

“The Ecology of Self in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*”
Prof. Robert N. Watson, UCLA
Rhodes College, March 26, 2010

1. *Nature*, (March, 2010): “The human gut is a virtual zoo, full of a wide variety of bacteria, a new study found. And scientists say that's a good thing. The first results of an international effort to catalog the millions of non-human genes inside people found about 170 different bacteria species thriving in the average person's digestive tract. The study also found that people with inflammatory bowel disease had fewer distinct species inside the gut. More than 99 percent of the different types of genes in our bodies are not in fact human, but come from microbes. Bacteria "rule this planet, including our body," said the study's co-author. "I think it's important that people realize that we are not really human — we are a walking colony of bacteria and they are crucial for our well being and health."

2. Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (1634): “to call our selves a Microcosme, or little world, I thought it onely a pleasant trope of Rhetorick, till my neare judgement and second thoughts told me there was a reall truth therein,” which is that “we live the life of plants, the life of animals, the life of men, and at last the life of spirits...for though there bee but one [world] to sense, there are two to reason; the one visible, the other invisible.”

3. OBERON: 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. (II, i, 176-82)

4. OBERON: I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine;
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;
And there the snake throws her enamel'd skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in. (II, ii, 249-55)

5. THISBE: Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
Of color like the red rose on triumphant brier,
Most briskly juvenal, and eke most lovely Jew,
As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire. (III, i, 93-96)

6. PUCK: Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,

A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire,
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn. (III, i, 108-111)

7. HERMIA: Out, dog, out, cur! thou driv'st me past the bounds
Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him then?
Henceforth be never number'd among men!
And hast thou kill'd him sleeping? O brave touch!
Could not a worm, an adder, do so much?
An adder did it! for with doubler tongue
Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung. (III, ii, 65-73)

8. HELENA: Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart. (III, ii, 203-212)

9. HERMIA: O me, you juggler, you canker-blossom,
You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stol'n my love's heart from him? (III, ii, 282-4).

10. TITANIA: Come, sit thee down upon this flow'ry bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy....
So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.
O, how I love thee! how I dote on thee! (IV, i, 1-45)

11. THESEUS: We will, fair queen, up to the mountain's top,
And mark the musical confusion
Of hounds and echo in conjunction.
HIPPOLYTA: I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
When in a wood of Crete they **bay'd the bear**
With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding: for, besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seem all one mutual cry: I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.
THESEUS: My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind;
So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;

Crook-knee'd, and dewlap'd like Thessalian **bulls**;
Slow in pursuit; but match'd in mouth like **bells**,
Each under each. (IV, i, 109-124)

12. PUCK: Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf howls the moon....
Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,
Puts the wretch that lies in woe
In remembrance of a shroud.
Now it is the time of night
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide. (V, i, 371-382)

13. John Donne, *Devotions* (1624): And then as the other *world* produces *Serpents*, and *Vipers*, malignant, & venomous creatures, and *Wormes*, and *Caterpillars*, that endeavour to devoure that world which produces them, and *Monsters* compiled and complicated of divers parents, & kinds, so this world, our selves, produces all these in us, in producing *diseases*, & *sicknesses*, of all those sorts; venimous, and infectious diseases, feeding & consuming diseases, and manifold and entangled diseases, made up of many several ones.

14. PUCK: And the blots of Nature's hand
Shall not in their issue stand;
Never **mole**, **hare**-lip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despised in nativity,
Shall upon their children be. (V, i, 409-414)

15. Robert Dorit, *American Scientist* (2008): "our ecological sensibilities seem to stop at the edge of the visible....Our overuse of antibacterials and antibiotics and the common belief that all microorganisms are harmful reflect our obsession with destroying the unseen....I argue instead for a new take on the world of the unseen—one that acknowledges the vital and subtle relationships that all plants and animals have with microorganisms. Without the microbial worlds that accompany us, human life would not exist. We should honor these relationships."

16. If the whole bodie were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?... those membres of the bodie, which seme to be more feble, are necessarie...God hath tempered the bodie together, and hath given the more honour to that parte which lacked, Lest there shulde be anie division in the bodie: but that the members shulde have the same care one for another. (1 Corinthians 12:17-25, Geneva Bible; 1560 edition)