Spring 1975

Humanism In The Love Themes Of Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream

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March 24, 1975
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In appreciation for their time given to read and to give constructive counsel, I express my thanks to Mr. Henry Burgess, Sister Miriam Clare Roesler, and Reverend Humphrey J. Courtney.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

At the time of William Shakespeare's birth, the Renaissance was blooming in Europe and its effects had spread to England. The underlying thrust of the Renaissance was humanism — man's awareness of his own potential and his optimistic development of it. Shakespeare was born at a time that was propitious for the development of his ability and for the consequent communication of his humanism. Shakespeare wrote many works that reveal his thoughts on the subject, most of his plays clearly exhibiting humanistic overtones. For example, the comedy Midsummer Night's Dream entertains us with other forms of love such as is found in families and among friends; he expands the qualities of love into a more rounded humanistic ideal.

With the use of critical material and the study of Midsummer Night's Dream, I hope to present evidence of Shakespeare's humanistic concept of a balanced and ideal love-relationship by presenting the variety of love-relationships involved in this play. Out of this variety, an ideal humanistic relationship should emerge.
INTRODUCTION

When Shakespeare was born in 1564, the Renaissance had had its effect on the European continent, beginning gradually during the Middle Ages, gaining momentum in the 1400's and spreading to England in a slightly altered form beginning around 1500.¹ Before the spirit of the Renaissance came to England, the pervading attitude of the Renaissance in Europe was one of exploration into all fields of human possibilities for political and social achievement; as a result, there was some religious rebellion, but the stable thread of Christian humanism never completely disappeared. According to Douglas Bush in his book The Renaissance and English Humanism, much was made of the most radical changes of the time because these changes made news; but the connection between Christian ideals and the cultivation of reason with education persisted from before the Middle Ages on through the Renaissance in varying stages.² The difference marking these two eras at their high points was in the stress on man's growing awareness of all his possibilities, and his ability to depend more on himself rather than on others in regard to research, discoveries, and knowledge.

¹Chaucer offered an earlier beginning which was interrupted by the Wars of the Roses.

²(University of Toronto Press, Toronto Canada), pp. 52-54.
Douglas Bush states:

Humanism in the Renaissance normally means Christian faith in allegiance with God-given reason, which is the most human faculty in man. 3

Neo-Platonism caught on readily because Plato's World of Ideas in which the ideal model of all things on earth existed in another realm was equated by the Christians with God as the Ideal Supreme Intelligence -- the all-encompassing Ideal. The Elizabethan Chain of Being which developed from the Greek ideals also made sense and gave order to the world, with a place in the order for man. Man became optimistic about himself and about what he could do.

According to Fritz Caspari in his book, Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England. 4

In the Sixteenth Century, English humanists evolved a social doctrine with which they tried to defend and improve the existing order of society. They used the knowledge of Cicero, Plato, Aristotle, and Quintillian.

The Greeks from whom these English humanists borrowed copiously would have recognized parts of their life-style in the attempt to give order to society. Edith Hamilton notes:

One of the earlier Greek sayings is that of Anaxagoras: 'All things were in chaos when Mind arose and made order.' In the ancient world ruled by the irrational, by dreadful unknown powers, where a man was utterly at the mercy of what he must try to understand,

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3 Ibid.

the Greeks arose and the rule of reason began. The fundamental fact about the Greek was that he had to use his mind.5

The Greek heritage embraced by the Renaissance scholars re-kindled the fire of human self-discovery. This rediscovery that spread through Europe found a receptivity in England. Further, the Greek heritage of order bequeathed to English humanism is evident in the writings of Aristotle and Plato as well as others of the time. The ideas that eventually found their way into the concept called the Elizabethan chain of being can be found in a statement by Aristotle:

> Since then reason is divine in comparison with man's whole nature, the life according to reason must be divine in comparison with (usual) human life. Nor ought we to pay regard to those who exhort us that as men we ought to think human things and keep our eyes upon mortality; nay, as far as may be, we should endeavor to rise to that which is immortal, and live in conformity with that which is best in us.6

Aristotle was aware of man's ability to elevate himself, an idea clarified in the Elizabethan chain of being and also in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's writing reflects the spirit of English humanism. Born in 1564 in Warwickshire county in the heart of England during the Elizabethan age7, he entered a world flowering under the expansive influence of the English


[6Ibid., p. 30.]

[7which encompassed the years 1558-1603.]
As A. L. Rowse marvels in his book *William Shakespeare, a Biography*:

If he had been born twenty years earlier or later, his achievement would not have been what it was.

In addition, says Rowse:

The time would not have been ripe or it would have been overripe ...

This fortunate timing was due in part to the type of education available to him during this age, for the grammar school at Stratford was typical of other schools throughout the country, schools founded or even refounded during the latter half of the sixteenth century.

In grammar school the whole of education was based on Latin from Lily's textbook. The school at Stratford was taught almost entirely by M.A.'s from Oxford. In addition to Latin grammar, Shakespeare received a heady exposure to the classic authors such as Aesop and his fables; Cato; Mantuan the Renaissance Christian poet; Terence and Plautus who wrote Latin comedy; and Palingenius, a popular textbook author from whom Shakespeare would draw later inspiration.

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10The pre-grammar school subjects for children below the ages of eight years were reading, writing, numbers, elements of religion, plus an introduction to Terence and Plautus.

In upper school, Shakespeare was overwhelmingly impressed by Ovid who inspired many direct and indirect references in later Shakespearean writing. The bulk of Shakespeare's education in classical mythology came from the *Metamorphoses* which he referred to in the original as well as to Golding's later translation. In addition to Ovid, Shakespeare acquired a knowledge of logic and rhetoric based largely on a text by Aphonius, a text which included Ovid's story of Venus and Adonis which was analyzed as an example of narration. He learned Virgil and Horace — the Horace of the Odes, not of the Satires, according to Rowse. From the text on rhetoric by Aphonius, Shakespeare picked up some of his knowledge of Greek mythology and history. An acquaintance with the works of Quintillian, Sallus, Caesar, and Livy further enriched his education.

Posterity is fortunate that such a talent as Shakespeare's was nurtured under such Renaissance conditions; for the grammar school at Stratford was typical of the numerous schools founded or refounded in the second half of the sixteenth century — a definite consequence of the Reformation impulse and the increasing efficiency of society, according to the statistics quoted by A. L. Rowse. In 1553, just eleven years before Shakespeare's birth, a charter provided for a grammar school,

the master to receive the generous remuneration of 20 pounds a year with a house in the Gild-precincts,

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where the school was, himself to provide an usher for the lower school.\(^{13}\)

The eleven years before his birth, the time at which these schools were established, allowed time to develop patterns of excellence that would nurture genius — without overlooking the importance of such education for all.

The founding of these schools re-emphasizes the times — the Renaissance age in England — and the educational provisions that accompanied these times. Shakespeare's education was heavily laced with the ingredients that he would use in his works: the classics and a thorough study of the Bible.

All of the influences of Elizabethan education: Greek mythology, history, Latin, the variety of classical authors, extensive knowledge of the Bible, the disciplines of memory and intellect as well as the spiritual growth bolstered by regular church attendance strengthened the talent Shakespeare possessed. His plays are full of lines reflecting his training in the classics and the humanistic grace it gave to his work. To select one play such as Midsummer Night's Dream is to scrutinize one plane of a multi-faceted mirror.

As Shakespeare's entangled love relationships unwind in the comedy Midsummer Night's Dream, two recurrent and graduated devices weave through the plot and give the observer clues to the states of being and stages of love. These two devices are the ladder of love and the chain of being. Begun as ideas in the philosophies of the ancients, these observations

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 34.
had developed in the Middle Ages and became symbols in the Elizabethan Age.

On the ladder of love, types of love occupy "rungs" in ascending order, beginning at the base with the level of the senses, progressing to love with reason, continuing to spiritual love and understanding, and ending with the love of God. In 1528 Count Baldassare Castiglione published a book about the behavior of a courtier. Shakespeare was aware of this author, according to the notes in The Complete Works of Shakespeare by Hardin Craig (page 738):

One thinks at once of the three great classics of the Renaissance that are still best known to the modern world: Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano (1528), translated into English by Hoby as The Courtier (1561), Elyot’s The Governor (1531), and Machiavelli’s The Prince (1516).

In his book, Castiglione delineated these types of love in the following passage:

And because in our soul there be three manner ways to know, namely, by sense, reason, and understanding: of sense ariseth appetite or longing, which is common to us with brute beasts; of reason ariseth election or choice, which is proper to man; of understanding, by which man may be partner with angels, ariseth will.

Man of nature endowed with reason, placed, as it were, in the middle between these two extremities, may, through his choice inclining to sense or reaching to understanding, come nigh to the coveting, sometime of the one, sometime of the other part.14

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In this statement, Castiglione has placed man in the middle and endowed his position in the scheme of things with reason. This position is typical of the Renaissance humanist and is clarified by comparison with the prevailing attitude of medieval times. In *A Handbook to Literature*, the term humanism is rather adequately defined:

Broadly, this term suggests any attitude which tends to exalt the human element or stress the importance of human interests, as opposed to the supernatural, divine elements -- or as opposed to the grosser, animal elements.

The Renaissance humanists agreed with the ancients in asserting the dignity of man and the importance of the present life, as against those medieval thinkers who considered the present life useful chiefly as a preparation for a future life.15

Combining these definitions by Castiglione and the Handbook definition above, as well as the earlier statement by Douglas Bush concerning "God-given reason, which is the most human faculty in man," we can understand the use of the chain of being, the ladder of love, and the function of these two devices in the play.

The chain of being was a precise system of ascending orders which charted the relationships of everything God created. Each link of the chain represented a category: minerals, plants, animals, human, angels, God. Each link of the chain was connected to these links above and below.

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and each was dependent on the other links which fulfilled given roles. The idea began, according to E. M. W. Tillyard, with Plato’s Timaeus, was developed by Aristotle, was adopted by the Alexandrian Jews (there are signs of it in Philo), was spread by the Neo-Platonists, and from the Middle Ages till the eighteenth century was one of those accepted commonplaces, more often hinted at or taken for granted than set forth.  

Acknowledging the completeness of creation, the chain had its roots in the earth plane; its final link was the Ideal in the other world, or Heaven. For a creature or object to step out of place in the chain was to upset the whole chain. There was an order in each link: gold over lead in minerals, or diamonds over quartz; in animals, birds had an order, and beasts of the field had theirs as well as fishes of the sea; furthermore, there was a linkage between fish, beasts of the field and birds of the air. In the world of men, kings had precedence over lawyers, on down the line to lower kinds of political and social levels considered as such by the criteria established in the Elizabethan era. Each stratum was important, however, because all of society depended on the services performed by every other stratum. The unique place man held in this chain of being was in his potential to take on the characteristics of the link below him or the link above; thus, he could express more of the spiritual qualities or more of the animal ones, or maintain an equilibrium between them. In this way, man was seen as a kind of

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microcosm, containing within himself an inner chain of being. Plato writes of this idea in Gorgias:

Callicles: What do you mean man, 'His ruling over himself'?

Socrates: A simple thing enough; just what is commonly said, that a man should be temperate and master of himself, and ruler of his own pleasures and passions.17

Shakespeare's humanism is evident when he uses these devices to illustrate man's ability to choose his predominant characteristics in his unique place in the chain. Man was not considered static. With the use of reason as the distinct human trait, man could make changes. With the spirit that began to develop in the Renaissance, the manifold nature of human beings began to develop in all directions. The Renaissance and Christian humanism encouraged the idea of man as a Christian cooperating in a responsible capacity with God's plan. Man, created in God's image, was the one link that could change the relationships in the whole chain for good or bad; but further, he could change himself -- he could expand his unique place and become more than he formerly allowed himself to be. In this sense, human love in all its facets could flower and be considered good.

In the play Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare places before us many ideas considered to be love or stages of love; also, he shows responsibility, reason, understanding, or lack

of those qualities considered as factors in love relationships. Love scales the rungs on the ladder of love; furthermore, humanity in various conditions traverses the chain of being in this play. Each kind of love relationship is given its due. The ladder of love and the chain of being as threads woven into the plot indicate conditions in the relationships. Each kind of love relationship is very human with certain factors present to show its elevated state or with qualities missing to show how a relationship is less than the ideal. Due to the use of reason, qualities of an ideal relationship prove to contain the most humanistic balance.

Taking into consideration the Renaissance regard for man as endowed with "God-given reason" and as a creature capable of choice in his position between the world of the senses and the world of the spiritual, the play *Midsummer Night's Dream* will reveal the full spectrum of human capabilities.
Setting the Stage
With
Theseus and Hippolyta

Shakespeare's setting for this play is during the summer solstice which, since very ancient times, has been celebrated as the point when the sun reached its zenith and was about to make its gradual descent toward the winter solstice. This summer celebration has been referred to as the Midsummer Fires, and later became the festival honoring John the Baptist. Perhaps it is fitting that, as the sun is at its zenith, love in its highest form should be compared with other forms in this play. While the sun may be at its zenith and parallel with the ideal love, the moon is mentioned most throughout the play, an organic parallel with the dream concept, since the moon is often used as a symbol of illusion, and fancy can be a pale imitation of love. Love really undergoes a test in this play, and all the symbols of the ancient initiation rites are present: the fires, woods, strange beings, the father image, the hierophant, the victory procession and celebration banquet, all centered around the theme of love and its realities.

From a humanistic approach, Shakespeare chooses for the first onstage relationship a mature and liberated king and queen, Theseus and Hippolyta. Their forthcoming marriage was clearly not arranged by someone's parents, and it is not a union of naive dependence. These two have been around for
awhile, he as a Greek hero who has survived the "trials" of his adventures and who is thus the typical hero of the "initiation" tradition; she, as queen of the Amazons, has also been a triumphant type of individual who has had to make decisions and lead others.

When the scene opens, both are discussing the forthcoming marriage celebration; he expresses his impatience for the happy day but Hippolyta rationalizes how quickly the time will pass when she says:

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

Hippolyta is mature in her statement and uses reason to explain the swift passing of time that, in some circumstances, can seem slow in passing. Time, in this sense is as illusive in its symbolism and as variable as the moon. Later, Theseus makes the statement that this marriage is to be an "everlasting bond of fellowship" -- setting the stage for comparisons with other love relationships that will appear. It is typical that Theseus as hierophant-hero should set the stage for comparisons to his statement about an "everlasting bond of fellowship" at the same time indicating that this bond is also one of equality. Love, put to the test and compared to fancy throughout the play, will reach a maturity that fancy will not reach. Had Shakespeare intended something less equal than a bond of fellowship, he might have selected the
word "companionship", a word that can mean equality but which can also mean a relationship that keeps one from becoming lonely, even though the companion might not be considered an equal.

Theseus has made a statement of his view of the forthcoming marriage and as a mature individual he states his opinion during a conversation between a father and daughter who are introduced as the play’s parental conflict as well as the representatives of a family relationship. While Theseus states his personal view ("code") of his marriage, Egeus, the father of Hermia, enters the scene and complains about his daughter's defiance in the face of his choice for her husband. Thus, Egeus complains and Theseus explains. Egeus as father states the old code of parental authority in the Athenian times. Theseus explains the consequences of disobedience to Hermia, "either to die the death or to abjure forever the society of men." Hermia prefers either fate to her father's choice; in view of this stand, Theseus continues:

Take time to pause; and, by the next new moon—
The sealing-day betwixt my love and me,
For everlasting bond of fellowship—
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would;
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For eke austerity and single life.

These statements about deferment to parental wishes seem a paradox in view of Theseus' experience and independence; and especially in view of his statement about his forthcoming marriage as an everlasting bond of fellowship; but as statements made by both Egeus and Theseus are compared, the conflict
of theme is set up and put to the test through the rest of the play. The question of just what love is and what it should be in its highest and most mature form, and its standing in light of traditional authority is presented to the observer. Traditional authority and love as an authority in itself are to be scrutinized.

With this introduction of conflict, the consequences of disobedience to tradition and the deadline for the resolution, the scene is set.
LYSANDER AND HERMIA AND DEMETRIUS AND HELENA

After Theseus and Hippolyta have discussed their wedding plans at the beginning of the play, a complex foursome takes over: Lysander and Hermia want to get married; but Hermia’s father, Egeus, wants Hermia to marry Demetrius; Helena, however, is in love with Demetrius who can’t see why Helena is chasing him all the time. Hermia would rather run away or become a nun than to marry Demetrius who claims he has the right to marry her because Hermia’s father chose him; considering the time and place, he has a claim, for the father’s word was supposed to be law in ancient Athens. In traditional Elizabethan times, marriages were still arranged for political or social advantage rather than for love; in this situation, a parallel is drawn concerning the problems of arranged marriage although the consequences of disobedience in Elizabethan times were not as drastic. Athens was considered by its inhabitants to be the parent of those who resided there, because the laws were all-powerful; therefore, to leave Athens was, for all practicality, to leave life itself.\(^{18}\) By inserting this father-daughter conflict in the play, parental motivation is questioned and the courage of Hermia’s convictions

\(^{18}\)This is one of the reasons given for Socrates’s refusal to leave his parent city Athens in favor of more harmonious surroundings. Plato wrote of this problem in \textit{Euthenepho}, which deals with questions of obedience, a fitting theme for Hermia and Lysander who decide to do what Socrates did not do, flee Athens.
is pitted in rebellion against it. In the face of parental anger and civic authority, Hermia and Lysander choose to run away because life means nothing to either one of them without the other. This kind of reasoning has a humanistic note, for both Lysander and Hermia act from independent rationale and choice, refusing to listen to the traditional voices of authority based on the father in Athenian law. Hermia refuses to "see love through another's eyes", in this case, her father's.

The eyes are referred to throughout the play, and as images, they reflect the state of love or the nature of love portrayed by the characters. The eyes also give clues to the person's understanding or reason in regard to love. Hermia's eyes are as "lode-stars" according to Helena, and a lode-star is a guiding star -- a guiding star in this case being the clear-eyed understanding of love and the ideal toward which all love can be patterned. This kind of understanding is humanistic, for it employs man's "God-given reason" needed to reach that understanding. Helena refers to her own eyes as "dissembling glass" for she has a blind loyalty to Demetrius and cannot give him up; and she cannot understand the difference between herself and Hermia. The difference is that Helena's loyalty is "dogged" and lacks understanding or even the power to let go, while Hermia is convinced that she should give up Lysander to Helena even though she knows something is not quite right. This matter of understanding is an important factor echoing the earlier statement by Castiglione when he said:
Man of nature endowed with reason, placed, as it were, in the middle between these two extremities, may, through his choice inclining to sense or reaching to understanding, come nigh to the coveting, sometime of the one, sometime of the other part.

Hermia's love for Lysander contains an ingredient called agape', that quality of caring and of charity expressed toward another. In man's mid-state between sense and understanding, the quality of agape' reaches to understanding. Hermia's concern for Lysander is especially apparent when, in the woods, he seems no longer to love her and yet she hopes all goes well for him in his confrontation with Demetrius over Helena.

In comparing the qualities of love possessed by Hermia and Helena, it is interesting to note the clues given in the play in connection with the chain of being. Helena's quality of loyalty is compared to a spaniel's and she doesn't mind being treated like a dog; this state is lacking in reason. In another reference to her constance pursuit, she compares her love to that of the dove for the griffin, and the hind for the tiger because the roles should be reversed, according to the ideals of Elizabethan times, and he should be pursuing her; this theme of who pursues whom is an echo of the old courtly-love code, the written authority upon which some people based love symptoms and behavior; it was a code, in other words, which, if followed, was arrived at not by humanistic reason but by a "chart" set up by someone else. This reversal of animals in the chase is also a clue to conditions in the chain of being, for the situation is not in order. In
Helena's persistence lies constancy, a quality she shares with Hermia; yet, Helena cannot understand unrequited love, as she demonstrates in her conversations about eyes, animals, and her description of true love. She understands her own feelings enough to make an ironic statement about what she suspects love to be:

Love can transpose to form and dignity;
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind;
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste;
And therefore is Love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

In a sense, she is representative of this quotation in her thinking she looks with the mind and in finding her own reasons for her pursuit; yet her pursuit is irrational in her "unheedy haste". "Winged Cupid painted blind" could parallel Helena's blind devotion; yet, winged Cupid could also be painted blind in order to keep fancy's eyes from shutting off reason and understanding.

Hermia adds a different dimension to the description of love when she talks of the need for patience and how it is just as necessary as the factors given to courtly love which she sees as "fancy" parading as "love":

Then let us teach our trial patience,
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers.

Demetrius is drawn to Hermia partly because he is the choice of her father, partly because she is pretty and rejects him. Aloofness may draw Demetrius just as dogged pursuit by Helena repels him, but the tables will be turned when Puck
accidentally anoints him with the flower called "love-in-idleness" causing him to fall for the first thing he sees upon awaking. He sees Helena and pursues her in the same kind of spirit with which he pursued Hermia, only this time with the aid of an outside force. Demetrius mistakes fancy for love once he is under the illusory spell; but at least this is better than his early illusions, for he returns the attentions of Helena. A sign that he labors under an illusion when compared to Hermia's description in the above statement is his use of Petrarchan language, the language of the traditional courtly love, as he awakens and sees Helena. There is a kind of love present, but more the love engendered by sight and fancy laboring under the spell of love-in-idleness. This is not a humanistic emanation, for the references are to an old list of symptoms by an authority outside oneself.

By comparison, Helena is continually loyal to Demetrius without the aid of "love-in-idleness". Lysander is also briefly smitten by Helena due to his being anointed by this flower, and the accident completes the round-robin of confused relationships. Shakespeare uses this complexity to entertain as well as to show parallels between the irrational attractions or lovers' blindness such as is portrayed by Demetrius toward Hermia and the type of unthinking condition of both Lysander and Demetrius toward Helena. When he gives a name for their affliction as "love-in-idleness", he gives a name to an everyday parallel: the impulsive and temporary attraction based on sense, the condition earlier quoted in Castiglione's
passage in which he states that reason is between sense and understanding and is uniquely human. The unreasoned condition is stressed by lines spoken by Hermia to Lysander when he claims that hate caused him to leave her and she replies: "You speak not as you think; it cannot be." At the same time, Lysander sees Helena with "new" eyes; in each case, the faculties of seeing and speaking are disengaged from the mind and the faculty of reason is in neutral. Another clue to the disjointed vision of this fanciful state is given when Lysander sees Hermia as below the animals in the hierarchy, for he refers to her as "knot grass, bead, acorn." "Love-in-idleness" affects the eyes, for this is where it is applied; and since it does not affect the brain, the result is a description just the opposite to Helena's earlier reference to love when she stated that love saw with the mind.

The signs of love as they are described in courtly-love tradition and referred to by Hermia as "poor fancy's followers" are inventoried by both Lysander and Demetrius while they are both under the spell of "love-in-idleness" and pursuing Helena:

Lysander: Why should you think that I should woo in scorn? Scorn and derision never come in tears; Look, when I vow, I weep, and vows so born, In their nativity all truth appears.

Demetrius, upon awaking and seeing Helena, says in Petrarchan prose:

O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine! To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne? Crystal is muddy, O, how ripe in show Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow! That pure congealed white, high Taurus' snow, Fann'd with the eastern wind, turns to a crow
When thou holdest up thy hand: O, let me kiss
This princess of pure white, this seal of bliss!

Helena is not taken in by this change. This dramatic irony adds to the comic situation, while emphasizing the differences between unreasoned helplessness and reasoned understanding.

During this four-way misunderstanding, sisterly love is introduced when Helena pleads with Hermia to remember their old school-girl days:

Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For parting us, -- O, is it all forgot?
All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence?
We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,
Had been incorporate.

Helena believes Hermia to be in complicity with both Demetrius and Lysander, and she accuses them of a cruel joke. The arguments and derision build until both Helena and Hermia refer to each other as something below the hierarchy of the living on the chain of being in Act III, scene 2:

Helena: Fie! Fie! you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

Hermia: How low am I, thou painted maypole?

These references to low estate underline the lack of equal regard in these relationships, especially while the spell of fancy holds sway. Bonds of fellowship they are not. This does not mean that Shakespeare regarded that first attraction of sight, physical attraction, as unimportant; but he saw the importance of this attraction maturing to understanding and
to include a spiritual love and agape* as well as rationality. Demetrius is the only one of the whole play who is never released from the spell of "love-in-idleness" and it is the one factor that will keep him constant in his marriage to Helena. Thus far, humanistically viewed, Shakespeare gives more than this quality to a sound love relationship if it is to last. Helena's constancy and Demetrius' compulsion of fancy both seem strong enough to override other missing factors, even though this may not be a rounded ideal. Eventually, the element of reason may aid in the maturing of this relationship; but at the moment, neither one has self-understanding. The humanistically-balanced person uses reason to delve into a matter in order to arrive at an understanding about himself and the world around him. He doesn't blindly accept outside authority, but looks into the reasons behind conditions.

Hermia's qualities of constancy, agape* and acceptance of the vicissitudes of attraction save the relationship between herself and Lysander. She is not even swayed in her constancy when she fears that Demetrius has killed Lysander:

Hermia: I pray thee, tell me then that he is well.
Demetrius: And if I could, what should I get therefore?
Hermia: A privilege never so see more.
And from thy hated presence part I so:
See me no more, whether he be dead or no.

She does not act on the rebound, nor kill herself in despair; but she does continue to puzzle over the change in Lysander. Considering Shakespeare's knowledge of the Bible, one might
wonder if he had in mind those qualities that St. Paul listed in First Corinthians 13, especially when Hermia stated, "Then let us teach our trial patience", for she exemplifies some of the traits listed in Paul's letter:

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

These are manifestations of a love found in families, in friendships, and in any age -- be it medieval, Renaissance, or Atomic; furthermore, this type of love is born of reason and matured to understanding, a humanistic condition. Once Lysander is released from his brief attraction for Helena, balance is restored and the stronger qualities of ideal love, patience, reason, and understanding, cement the relationship between Lysander and Hermia. In these two, Shakespeare has depicted an age-old problem and its most rational solution. Too often, an otherwise stable alliance can break apart if certain qualities are missing, especially if a brief outside attraction interferes. Often too much importance is placed on injured pride on this rung of the ladder of love and often impatience for redress strains patience, constancy and understanding. If there is little or no will to practice these virtues, a relationship is defeated. In reviewing the human choices balanced by reason and stated earlier by Bush and Castiglione, we have in Helena and Demetrius two human beings with little self-understanding; in Hermia and Lysander,
once the latter's reason is re-activated, we have the other choice: understanding of self with the consequent understanding of the other person, and acceptance.

In this foursome, Shakespeare did a masterful job of showing unbalanced relationships and in giving clues to the problems through parallels, especially the parallel of love-in-idleness as mischief-maker.
Oberon and Titania are king and queen of the elves. They are above the mortal rung of the chain of being, but below the rung of the angels. They possess certain freedoms and the lack of concern unique to their order. Oberon and Titania have been married for a long time, but they flit off to their separate interests when the spirit moves. In spite of their dallyings, they have enough acceptance of each other, and sense of constancy, to return to each other. They possess a certain kind of understanding, a trait of the supernatural order. On the ladder of love, they are above the level of sense in their attraction for each other; and they help each other, unless one of the party feels self-interest and ill-served; then they are not above pulling tricks to get the desired results. They exhibit the traits of the Greek gods of mythology with supernatural powers, yet with the weaknesses of humans. The name Titania is reminiscent of the word Titan, the name of a group of twelve of the most important offspring of earth and sky in Greek mythology. Most of the Titans seemed to have the attributes of natural phenomena. Oberon and Titania fall into the category of supernatural beings with human characteristics.

Since Oberon is angry because Titania refuses to give him the changeling, a boy stolen from an Indian king, he
decides on revenge in order to get the changeling. Perhaps we have in this case, the injured pride seeking redress; this was not the case in Hermia's feelings toward Lysander, but was apparent in Demetrius' attitude toward Lysander. In any case, Oberon states his plan in Act II, scene 1:

The next thing then she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
She shall pursue it with the soul of love;
And ere I take this charm from off her sight,
As I can take it with another herb,
I'll make her render up her page to me.

Oberon orders Puck to anoint Titania's eyes. The caper backfires when Oberon, in sympathy for the mixed fortunes of the mortals in the woods, has Puck anoint them also; only Puck anoints the wrong ones. This comical turn shows an interesting lack of foresight, a factor that requires reasoning and the tactics of a chess player. Oberon is so obsessed by jealousy that his reason is impaired. The interesting condition involving this level of the chain of being is that Oberon's ambitions regarding the changeling are on the ego-gratifying level. Oberon is not on the level where he seeks personal comfort or a way to ease his own sense state, rather, he works on the mental level in regard to goals. But his jealousy blocks his understanding of Titania's plans for the boy.

Oberon makes use of an accident of Cupid's when he employs "love-in-idleness", a flower that was hit by Cupid's arrow when it missed a Vestal. Here the theme of family love is introduced symbolically without interrupting the main plot. The Vestals were the Roman virgins who spent thirty years of
their lives keeping alive the fire in the temple to Vesta. To let the fire go out would mean a national disaster for the Romans, because Vesta was goddess of the hearth and home. When Cupid let the arrow fly with the intention of hitting a Vestal, he was endangering the stability of homelife evidenced by filial love, neighborly love, parental love. When Oberon employs this power to delude by means of "love-in-idleness", a condition akin to love-at-first-sight is the result. Shakespeare is satirizing courtly love, the tradition of medieval court circles, a tradition still rife in the Renaissance. The affection induced by "love-in-idleness" is based on being attracted by what one sees, a being in love with love, and its duration varies because it is an unstable condition caused by lack of reason and will power. The qualities of reason, understanding and will which became synonymous with Renaissance thinking tilt the balance on the ladder of love and in the chain of being toward a more complex human type than mere love-at-first-sight. These are the qualities unique to the human condition and add the touch of humanism to man's attractions and to all human conditions. This is not to demean the value of what one sees, but a reminder that lasting relationships can build from there, or even without such a beginning. Comparing the effects of "love-in-idleness" on the eyes with Helena's statement made earlier in the play, one remembers again Helena's words about love:

Love can transpose to form and dignity;  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;  
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind;
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste;  
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste;  
And therefore is Love said to be a child, 
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

While it is ironic that Helena should say this in view of her lack of understanding and inability to reason out the differences in her situation, this is a different view from Oberon's incantation:

What thou seest when thou dost wake,  
Do it for thy true-love take, 
Love and languish for his sake;  
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,  
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,  
In thy eye that shall appear  
When thou wakest, it is thy dear;  
Wake when some vile thing is near.

In the first quotation, the mind is important but beguilement can be the result; time or maturity with reason and understanding need not enter into the relationship. In the second passage, the mind is apparently disengaged because the eyes do the deciding with no reasons for the attraction needed. The first statement means that choice, a humanistic factor, is involved -- the individual can decide whether love or fancy is involved and reason why; in the second statement, there is no choice.

Oberon, wielder of the ointment that brings about fancy by way of his servant Puck, acts as the supernatural power that has traditionally been involved in initiations. This function of the supernatural is further substantiated in the scene where Lysander and Demetrius seek each other for a challenge over Helena. Puck, who has run all the errands with the ointment of love-in-idleness, directs the steps of both Demetrius
and Lysander as they look for each other in the woods:

Puck: Up and down, up and down,
     I will lead them up and down;
     I am fear'd in field and town;
     Goblin, lead them up and down.
     Here comes one.

     (Lysander enters)

Lysander: Where art thou, proud Demetrius?
     Speak thou now.

Puck: Here, villain; drawn and ready.
     Where art thou?

Lysander: I will be with thee straight.

Puck: Follow me then, To plainer ground.

     (Exit Lysander, following the voice)

Re-enter Demetrius

Demetrius: Lysander! Speak again:
         Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled?
         Speak! In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

Puck: Thou coward, art thou bragging to the stars,
       Telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars,
       And wilt not come?
       Come recreant; come, thou child, I'll whip thee with a rod; he is defiled that draws a sword on thee.

Demetrius: Yea, art thou there?

Puck: Follow my voice: we'll try no manhood here.

In that last line, Puck emphasizes what is really on trial here: not manhood, but the question of the difference between love and fancy. Oberon, bent on getting the boy from Titania, directs the proceedings that do not involve his reason or the reason of others. He demonstrates how one capable of
understanding can shelve both reason and understanding at times. Oberon is satisfied and removes the spell of "love-in-idleness" with the antidote of Dian's Bud only when he has the boy. In Act IV, scene 1, Oberon exclaims:

Sound, music! Come, my queen, take hands with me, And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be. Now thou and I are new in amity And will tomorrow midnight solemnly Dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly And bless it to all fair prosperity: There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity.

In a few more lines, Titania asks for the reason why she was under a spell:

Come, my lord, and in our flight Tell me how it came this night That I sleeping here was found With these mortals on the ground.

As representatives of the faculty in man in which the individual can rise to understanding and will from the basis of reason, they both reveal how human qualities prevail, even in times of misunderstanding. Both are believable individuals with acceptance of each other, and in the earlier words of Theseus, a bond of fellowship exists.
GOING TO EXTREMES
WITH
TITANIA AND BOTTOM

Pursuing the humanistic view of an ideal love-relationship, one encounters an antithesis in the brief adventure of Titania and Bottom. These are opposites on both the ladder of love and the chain of being. Several clues point to Bottom's lack of imagination and sensitivity as well as his hedonistic tendencies. Bottom and his cohorts are preparing a play that they consider suitable for the forthcoming wedding festivities, and find it necessary to prepare an explanation to the audience so that those who see the play will understand that the "bloodshed" is not real. Even though the play is tragic and poorly handled by this group, and is not fitting for the wedding celebration, they are at least sensitive enough to worry about the audience's reaction, but lack the imagination to realize that the audience will know it is all make-believe. Bottom states in Act III, scene 1:

*Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the more better assurance, tell them that I Pyramus am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them out of fear.*

Furthermore, since they fear that the lion might frighten the ladies in the audience, an explanation is provided for that, and Bottom stresses:

*Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck*
The actor inside the skin must explain the whole thing. Finally, this group has to grapple with the very symbol of illusion, the moon. Their problem is whether to open the window and let it shine into the room, or let someone play the part. They consult the almanac to see whether or not the moon will shine on that evening and discover that it does; however, the suggestion holds that someone be outfitted to play the part of the moon. The entire scene underlines the lack of imagination and sensitivity. Bottom's insensitivity is further stressed when Puck gives him an ass's head shortly before Titania awakens. The ass's head graphically emphasizes the animal order tendency in the kingdom of human existence. The scene is set for the antithesis to be played: a supernatural being that resides in the realm of sensitivity and imagination meets a being from the bottom rung of the human category in the chain of being, one who is interested in physical comfort and whose daily concerns are circumscribed by the physical world, one who lacks imagination and sensitivity. Titania, not only experiences "love-at-first-sight" by way of "love-in-idleness" but she employs her altruistic qualities to serve Bottom's whims. This is not a "bond of fellowship". She is willing to wait on him, and he is willing to be waited upon -- one giving, the other taking -- each according to the traits typical of that rung on the chain of being; but there is no equality of interests, nor equality of background nor synthesis on the ladder of love. One is always at the level below physical attraction -- namely, self-love, self-indulgence,
with no love for the other person; the other is at the mental-altruistic level, ready to serve the object of attraction. Bottom is not in love, but only taking advantage of the condition in order to eat what he wants to eat, to be waited on, to be "scratched where it itches", to entertain his ears with "tongues and bones", and to sleep when he feels like it. As Titania is at the level typical of her name and at the level to which man can reach with his capacity to reason, so Bottom is at the "bottom" of the other level to which man may stoop, the indolent sector of the sense level. In Titania's giving and Bottom's taking, there is a kind of togetherness that is often found in human relationships, but it can hardly be called a "bond of fellowship", the term earlier mentioned by Theseus, much less an everlasting one. Even with the complementary factors of give and take, spirit and body, it won't work, because there is no linking quality such as understanding, imagination, or agape. This relationship is not a humanistic ideal; it will always be on about the same level on the ladder of love as at the beginning, and there will be no synthesis of reason or feeling in order for it to progress toward something better. Bottom stated the condition well when he said to Titania:

reason and love keep little company together now-a-days;

Actually, neither Bottom nor Titania used reason to understand the relationship; Titania's reason was bequiled by "love-in-idleness"; and Bottom is too stupid to wonder at all. In this regard the relationship lacked humanism. Basing this
relationship also upon an example of the balance between mind and the senses, the balance is thrown off and, rather than witnessing mind-over-matter, it is matter-over-mind through Titania's indulgence of Bottom's whims. When the mind serves the body or material whims, the mind stands in danger of being enslaved and of eventually causing the entire being to become enslaved. The same is true of such a partnership as that portrayed by Bottom and Titania, comical as it may be onstage. With Titania's reason bewitched, she cannot understand or will; without will, she cannot exercise mind-over-matter and thus keep the situation under control. Once Titania is released from the spell, she wants to know the reason for her adventure; on the other hand, Bottom doesn't seek a reason because he already guesses that he wouldn't understand. However, Bottom is not hopelessly insensitive in reference to his traits; although he is enamored of himself and sees no more to Titania than a source of whim-fulfillment, he gains a momentary bit of insight in Act IV, scene 1:

Methought I was -- there is no man can tell what; Methought I was, -- and methought I had, -- but man is a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream way.

He suspects that his senses would not do justice to the meaning of his adventure. This is a saving feature of Bottom, for he still possesses a quality of dull sensitivity that keeps him aware that he can't quite comprehend the experience.
This vague comprehension of himself is the first step in self-understanding, a humanistic quality.
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS IN
FESTIVITY

Act Five includes not only a happy ending but also a kind of treatise explaining the qualities of love. Theseus states:

Lovers and madmen had such seething brains
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Both glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

Theseus explains in that statement the lengths to which imagination can go without reason. Imagination can grasp a visual image or situation and distill something from it; however, he mentions the faculty of reason as the quality that comprehends or understands what has been seen or done. In this way, the humanistic view is one in which the bringer of joy is recognized. Imagination can run rife without reason; and imagination can bring fears that cause the embodiment of fears when there is nothing to fear. With reason, comprehension of a situation puts things into perspective. This
stresses what happens under the influence of fancy; and even though Theseus knew nothing about the flower "love-in-idleness", his statement is an effort to explain the night's events and an opportunity for Shakespeare to clarify the situation. In this clarification, reason as the distinctly human trait balanced between sense and understanding gives to love what fancy does not have and thus we see love in its humanistic light exalted as a distinctly human trait. With reason, love can grow in understanding and take on more of the spiritual traits. Theseus states the turn imagination can take without reason:

Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

He thus gives the clue to the cause for the tragedy in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe; for in that story too much imagination caused tragedy in spite of their constancy. In contrast, Hermia, using her reason, deferred such drastic action as the taking of her own life while she sought the whereabouts and possible fate of Lysander.

Following Theseus' explanation of imagination, Hippolyta adds her thoughts about the events of the night:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images
And grows to something of great constancy;
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

In this statement, she sees something more than fancy in the totality of the adventure, and she stresses constancy. In her mature insight, Hippolyta sees more than fancy as the outcome; she realizes that the minds of the four young people
have been transformed. What she sees as greater than fancy is love with the restoration of reason. Even though Demetrius is the only one who is still under the spell of "love-in-idleness", he at least recalls that he was betrothed to Helena before the idea of marriage to Hermia occurred to him. He vows constancy in Act IV, scene I, when he explains his change of feelings and will to Theseus. When Theseus comprehends the determination of the four, he overrides the wishes of Egeus and lets the people proceed to the celebration and their own marriages. In this overriding of wishes, Theseus, who stated the "code" of marriage as an "everlasting bond of fellowship" represents the "code" winning out over traditional authority embodied in Egeus. Reason has helped love to prevail over fancy.

The imagination of which Theseus spoke is the factor absent in Bottom, an absence exhibited first in his scene with Titania and then in his handling of the play along with his fellow mechanicals. This play is introduced by Theseus following the arrival of the four young people. Hippolyta's earlier statement, "all the story of the night told over", can closely parallel the play as well as the events of the night, for it not only refers to Hermia and Lysander but also to the close parallels of Pyramus and Thisbe. The difference between the two couples lay in the use of reason to defer tragedy in the case of Hermia and Lysander.

The paradox of unimaginative players dealing with a play loaded with illusion and imagination produces a comical and
sometimes ludicrous performance. The sensitivity of Theseus is emphasized when he makes the statement that he wishes to hear the play no matter how awkwardly it is performed, for he knows what effort was put forth, especially after being informed that the play was produced by

Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
Which never labored in their minds till now,
And now have toil'd their unbreath'd memories
With this same play against your nuptial.

After the introduction by Quince, Theseus makes a comment that fits the adventures of the night before in regard to the chain of being:

His speech was like a tangled chain;
nothing impaired, but all disordered.

The comedy is heightened not only by the performance of Bottom and his crew but also by the running commentary of Theseus and his company; in spite of the poor choice of subject matter for such an occasion, the high mood cannot be lessened. In addition, the paradox of a happy company watching a tragic performance by an insensitive crew heightens the mood and through paradox displays two possible outcomes of love: joy or sorrow. In this setting in the last act, one is suddenly made aware of the three levels that are the choice of man: the sense level with the rude mechanicals and the insensitive handling of a love tragedy; the level of understanding in the supernatural company of Oberon, Titania and menage who are there to give their blessings; and the level of reason represented by the company of happy human beings. Interestingly, the first two levels mentioned serve the company of humans
just as reason rules the levels of understanding, will and
the senses.

With these levels in mind, one sees Shakespeare giving
more than one meaning to many of the asides in the performance
of the play:

Theseus: I wonder if the lion be to speak.

Demetrius: No wonder, my lord: one lion may,
when many asses do.

In another exchange, imagination is again emphasized:

Hippolyta: This is the silliest stuff I ever heard.

Theseus: The best in this kind are but shadows;
and the worst are no worse, if imagi-
nation amend them.

Hippolyta: It must be your imagination then,
and not theirs.

Theseus: If we imagine no worse of them than
they of themselves, they may pass
for excellent men.

Through this repartee, Shakespeare emphasizes the value of
imagination in the mind of the beholder. Reason can animate
understanding of another person and the will elevates the
other people and the situation.

When the death scene brings on a slight amount of sadness,
repartee again gives an upbeat touch with meaning:

Pyramus: Now, die, die, die, die, die.

Demetrius: No die, but an ace, for him; for he
is but one.

Lysander: Less than an ace, man; for he is dead;
he is nothing.

Theseus: With the help of a surgeon he might
yet recover, and prove an ass.
With references to the character of Pyramus being one-of-a-kind, Lysander adds the meaningful observation that the man is less than that when he is dead. One compares this passage to an earlier observation of Lysander's:

"My lord, I shall reply amazedly,
Half asleep, half waking, but as yet, I swear,
I cannot truly say how I came here;"

In both cases, the character's reason was obstructed by his condition; and in this state, he is less than alive in human terms. As Theseus stressed above, at least if the character recovers, he might be on the animal level; and man has the capacity to be on that level if reason is not in control; being human, the state of being alive offers hope; the human can rise to his own highest capacities, and perhaps to the ideal.
CONCLUSION

Humanism is the strong support underlying the love themes in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Based on man's unique position in the scheme of things due to his faculty of reason, the love themes in this play reveal varying amounts of the use of reason and, ultimately, the ideal humanistic love relationship that emerges with understanding and will through the use of reason in the relationship of Hermia and Lysander.

The factors that comprise various conditions of human love appear in this play. Not only do the different attractions of romantic love appear but also the love between family members and friends. Shakespeare revealed the many valid kinds of love relationships from the sense level through the level of understanding and agape' by way of reason, a capacity possessed by man and not by the animals, a capacity that gives man the potential to remain at the sense level or rise to the ideal, which in its faculty of understanding and selflessness gives a spiritual quality to the relationship. The added values of imagination and constancy are due to the ideal human condition based on reason.

By comparing conditions and discovering that human beings can be attracted to each other without reason, the play indicates how much better it is to have a little reason involved for a fuller appreciation of the other human being, furthermore, the play shows how humans on a more spiritual
level can sometimes act or feel without reason as was the case with both Oberon and Titania. The object of love does not always love in return; witness Bottom and see Demetrius' attitude toward Helena before he was anointed. The play includes the love of family members and of childhood friends as well. Serving as parentheses on mature love and a stable relationship are Theseus and Hippolyta. The most perfect or ideal example of love was portrayed by Hermia toward Lysander; in emphasis, she spoke lines that enunciated St. Paul's treatise on Love in I Corinthians 13, a timeless example of ideal love. Comparing the statement by Theseus, that his marriage would be an everlasting bond of fellowship, with Hermia's regard for Lysander as well as Lysander's regard for Hermia once he is restored to a rational state, one is impressed with the fact that Hermia and Lysander come closest to the ideal love relationship.

With such a relationship in mind, one can still appreciate the other affinities as highly believable and very human due to the qualities of choice and the use or neglect of reason.

Shakespeare left nothing out of this play in regard to human love and the examination of the ingredients that comprise the ideal, namely, reason that reaches to understanding not only of oneself but of the loved one. This understanding gives a selfless and lasting quality to the relationship.

Based on his background of Renaissance Christian humanism, plus the added definitions by Bush and Castiglione as well as the themes of the play one concludes that Shakespeare's
humanism is present throughout the plot and, as stated in the purpose of the thesis, an ideal humanistic love relationship emerges.
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