Puck’s apology and unabashed acknowledgment of the audience’s existence has a political purpose. At the end of the sixteenth century, the stage was in a precarious place. Philip Stubbes criticized the stage and wrote about its morality. His is a good primary source to explore when trying to understand Puck’s motive for apologizing to the audience. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* plays with (and pokes fun at) a number of social conventions. It is possible that contemporary audiences might have found this offensive. But why might Puck apologize? What is his relationship with the audience? In order to determine that, we can look at Mullaney’s article. When he writes, “The popular stage was one of the cultural contradictions which the unchanging and analogic hierarchy of Tudor ideology sought to suppress, and that ideology was frequently invoked against the theatricality of popular drama” (p. 52), he suggests the stage was seen as subversive politically. So Puck’s apology addresses not just morality, but also politics. Peter Thomson also grants insight that might be useful to our interpretation of Puck. He observes, “The idea of acting as if the audience were not there is a twentieth century phenomenon...” (329). This assertion suggests that Puck’s exit from the world of the play was not unusual in Shakespeare’s time. Further mining of Thomson’s article will be necessary.

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Works Cited


Bottom and Peter Quince: you cannot have one without the other. After reading the David Wiles article, “Shakespeare’s Clown: Acting and Rhetoric in Shakespeare’s Playhouse,” it seems plausible that the relationship between Bottom and Quince mirrors the relationship between William Kemp and William Shakespeare, actor and playwright/prompter. Wiles asserts Kemp’s role in the company was just as important as that of Shakespeare. When Quince assigns the roles to the mechanicals, he obviously already considered who to cast as what character. As Wiles notes, the playwright tailored scripts to his actors, which explains Quince’s lack of flexibility when Bottom tries to play the lion as well as Pyramus, his assigned part (I.2.64-I.2.71). Wiles points out Kemp often “clung tenaciously to principles of [his] own” (42). In the play within the play, Quince does not let Bottom do as he wishes, not giving in to his bossy demands. However, in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, the clown of the cast brings about laughter with the enthusiastic pushiness of Bottom’s lines. Therefore, Shakespeare shows us neither is ever entirely in control, for as Bottom cracks us up, wielding some power over the audience, Quince maintains order in the world of the play. The actor nor the playwright ever has complete autonomy. While I originally noted Quince’s leadership and humor in I.2.64-I.2.71, the Wiles article made me realize that Shakespeare is likely basing this relationship between Bottom and Quince on reality, adding even another dimension to a multi-layered play. While it is true to say that Shakespeare shows the humor of managing actors with Quince’s comical line about scaring the ladies, he is further playing with the dynamic between actor and playwright by exposing the differences between who dominates which sphere (e.g. the stage/theater or reality).