor as Error in *Midsummer Night’s Dream***

In *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595-6), Shakespeare presents us with two models of metaphor: Puck’s metaphors have the power to affect change in the play through magic, in contrast with Bottom’s usage, which struggles to gain symbolic power and remains comically literal and faulty. Puck is master of the magical, transformative world of the wood outside Athens, whereas Bottom and his fellow actors fail to control symbolism in their speech. The former type is representative of Shakespeare’s powerful figurative language, most often perceived as adding power and atmosphere to the text. Caroline Spurgeon’s extensive survey argues that imagery, including metaphor, ‘gives quality, creates atmosphere and conveys emotion in a way no precise description, however clear and accurate, can possibly do.’[[1]](#footnote-1) Ralph Berry perceives ‘metaphor as a controlling structure’ which he describes as a ‘formal priority’ in a text.[[2]](#footnote-2) This idea has been developed more recently by Simon Palfrey who argues that metaphors form ‘mini-narratives’ of the playworld.[[3]](#footnote-3) Maria Fahey agrees, arguing that Shakespearean metaphors ‘have the power to turn words into deeds and to move plots into acts.’[[4]](#footnote-4) These studies focus on the dramatic significance of metaphor, often as vehicles for overriding themes or as ‘controlling structures’.

Yet early modern rhetoricians recognised that metaphor was an error. The ‘translation’ of word and meaning in metaphor was regarded as an incorrect use of language, even an ‘abuse’. Rhetoricians were cautious of metaphor’s duplicity, but they also saw it as necessary to express oneself properly and achieve eloquence. This article demonstrates how Shakespearean metaphor can effect mediocrity or failure through the character of Bottom, highlighting the erroneousness of figurative language. These failures enable us to historicise the attitude of caution and distaste taken by some early modern rhetoricians towards figuration, rather than perceiving it as a dynamic literary function as has been the main critical focus. What we see in his language is an exposure of these problems, not just their manifestation, and we can consider Bottom, alongside Puck, as a user of metaphor rather than its victim.

**Metaphor as Error**

The significance of metaphor in the play alters when we understand the history of its interpretation and the terms used to describe it. Quintilian described figures as ‘errors’ because they digress from ordinary speech.[[5]](#footnote-5) This view persisted into the early modern period, although it is a different kind of error from present-day usage. Error in the early modern period meant ‘wandering’. In 1587, Thomas Thomas defined ‘error’ as ‘a false opinion, a taking of a falsehood for truth: a wandring, a mistaking, deceit, ignorance: a winding or turning: a turning out of the way.’[[6]](#footnote-6) It is at once a ‘mistake’ and a ‘winding’. Similarly, in 1584, Thomas Cooper conveys its dual sense: it is ‘a false opinion: a taking of falsehoode for truth: a wandring.’[[7]](#footnote-7) Wandering is the root of error from the Latin *errare* but its association with falsity is now the primary meaning.[[8]](#footnote-8) How might our understanding change if we consider metaphor as error in this former sense? Erasmus describes it in these terms, claiming that in metaphor ‘a word is transferred away from its real and proper signification to one which lies outside its proper sphere’.[[9]](#footnote-9) Its transference is a type of semantic wandering to somewhere ‘outside’.[[10]](#footnote-10) His definition suggests its misplacing as well as its impropriety, for metaphor was (and is) interpreted as an incorrect use of language.

Straightforwardly, metaphor is a mistake of literal speech. When Hippolyta claims ‘Four days will quickly steep themselves in night’ (I.1.7), she is using words in ways that they do not mean: days cannot be ‘steeped’. Metaphor is a wandering of sense: it moves away from an ordinary way of speaking, using a more semantically distant, even unexpected signifier to convey meaning. Yet it is misleading to characterise it as merely a malfunction of literal expression as it is not to be corrected. Nevertheless, the view that metaphor is mistaken language is familiar in the early modern period.[[11]](#footnote-11) It was highly valued among early modern English rhetoricians, whilst also being recognised as an ‘abuse’ of language. In 1589 George Puttenham describes all tropes as abuses of language:

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sort abuses, or rather trespasses, in speech, because they pass the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the ear and also the mind, drawing it from plainness and simplicity to a certain doubleness, whereby our talk is guileful and abusing.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Tropes transgress ‘ordinary’ and ‘common’ language, leading to ambiguity and deception.[[13]](#footnote-13) This sense of ‘guileful and abusing’ language, suggests the dangerous consequences of employing tropes, which may both confound communication and mislead it. Yet at the same time he claims that the use of tropes is essential to poetic language.

Richard Sherry agrees on the importance of metaphor. In 1550 he writes that ‘among all virtues of speech, metaphor is the chief. None persuadeth more effectously, none sheweth the thing before our eyes more evidently, none moveth more mightily the affections, none maketh the oration more goodly, pleasant, nor copious’.[[14]](#footnote-14) From Sherry and Puttenham’s observations we can conclude that metaphor is both dangerous and desirable. Sherry makes a wider parallel between error and poetry, claiming of a ‘Faute’ in language ‘which though it be pardoned in Poetes, yet in prose it is not to be suffered’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Because of the faultiness of figurative language, rhetoricians created rules for usage in an attempt to contain error. In 1593 Henry Peacham argues that in metaphor:

First, that there be not an unlikeness instead of a likeness...Secondly, that the similitude be not farfetched, as from strange things unknown to the hearer...[for] he shall obscure the thing that would fain make evident. Thirdly, that there be no unclean or unchaste signification contained in the metaphor, which may offend against modest and reverend minds.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Peacham claims that the two objects compared by a metaphor should not be dissimilar nor the comparison loose or open-ended. Dudley Fenner uses an analogy with female sexuality to convey his worries about far-fetched metaphor: a figure ‘must be shamefaste, and as it were maydenly, that it may seeme rather to be ledde by the hande to another signification, then to be driuen by force vnto the same’, which is an ‘abuse of speache’.[[17]](#footnote-17) Peter Mack argues that style in Renaissance language, including the use of metaphor, consists in three qualities: ‘correctness, clarity, and careful sentence construction’.[[18]](#footnote-18) A prescribed use of metaphor, one that is restrained, ordered and compares similar objects is consistent with Mack’s description of eloquence: metaphor can clarify and be ‘correct’. Yet in contrast with this aspiration for the clear and regular effect of metaphor is the sense that it is a deviation from the ‘normal’.

The distinction between ‘ordinary’ language as clear and distinct, and ‘literary’ language as unfamiliar and poetic was first asserted by Aristotle.[[19]](#footnote-19) More recent thought on metaphor is also marked by a frequent presupposition that ‘metaphors are somehow “deviant”’.[[20]](#footnote-20) This propensity to understand metaphor by reference to literal meaning has led error to be situated at the heart of figurative language. Donald Davidson bases his theory of metaphor on the idea that a figurative reading is false or misleading: ‘[p]atent falsity is the usual case with metaphor’.[[21]](#footnote-21) John Searle agrees: ‘the defects which cue the hearer may be obvious falsehood, semantic nonsense, violations of conversational principles of communications’.[[22]](#footnote-22) When a literal interpretation of a word or phrase fails, a figurative interpretation needs to be searched for, known as the ‘error recovery model’.[[23]](#footnote-23) The audience is encouraged to identify linguistic ‘error’ in order to diagnose a case of metaphor and find an alternative understanding outside ‘proper’ rules of use. Mistake or error thus becomes the signpost of metaphor. For Paul de Man, error is not merely a sign of metaphor but its definition: ‘the specificity of literary language resides in the possibility of misreading and misinterpretation’.[[24]](#footnote-24) Describing metaphor as ‘error’ captures the deviations of sense that characterise it, but it also enables us to historicise error by recalling early modern interpretation of metaphor as a mistaken and potentially dangerous form of language. The setting of the wood is the crucial location to stage this crossover between mistake and wandering.

**The Wood**

The *MND* wood is located ‘a league without the town’, in a place beyond the city of Athens.[[25]](#footnote-25) It is a radical and impossible place which resists literal interpretation. The wood, as a literary function, has a long history of providing a place of journeys, wandering and loss.[[26]](#footnote-26) As Julie Sanders claims, representations of woodland and forest recur ‘as places of escape and exile, of non-normative, and therefore potentially transgressive practice.’[[27]](#footnote-27) In its location outside of the city, the wood mirrors the position of the early modern theatres in the Liberties, beyond the jurisdiction of London. Steven Mullaney argues that the theatres’ location outside the city was ‘in a certain sense outside the law, and so could serve as privileged or exempt arenas where the anxieties and insecurities of life in a rigidly organised hierarchical society could be given relatively free reign’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Beyond the city of London, the theatres allow social rules to be reordered and alter expectations of language use, and their analogue in *MND* is the wood beyond the city of Athens. Indeed, the two alternative spaces crossover when the wood becomes a theatre to stage the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe (V.1). Quince describes the wood as ‘a marvail’s convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage’ (III.1.2-4). ‘Convenient’ in this context suggests that the wood is an appropriate place to disguise themselves as characters and to act, play and fool. The ‘green’ stage delivers a sense of wildness and this too makes it appropriate for the type of action that will take place there: liberated, extemporised or lacking the expectations that a more formal setting delivers.

Northrop Frye recognises the *MND* wood as a place of transformation that enables a specific teleology: ‘the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world’.[[29]](#footnote-29) The deviation from the city to the wood, from the contrast of associations of the city as correct and standard, to the wood as wrong, erratic and subversive, manifests itself in language. According to Mullaney, since the words spoken in *MND* are located in the margin rather than the centre, forms of signification become ‘more contradictory, more extravagant and incontinent, than those allowed to manifest themselves within the city gates’.[[30]](#footnote-30) As a magical space that seems to be beyond certain conventions or rules, the wood is a particularly appropriate setting for metaphor’s translations and deviations.

Because the fairy wood is a magical place, metaphor has the potential to be literal, demonstrated by the first words spoken there. The Fairy describes its movement through the wood:

Over hill, over dale,

Thorough bush, thorough brier,

Over park, over pale,

Thorough flood, thorough fire:

I do wander everywhere (II.1.2-6)

Magic can metamorphose reality beyond what is normally possible; it is thus ambivalent whether the Fairy is immanent, traversing hills, dale, bushes and briars by magic, or whether this metaphorically suggests great distance without having travelled ‘everywhere’. Similarly metaphor can translate the landscape into a living being, as Titania says, ‘the winds, piping to us in vain, | As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea | Contagious fogs’ (II.1.88-90). Did the winds pipe music or simply blow, and were they vengeful? This world, inhabited by the King and Queen of the fairies, encourages us to reform figurative expression into some kind of reality. At these moments of rich digression the boundary between literal and figurative is uncertain. When metaphor is combined with magic in the fairy wood it gains power not merely to represent reality but to translate it.

This contrasts with the ‘classical’ style of language in the Athenian court, as Anne Barton notes.[[31]](#footnote-31) The opening is dominated with Egeus’s case against his daughter, Hermia, and her choice of husband, Lysander. Their dialogue is full of tropes:

Lys. The course of true love never did runs smooth,

But either it was different in blood—

Her. O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low

Lys. Or else misgrafted in respect of years—

Her. O spite! Too old to be engaged to young.

Lys. Or merit stood upon the choice of friends—

Her. O hell! To choose love by another’s eyes. (I.1.134-140)

Stichomythia structures the exchange in an even back and forth. The use of isocolon creates symmetry within Hermia’s lines by dividing them into two sections, indicated by a dash, a structure which is repeated in each of Hermia’s responses. The sense of pattern through repetition is emphasised through anaphorawhich begins each line. The effect is to convey the lovers’ mutual anguish in an artificial form which contrasts with a different linguistic style once we leave the court and enter the wood. This also affects metaphor: in Egeus’s speech it is used as ornamentation, employed to help persuade Theseus of the harm done to his property. He claims that Lysander has ‘bewitched the bosom of my child’, that he has ‘by moonlight at her window sung | With faining voice verses of faining love | And stol’n the impression of her fantasy’ (I.1.30-2). The ‘bewitching’ and stealing of Hermia is a lyrical, rhetorical device to symbolise desire, represented as the strange and uncontrollable power Lysander has over her, rather than an actual enchantment. We are not yet in the fairy world where Puck can literally implement the bewitching Egeus describes, as he does to Lysander in Act Two Scene One.

Egeus’s formal plea to Theseus reduces down to his directly-stated purpose: ‘As she is mine, I may dispose of her, | Which shall be either to this gentleman | Or to death’ (I.1.42-4). This style of forthright intention contrasts with the play’s middle section in the wood, most notably with the fairies’ playfulness and the actors’ performance which characteristically lacks explicit purpose. For example in Act Two Scene One, Puck says

I jest to Oberon, and make him smile  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;  
And sometime lurk I in a gossip’s bowl  
In very likeness of a roasted crab,  
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,  
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.  
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,  
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;  
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,  
And ‘Tailor’ cries, and falls into a cough;  
And then the whole choir hold their hips and loffe,  
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze and swear  
A merrier hour was never wasted there. (II.1.44-57)

He pulls together a disparate group of images, suggesting his contrary nature and his ability for limitless change. Metaphor here functions as an extended divergence, full of comic images as he metamorphoses from a fat horse to a crab apple. Once both the characters and readers are in the green world, the idea of progress towards something is dropped, replaced with a kind of ‘taking place’ or ‘wasting time’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Puck declares, ‘A merrier hour was never wasted there’, that his light-hearted trickery was an entertaining divergence in much the way his own representation of it is. As such, this is one of the digressions that characterise time in the wood. Puck moves in a whirl through a mixture of precise images, where the content could be expressed with more brevity but without the detail, ponderousness or creativity.

Yet metaphor in *MND* does not just function as divergence: Puck’s digression is not simply playful fun. His metaphor-making could describe actual events because his speech is complicated by magic which could render his verbal transformations real, making it possible for him to become a ‘roasted crab’ or a ‘three-foot stool’. The wood is the ‘convenient’ place for language to ‘go on holiday’, not only to be playful but to have effects beyond the way it is conventionally used in the first scene.[[33]](#footnote-33) Raphael Lyne argues of Puck that ‘being these things really, or metaphorically, and being like these things (as a kind of simile), are not completely distinct within fairy ontology’.[[34]](#footnote-34) In the early modern period, metaphor was synonymous with *translatio*, and uniquely in *MND*, metaphor is able to perform the magic trick of making one thing into something else not just semantically but as actual translation.[[35]](#footnote-35)

For example, in Act Three Scene One Bottom’s head is transformed into that of an ass whilst keeping his human body. The metaphor that he is an ‘ass’ is literalised through his translated head (III.1.113), signifying his foolish character. His metamorphosis is even described in terms of metaphor, when Quince famously declares ‘bless thee! Thou art translated’ (III.2.114). Puck describes his own magic as a translation, further associating magic with metaphor. He claims that he ‘left sweet Pyramus translated there’, waiting for Titania to enter and have her own affections translated through Puck’s magic(III.2.32). Metaphor can not only change and translate meaning but can also be the vehicle through which plot and character are directed. In another act of transformation, the love potion that Puck applies to the eyes of Lysander is the drug of metaphor, the ability to make him magically ‘see’ things in a different way (II.2.84-5). Lysander awakens, switching his affections – ‘Not Hermia, but Helena I love’ – seeing one woman with all the fierce desire he previously held for another (II.2.119).[[36]](#footnote-36) Demetrius acts in the same way, passionately declaring a love for Helena that was once Hermia’s: ‘O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!’ (III.2.138). For both men, the object of their affections is translated from one woman to another. Puck’s magic wields the transformative power of metaphor: it has the facility to change perception and see one thing as another, or in the case of Bottom, to make one thing into another. Here we see the play correcting the error of metaphor by making metaphorical language literal through the power of magic. In contrast, the ‘rude mechanicals’, as Puck mockingly describes them, reassert the error of metaphor by failing to use it properly and thus exposing its ‘mistake’.[[37]](#footnote-37)

**The Actors’ Error**

The acting troupe plays with metaphor’s ability to substitute and translate. When acting the play-within-the-play they engage with the structure of metaphor, replacing the self with a character, just as metaphor is the replacement of one object with another. The actors change or translate their selves so that the audience see one character through another. Modern editions such *The Riverside Shakespeare* rename the characters, following the first Quarto in changing the speech prefixes to ‘Pyramus’; ‘Thisbe’; ‘Lion’; ‘Wall’; and ‘Moonshine’.[[38]](#footnote-38) These speech prefixes replace the name of the previous character rather than appearing alongside it.[[39]](#footnote-39) Bottom is not *compared* with Pyramus in the manner of a simile, he *is* Pyramus, in the manner of a metaphor. Yet they fail to become their named characters. They only remain in character fleetingly and constantly draw attention to the fact that they are supposed to be someone else.[[40]](#footnote-40) The speech prefix ‘Lion’ precedes the line: ‘Then know that I as Snug the joiner am | A lion fell’ (V.1.221-2). The Lion announces that he is only Snug, alienating the audience from the conceit that there is a lion onstage. The acting troupe thus turns the conventions of assuming a role into error; acting becomes a comically failed substitution.

During the play, Bottom speaks directly to Theseus, breaking his character by commenting on the staging of the play. He explains to Theseus that ‘“Deceiving me” is Thisbe’s cue. She is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall’ (V.1.182-4). Here he makes the mechanics of metaphoror translation visible by revealing the cue and the action to follow. This is funny but also has the effect of maintaining two identities for each of the actors: Flute is both Thisbe and himself. In other Shakespearean metatheatre the players only have one proper identity – the character they are to become. In *Hamlet* they are known generically as ‘First Player’ (II.2). They do not coexist with their first character like Bottom/Pyramus. When the First Player speaks to Hamlet prior to the performance, it is only to discuss how it will be executed (II.2, III.2). On adopting their characters in performance, they seamlessly become ‘Player Queen’ and ‘Player Queen’ (III.2.145), in a way that Bottom and Flute fail to do. In *Sir Thomas More*, the actors are also known simply as ‘Players’.[[41]](#footnote-41) Of the plays-within-plays in early modern drama, *MND* is the one in which the actors least successfully subordinate themselves to their roles. The unique feature of the acting troupe is that they explicitly foreground their real selves while presenting their parts, which they then stumble over. This failure is not one-dimensional; it has the effect of de-naturalising theatrical illusion after four acts of a consistently maintained illusion of a magical fairy world. It could be argued that rather than being ignorant and foolish, the acting troupe are sensible in their literal-mindedness, resisting the irrationality of seeing one thing as another.

Their ‘error’ is generated by their engagement with the problems occasioned by metaphor. Starveling cannot quite grasp how metaphor works nor successfully manage to present one object as standing for another. He explains that ‘the lantern is the moon, I the man i’th’ moon, this thorn bush my thorn bush, and this dog my dog.’ (V.1.252-4).[[42]](#footnote-42) He mixes literal and symbolic elements, claiming that the lantern is a metaphor, but that his dog and thornbush are not to be taken metaphorically – they are as they appear onstage, despite also being metaphors given that they need to appear ‘in the moon’. Demetrius points this out, objecting: ‘Why, all these should be in the lantern, for all these are in the moon’ (V.1.255-6). At this point, Theseus explicitly recognises metaphor as error, declaring that ‘This is the greatest error of all the rest’ (V.1.241). Both he and Demetrius object to the metalepsis of the image, which has too many substitutions: the lantern is to represent the moon and Starveling as Moonshine is supposed to be somehow inside it.[[43]](#footnote-43) Theseus associates figuration with error, selecting excessive figuration as the worst error of all. The problem of how one thing can become another is not just faced by the acting troupe; they struggle to represent this translation onstage just as the onstage audience fails to interpret it.[[44]](#footnote-44) Shakespeare anticipates that the errors of the acting troupe might not be simply mistakes. Theseus claims that in ‘tongue-tied simplicity | In least speak most’ (V.1.104-5), that there may well be value in what the acting troupe say despite the pauses and brokenness with which it is delivered. In their tongue-tied simplicity they may achieve eloquent complexity, and in the same way their failure to assume a part metatheatrically communicates the impossibility of acting. We may be able to interpret Pyramus and Thisbe as a comedy of errors, but at the same time we can see them grappling with the problems of metaphor by maintaining a literal position despite needing to embrace theatrical irrationality.

**Bottom’s Error**

The acting troupe’s failure to adopt a part, to symbolise another, is reflected in their own faulty employment of language. Bottom most grossly mistakes language and is thus perceived as one of Shakespeare’s most foolish characters. Harold F. Brooks assumes that Bottom is a likeable fool: ‘None of the things which make Bottom ridiculous deprives him of our liking or even of the admiration we have for him’.[[45]](#footnote-45) He has been claimed as a simple character, whose meanings are in no sense metaphorical. Ronald F. Miller argues that Bottom is completely unaware of the fairy and figurative worlds around him: ‘An intelligence capable of understanding that fairies may be real on one level and be metaphors on another is also needed to comprehend that a man may be both an actor on the literal level and a lover or a tyrant on stage. Such subtleties are quite beyond Bottom’.[[46]](#footnote-46) Miller refers to ‘the weaver’s unimaginative literalism’ as being the source of his simple-mindedness. For Miller, Bottom is able neither to comprehend metaphor, not use it.

Yet the perception of the use or misuse of Bottom’s words is a social problem, not simply a linguistic fact.[[47]](#footnote-47) The prior knowledge we have of his social status affects whether we interpret his language seriously or not. This is a political decision, as a reader may be more inclined to probe the semantic possibilities of higher status characters. Michael Saenger seems to adopt this approach, arguing: ‘[w]e laugh at these characters because their words make audible their awkward efforts to translate their own social status: they are walking malapropisms’.[[48]](#footnote-48) We are licensed to laugh at these characters’ funny ways of speaking without considering their dual role as signifiers of class.[[49]](#footnote-49) It is Theseus, Duke of Athens, who encourages everyone to laugh at their mistakes by declaring ‘Our sport shall be to take what they mistake’ (V.1.90). Theseus can have fun with their errors as one who uses standard language and knows the rules, and Saenger is following Theseus in condoning laughter at linguistic difference.[[50]](#footnote-50) Madeleine Forey suggests that the comedy comes from the audiences’ superiority: ‘the jokes are on those who cannot put what they are doing into a literary context’, and the audience ‘can afford to feel some of the same superiority to it’.[[51]](#footnote-51) Despite a critical movement to reconceive Bottom’s language and deviate from Theseus’s interpretative model based on mockery, Bottom is still seen by some as witless, where his low status is associated with a lack of education and incorrect language use; consequently his speech is claimed to be wrong rather than metaphorical.

Some critics, however, have attempted to reclaim Bottom from the condemnation of pure folly and ignorance. Lyne argues that we should not interpret Bottom’s mistakes as meaningless: ‘close rhetorical reading might uncover clumsiness of one sort, but it also highlights the spontaneous effectiveness of their thinking’.[[52]](#footnote-52) J. Dennis Huston agrees, stating that ‘[w]hat is surprising is the order periodically perceivable beneath the surface chaos of [Bottom’s] malapropism’.[[53]](#footnote-53) Ludwig Borinski differentiates Bottom’s style from Quince’s: ‘Quince is the pedant, whose talk abounds in redundancies: Bottom is no fool and has real wit, and accordingly he alone has sufficient imagination for witty associations’.[[54]](#footnote-54) Lina Perkins Wilder proposes a revisionist reading of Bottom by focusing on the politics of his names, celebrating his multiple roles and his professional status: as ‘“Clown”, Bottom is both a “hempen homespun” and a “patch”, a country bumpkin and a city-dwelling professional performer’.[[55]](#footnote-55) Most revisionism, however, has focused on Bottom’s biblical re-working of 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 as he awakens from his dream. Patricia Parker is one of the many critics who have recognised this textual parallel.[[56]](#footnote-56) The spiritual rapture expressed in Corinthians suggests a realm of ‘unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter’.[[57]](#footnote-57) Parker associates this divine ineffability with Bottom’s own difficulty in describing his vision, characterised by his halting speech: ‘Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had’ (IV.1.206-19). Parker reclaims Bottom’s hesitant speech, not as a signifier of his inability to express himself, but that he has witnessed what cannot be expressed. Apart from this scriptural parallel, critics have so far only suggested the potential meaning in Bottom’s speech; its kind and form has not yet been thoroughly explored in terms of its figurative potential.[[58]](#footnote-58) There are other parts of Bottom’s language that, instead of being semantically redundant, could be understood metaphorically.

Bottom (as Pyramus) says ‘Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.’ (V.1.267). He refers to the light of the moon as being the light of the sun, humorously confusing one for the other. There are two main critical approaches to this moment, both of which lead to comedy. First, he mistakes the moon for the sun, and the audience laugh at his mistake, following Theseus. This could be seen as one of Bottom’s malapropisms, which characterise him as a gentle clown. Alternatively, he translates the moon as the sun, which we can recognise as a metaphor. One is seen in terms of the other – both hang in the sky and give light. The associations of the term ‘sunny’ are leant to the moon to alter our understanding of it, suggesting that the moon’s light is bright or warm or pleasant. This second approach emphasises the mistakenness of metaphor; we laugh because we recognise a meaningful mistake. Bottom’s ‘sunny beams’ can be read as an unintended mistake or a mistake-as-metaphor, which seems to have an element of intention or design.

Developing this latter interpretation, Bottom’s sunny moon could be a theatrical in-joke. Earlier in the play the troupe discuss whether or not the moon will shine on their performance. Quince says ‘there is two hard things: that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber’ (II.2.43-5). Snout asks if the moon will shine on the night of the performance, according to the almanac, and it is declared that it will. Quince suggests that alternatively ‘one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine’ (II.2.54-6).[[59]](#footnote-59) The fact that Starveling indeed appears as Moonshine suggests that the alternative disfigurement was required as there was no moon. This could refer to the earliest conditions of performance. As Andrew Gurr points out, in ‘London plays were always staged in the afternoons, presumably to get the brightest daylight whether outdoors or in’.[[60]](#footnote-60) According to Gurr, it was only ever going to be the sun in the sky, especially when played at the Globe where the sun overhead would be all the more obviously not the moon. Bottom’s ‘sunny’ moon could be a knowing reference to the fact that, despite the play being set at night, the moon would never appear to the theatre audience, instead needing to be symbolised and imagined. His phrase therefore could function as a comic metaphor with a knowing nod to the audience, succinctly drawing upon the conditions of acting. He is not quite an artist, in that he does not control figuration in a conventional manner, but he is not just an ass, as Huston claims.[[61]](#footnote-61) He certainly cannot wield the transformative power of metaphor as does Puck. Instead, Bottom is given the freedom to err into mistake, which has the effect of emphasising the inherent error of figuration.

**Bottom’s Metalepses**

Bottom employs a style of figuration which is in some ways similar to other characters, yet its interpretation has inclined more towards mistake than playful wandering. Yet we can understand his linguistic style through the rhetorical figure of metalepsis, the trope of error. It is a type of metaphor that comes closest to failure, and is therefore useful when interpreting Bottom’s dialogue. Metalepsis has a series or succession of figurative substitutions.[[62]](#footnote-62) Erasmus offers the example, ‘the Greeks call something ‘sharp-pointed’ when they mean “swift”’.[[63]](#footnote-63) The missing stage is the establishment of the connection between something sharp and something swift, like an arrow. This idea of semantic difference via metaphorical combination is applicable to parts of Bottom’s speech, and might help see his ‘mistakes’ as metaphors. His final sentence closes Act I Scene 2: ‘Enough; hold, or cut bow-strings’ (88). At first the hearer’s understanding is momentarily bewildered. There are no other references to archery in the scene and the metaphor of cutting ‘bow-strings’ seems obscure, which is indeed how it has been interpreted.[[64]](#footnote-64) This may be an idiomatic expression, or Bottom may be taking it from an odd context, nevertheless it still functions as metalepsis by drawing together distinct concepts without demonstrating their clear relation. ‘Hold’ could refer to keeping the agreement to meet at a certain time and place for the rehearsal, while ‘cut the strings’ evokes the release of the ‘tension’ of the agreement when the enterprise of putting on a play falls apart. Rather than taking this as an example of Bottom’s incoherence, this could be interpreted as a pithy metaphor that prominently closes the scene.

The slippage between error and poetry makes editing Bottom’s language difficult because it is sometimes unclear whether a mistake is to be corrected or if it is part of his character. Seeing Bottom as serious or silly affects how his language is edited which in turn constructs him as either silly or serious. The following is a moment that actively constructs Bottom as a mistaken character:

Bottom (as Pyramus) Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet,—

Quince Odours—‘odorous’!

Bottom (as Pyramus) ...odours savours sweet. (III.1.76-8)

Because Quince and Bottom’s meaning is not entirely clear here, the perception of difficulty has led semantic uncertainty to be attributed to textual error, and editors have attempted to ‘correct’ the text. Instead of following the copy-text, Peter Holland turns to the Folio, generally deemed to be less reliable than Q1 as it was printed from Q2. In the Folio, Quince simply repeats ‘Odours, odours’, as if correcting Bottom’s first and mistaken ‘odious’ which he then gets right at l.67. Whereas in Q1 (above), Bottom mistakes his first line, which Quince picks up, demonstrating how the correct adjective is formed: ‘Odours, odorous’, which Bottom gets wrong again. Foakes follows the Q1 copy text because he claims that emendation either way does not render the passage clear,[[65]](#footnote-65) whereas Holland bases his decision ‘as much on which jokes are wanted as on textual analysis’.[[66]](#footnote-66) Foakes works on the assumption that Bottom’s language will be wrong and that his ‘erratic grammar and sense…establish a sense of a textual crux here’.[[67]](#footnote-67) The perception of Bottom as well as Quince’s language as faulty in combination with textual variance has led editors to judge that the language is corrupt, yet emendation does not succeed in clarifying the text.

Textual history reveals editors attempting to make sense of the exchange: Brooks changes Quince’s response to ‘Odorous! Odorous!’ (1979), while Wilson opts for ‘Odious?—odorous!’(1924).[[68]](#footnote-68) Neither of these interventions follow the copy text Q1, or F1. This is further complicated by the meaning of Bottom’s repetition: ‘“…odours savours sweet”, where it is not entirely clear whether “savours” is a noun or verb’, and has led Brooks again to change it to ‘Odorous savours’.[[69]](#footnote-69) Textual criticism has assumed that, because of Bottom’s typically mistaken language, there is a problem here that requires editorial intervention, which risks confusing semantic with textual error. Editors have tried to ameliorate Bottom’s error, making it more easily understood, refusing to let the meaning wander away; error is only understood as mistake, not poetic wandering, but on occasions Bottom’s language hints that this is not always the case.

A. D. Nuttall describes Bottom as having ‘foolish, unfathomably profound speech’.[[70]](#footnote-70) To disregard it for its foolishness eclipses the potential meaning in the ‘sunny moon’ or ‘cut bow strings’, or the ways in which the ambiguity of ‘odious’ encourages reflection that perspicuous expression would not, and it becomes a comic game of mistake and correction. His literality is in some senses profound, for example when he cautions the actors to ‘eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath’ in the performance of Pyramus and Thisby (4.2.42-3). Despite comically missing the metaphorical import of ‘sweet’, it is nevertheless a playful confusion that sweet-tasting foods will help create sweet, pleasing speech. His literality is most meaningful when positioned against irrational, magical moments of the play. When Titania, the Queen of the fairies, awakens and declares to Bottom ‘On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee’, Bottom replies ‘mistress, you should have little reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together now-a-days’ (3.1.141-4). His reaction reveals that he comically fails to understand the significance of who has just declared her love for him, yet his response can be seen as a self-conscious comment on the relationship between art and life, dreams and the waking world. This is what Nuttall identifies as foolish profundity, where his linguistic mistake at the same time contains latent, serendipitous meaning.

Bottom blurs the line between failed literalism and successful figuration. In so doing, his speech displays the mistakenness that inheres in figuration, an aspect that the humanist ideology of Puttenham, Peacham and others, sought to control and regulate through decorum.[[71]](#footnote-71) Quintilian reveals that figures can be prevented from being errors through decorum, arguing that ‘as a rule such figures are defended by authority, age and usage’.[[72]](#footnote-72) This ‘authority’ relies on class distinctions to determine whether a figure is in fact an error, ably represented by the onstage aristocratic audience, who preside over the play-within-the-play. The idea of poetry as authorised by the elite is displayed even more strongly in William Scott’s *Model of Poesy* (1599). He disparages ‘clowns, antics, or jigs in plays’, stating ‘I reckon these scum unworthy the countenance of poesy’.[[73]](#footnote-73) As one of Scott’s lowly ‘clowns’, Bottom represents a carnivalesque resistance to linguistic authorities as a poet who lacks decorum. He does not use figures with ‘authority, age and usage’ which turn them from errors into poetry. Bottom-as-poet reveals the close connection between poetry and high social status by failing to be poetic. Working against this class-based assumption, Shakespeare finds special energy in combining the error of metaphor and the ‘popular voice’, by making Bottom a kind of poet who rejects humanist standards of correct usage. His voice enables Shakespeare to explore the fundamental problems of ‘figuration’ for comic effect. Bottom’s faulty metaphors reveal a contradiction within humanist regulation, that figurative language, which has error at its heart, is a central feature of eloquence.

*MND* presents two models of metaphor to demonstrate both its magic and mistake. Bottom and the acting troupe struggle to utilise metaphor as a result of its inherent faultiness. In their hands metaphor is strained and difficult, its power reduced. By contrast, the magic of the fairy wood gives metaphor a special power and with it the ability to alter plot or character. The play is littered with these transitions, such as Puck’s making Lysander into Helena’s lover and Bottom’s transfiguration into an ass. Metaphor is not merely a figure of speech but a way of performing the impossible trick of making one thing into another. In this way, magic corrects the error of metaphor by making at least some of the verbal translations of metaphor real. For all-too-human characters such as Bottom, metaphor moves in the other direction. It is a wandering of sense, where the impossibility of what he says becomes metalepsis, a rhetorical figure used to highlight faultiness. His use of metalepsis demonstrates even more powerfully metaphor’s erroneousness and thus the close and collapsible space between successful poetic use and faultiness. Bottom is important, not for his ability to find the right words, but for his comic, creative circumvention of this principle, where the ‘wrong’ word becomes meaningful through the translation of metaphor.

1. Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare’s Imagery and What it Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), first edn. 1935, p. 9. Similarly, Wolfgang Clemen claims that Shakespeare’s metaphors ‘play a decisive part in the characterization of the figures in the play and in expressing the dramatic theme.’ Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare’s Imagery*, 2nd edn., (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ralph Berry, *The Shakespearean Metaphor: Studies in Language and Form* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Simon Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004). p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Maria Franziska Fahey, *Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama: Unchaste Signification* (Basingstoke: Palgrave

   Macmillan, 2011), p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H. E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1920), 9.3.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Thomas Thomas, *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (1587), sig. xiii r. at *EEBO* ˂http://eebo.chadwyck.com˃ [date accessed 13 August 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1584), sig. V.v.2 r. at *EEBO* ˂http://eebo.chadwyck.com˃ [date accessed 13 August 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Charlton Lewis, ed., *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 657. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Desiderius Erasmus, *Literary and Educational Writings 2: De Copia and De Ratione Studii*, ed. Craig Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), Vol. 24, p. 333.

   Erik Gunderson states that part of the impropriety of a trope is its ability to ‘“turn” language away from its expected course.’ Gunderson, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Paul Ricoeur claims that ‘metaphor is defined in terms of movement’. It is ‘a sort of displacement, a movement ‘from...to...’, Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As Maria Fahey argues, ‘for as long as scholars of poetics and rhetoric have defined and praised metaphor, they simultaneously have cautioned against its misuse.’ Fahey, *Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama*, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn,(Ithaca, London:

    Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Peacham agrees with the potentially dark consequences of using tropes in the Epistle of his earlier edition (1577). He warns that figures of speech ‘may make his speech as clear as the noon day: or contrariwise, as it were with clouds and foggy mists, he may cover it with darkness, he may stir up storms and troublesome tempests’. Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, London, 1577, at *EEBO* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> [accessed 13 June 2016], (Sig. Aiii). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (London, 1550) at *EEBO* ˂http://eebo.chadwyck.com˃ [accessed 13 July 2016], Sig. Cv.v. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Sherry, *Treatise of Schemes and Tropes*, Sig. Ci.v. Sherry then lists some unwanted (but markedly poetic) aspects of language, such as ‘super abundancia’, ‘ambiguitas’ and ‘cumulatio’, aspects which Erasmus promotes in his theory of *copia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *The Garden of Eloquence*, London, 1593, at *EEBO* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> [accessed 13 June 2016], p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Dudley Fenner, *The artes of logike and rethorike* (1584), Sig.D2.v at *EEBO* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> [date accessed 21 November 2016]. Thomas Wilson in *The Arte of Rhetorique* teaches that good discourse should be plain. The poet or orator should ‘vtter his mind in plain wordes, such as are vsually receiued [...] without goyng aboute the busshe [...] For what manne can be delited or yet be perswaded, with the onely hearyng of those thynges, which he knoweth not what thei meane.’ Thomas Wilson, *The arte of rhetorique* (1553), Sig.Aii v-r., at *EEBO* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> [date accessed 21 November 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Peter Mack, ‘Humanism, Rhetoric, Education’, *Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature*, ed.

    Donna B. Hamilton, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Aristotle, *Poetics I*, trans. Richard Janko (Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 1458a18-1459a17. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For example, see Andrew Ortony, ‘Metaphor, Language and Thought’, *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-16, p. 4. See also Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: a Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.92; Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 4; and Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988), esp. pp. 1-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Donald Davidson, ‘What Metaphors Mean’, *Critical Inquiry*, 5: 1 (Autumn, 1978), 31-47, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. John Searle, ‘Metaphor’, in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn., (Cambridge: Cambridge

    University Press, 1993), 83-111, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Raymond Gibbs, ‘Making Sense of Tropes’ *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252-76, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. William Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1.I.165) in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, eds., 2nd edn, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The wood as an allegory is used throughout literature. The wood features in: Edmund Spenser *The Faerie Queene* (1590); Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* (1591); Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594), *As You Like It* (1599), as well as the tragic woods of *Titus Andronicus* (1593-4) and *King Lear* (1605); and John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667). The history of the literary wood is complex and my concern is primarily the Shakespearean wood. Critical work on the Shakespearean wood and forest include: C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Jeanne Addison Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Anne Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 352-79; Robert Watson, *Back to Nature, the Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Charlotte Scott in ‘Dark Matter: Shakespeare’s Foul Dens and Forests’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 64 (2011), 276-89; and Robert Theis, *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern England, 1630-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Mullaney, *Place of the Stage*, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Anne Barton, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, *Riverside Shakespeare*, 251-55, p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. As Orlandosays in *As You Like It*, ‘there’s no clock in the forest’ (III.2.301), emphasising the distinction between the different temporal orders that characterise the two worlds. Kiernan Ryan describes the ‘relentless war waged by Shakespearean comedy on conceptions of time that clamp people into the predictable scripts of their culture’. Ryan, *Shakespeare’s Comedies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 4. For more on time in the forest see J. L. Halio, ‘No Clock in The Forest: Time in *As You Like It*’, *SEL*, 2 (1962); Irwin Smith, ‘Dramatic Time versus Clock Time in Shakespeare’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 20 No.1 (Winter 1969), 65-69; Rawdon Wilson, ‘The Way to Arden: Attitudes Toward Time in *As You Like It*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 26: 1 (1975), 16-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The phrase ‘go on holiday’ comes from Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*. He claims that ‘philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday’ in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 38, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2011), p. 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For example, John Hoskins (c. 1590s) states that ‘A metaphor, or translation, is the friendly and neighborly borrowing of one word to express a thing with more light and better note.’ in *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), p. 8. Thomas Rogers uses the two synonymously, referring to ‘translation or metaphor’ in *The anatomie of the minde* (1576), p. 3 Sig. Biiii v., at *EEBO* ˂http://eebo.chadwyck.com˃ [date accessed 15 December 2016]. For the definition of *translatio* as metaphor, see Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. This shift is conveyed in the language of metaphor: Helena wishes to be ‘translated’ into Hermia in a previous scene so that Lysander will love her (I.1.191), which is in one sense what happens, as Lysander’s desire is indeed transported. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Puck’s epithet is clearly derisory. He describes them as ‘A crew of patches, rude mechanicals, | That work for bread upon Athenian stalls’ (III.2.9-10).Instead of referring to them as ‘mechanicals’ I will refer to them as the acting troupe. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Q1, British Library Treasures, ˂http://www.bl.uk/treasures˃, [accessed 10 July 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The Cambridge and Oxford editions instead include the names of the former and latter characters in the speech prefix, such as: ‘Bottom (as Pyramus)’. See *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,ed. R. A. Foakes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Peter Holland, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The inability of the Mechanicals to assume fully their character is curiously reflected in the first Folio. As the play-within-the-play begins, ‘Tawyer’ is referenced as playing a trumpet to herald the arrival of the players (V.1.126 s.d.): ‘Tawyer with a Trumpet before them’. ‘Tawyer’ refers to William Tawyer who was apprenticed to John Heminges. Just at the moment of failed acting, William Tawyer’s presence is foregrounded by the printed text; the character is not a nameless herald but a specific actor. The text mirrors the play to come, where Bottom fails to become Pyramus. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Shakespeare, *Sir Thomas More*, ed. John Jowett, (London: Methuen, 2011), 9.45-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Compare with *The Tempest* (2.2.137-8), where reference to the man-in-the-moon forms another comic moment. Stephano claims to have come ‘Out o’ th’ moon, I do assure thee. I was the man ‘i th’ moon when time was.’ The credulous Caliban believes this literally to be true: ‘I have seen thee in her, and I do adore thee. My mistress showed me thee, and thy dog and thy bush’ (2.2.139-40). Trinculo calls him ‘a very shallow monster’, who lacks the depth of understanding (2.2.143-4). Again a character believing the impossible is mocked by those who understand metaphor. Caliban’s slave status adds another dimension to this problematic mockery. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ‘Metalepsis’ is defined as ‘any metaphorical usage resulting from a series or succession of figurative substitutions’. See *OED* <www.oed.com> Oxford University Press, [date accessed 18 August 2016]. On metalepsis in early modern language see Brian Cummings, ‘Metalepsis’ in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander and Katrin Ettenhuber, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217-233. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Theseus is the figure of ‘cool reason’ who disapproves of the powerful ‘tricks’, of metaphor, finding them unsettling because they create something out of ‘aery nothing’ (V.1.6, 16, 18). He objects to metaphor in the way it proposes one thing as something else, for one to see ‘Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt’, which he deems to be a form of madness (V.1.11). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Harold F. Brooks, ‘Introduction’ to *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (London: Methuen, 1979), pp. cxiv–cxv. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ronald F. Miller, ‘*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: The Fairies, Bottom, and the Mystery of Things’ *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 26: 3 (Summer, 1975), 254-268, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Sylvia Adamson discusses Renaissance class associations with malapropism, focusing on Dogberry and Mistress Quickly. Adamson, ‘Literary Language’, *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. 3: 1476–1776, ed. Roger Lass, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 575-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Michael Saenger, ‘The Limits of Translation’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 65 (2012), 69-76, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Perkins Wilder argues that class is one of the reasons that the acting troupe are objects of mockery. She states that ‘rude mechanicals’ is a ‘class-inflected title’ which ‘licenses us not to take their dramatic work at all seriously’. Perkins Wilder, ‘Changling Bottom: Speech Prefixes, Acting, and Character in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, *Shakespeare*,4:1 (2008), 41-58, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This form of class mockery is also discussed by Margaret Schlauch, ‘The Social Background of Shakespeare’s Malapropisms’, in *A Reader in the Language of Shakespearean Drama*, eds. Vivian Salmon and Edwina Burness, (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1987), pp. 71-99, and Patricia Parker *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 83-115). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Madeleine Forey, ‘“Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou Art Translated!”: Ovid, Golding, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 93: 2 (1998), 321-329, p. 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition*, p. 124. See also Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. J. Dennis Huston, ‘Bottom Waking: Shakespeare’s “Most Rare Vision”’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 13: 2 (Spring, 1973), 208-222, p. 212. Huston, however, perceives limitations of this argument: ‘but these instincts are in no way informed by the education, discipline, and common sense that would put them to any productive use. As a result Bottom is an ass, not an artist’. Huston, ‘Bottom Waking’, p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ludwig Borinski, ‘Shakespeare's Comic Prose’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 8 (1955), 57-68, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Perkins Wilder, ‘Changling Bottom’, p. 46.Brian Vickers does not go as far in his re-evaluation, yet he nevertheless perceives the rhetorical value of Bottom’s language. He claims that ‘[t]here is something more significant about Bottom’s use of *hypallage*, for here a rhetorical figure becomes a part of personality’. Vickers, *The Artistry of Shakespeare’s Prose* (London: Methuen 1979), p. 67-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, ‘“As Deceivers, Yet True”’, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Scribner’s, 1937), pp. 3-24; Helen Peters, ‘Bottom: Making Sense of Sense and Scripture’, *Notes & Queries*, 35: 1 (1988), 45-47; Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 106-114; and Forey, ‘“Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou Art Translated!”, 321-329. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. 2 Corinthians, 12:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. For example, Kiernan Ryan refers to the ‘unconscious profundity of Bottom’s malapropisms’ but does not more deeply discuss the source of such profundity. Ryan, *Shakespeare’s Comedies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. ‘Disfigure’ is here another meaningful mistake. An actor should rather figure or represent moonshine. But the ‘disfiguration’ could also predict the marring of the play-within-the-play, the comic misrepresentation to come. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*,4th ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Huston, ‘Bottom Waking’, p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This is Puttenham’s definition: ‘But the sense is much altered and the hearers conceit strangely entangled by the figure *metalepsis*, which I call the Far-fetched. As when we had rather fetch a word a great way off then to use one nearer to express the matter as well and plainer’. Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Erasmus, *Literary and Educational Writings 2*, p. 339. Cummings describes metalepsis as ‘a process of transition, doubling, or ellipsis in figuration, of replacing a figure with another figure, and of missing out of the figure in between in order to create a figure that stretches the sense or which fetches things from far off’. Cummings, ‘Metalepsis’, p. 219. Alastair Fowler terms the use of multiple or conflicting ‘doubled, embedded and inverted metaphor’ as the ‘Shakespearean conceit’. Fowler, *Conceitful Thought: The Interpretation of English Renaissance Poems* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), p. 90. See also Judith Anderson, *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tudor-Stuart England* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), esp. pp.129-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Evans and Tobin eds., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 260; Peter Holland, ed., *Midsummer*, p.152. Foakes points out that the phrase may be proverbial, although the closest proverb he suggests is ‘Hold or cut codpiece point’ which is sufficiently different to seek either a different proverb or explanation. Foakes, ed., *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Foakes, ed., *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Holland, ed., *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Foakes, ed., *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Foakes, which records these variants on p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Foakes, p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. A. D. Nuttall, ‘Bottom’s Dream’, *Notes and Queries*, 48 (2001), p. 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. For discussion of Peacham and Puttenham, see pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, 9.3.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016),p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)