"Lord, What Fools These Mortals Be:" Ambiguity in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and A Midsummer Night's Dream

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"LORD, WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE:" AMBIGUITY AND DOUBLE ENTENDRE

IN *ROMEo AND JULIET* AND

*A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

BY HANNAH MARY MURPHY

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I would like to thank my advisor and reader Professor Prakas, for convincing me to be an English Major and without who I wouldn't have been able to complete this thesis, Kathryn Morgan, for agreeing to answer my questions, and my parents and older brother, John, for giving me my love of Shakespeare.
"Lord, What Fools These Mortals Be:" Ambiguity and Double Entendre in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*

There are few stories more iconic than the plays of William Shakespeare: even four and half centuries after they were written they still capture the imaginations of all who hear them and because of this, many people have tried to recreate them in the years since. Furthermore, I would argue that in these many adaptations, there are none as entertaining and beautiful as the ballets, Mendelsohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, both adaptations of their corresponding Shakespeare plays. This thesis will refer specifically to versions of the ballet performed by New York City Ballet, so that they might be more easily compared with each other. The *Romeo and Juliet* referenced is a from the 2007 run of the ballet with choreography by Peter Martins, starring Kathryn Morgan as Juliet Capulet and Sean Suozzi as Romeo Montague, while *Midsummer Night's Dream* is circa 1986 with choreography by George Balanchine, starring Maria Calegari as Titania and Ib Anderson as Oberon. When watching these productions in conjunction with a reread of the plays, one must ask, how do the ballet adaptations of Shakespeare's plays retain the ambiguity and double entendres present in the dialogue of the plays without ever saying a word? I will be focusing on these two devices because they are crucial to retaining the narrative fabric of Shakespeare plays. They, ambiguity and double entendre, are both found in high quantities in every Shakespeare play but especially in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In turning to the ballets, we find that these two art forms accomplish fundamentally the same effects produced through ambiguity and double entendre as the plays do, but through vastly different means all while never losing the core story that they are trying to tell.
To clarify, the definition of ambiguity within this thesis refers to both the level of double entendre present in the dialogue, in other words, the presence of two or more meanings to the same word or phrase. As well as, the different ways specific characters engage with the same events based on the level of knowledge they have; similar to dramatic irony. This narrative device is commonly used in Shakespeare writing, and is a vital part of creating a story that feels "Shakespearean" instead of simply "Elizabethan." This illuminates the tension that in order to retain the ambiguity that is present in the text of Shakespeare's plays, ballets must find a way to portray the verbal/written device while never speaking. One way they could accomplish this is by retaining the sense of interiority of the character within every dancer. In an interview that I conducted with her, Kathryn Morgan (the Juliet of NYC Ballet that I will be analyzing here) said that "because there is no speaking [in the ballet], you do have to create a dialogue in your head, create a story in your head and create a backstory in your head for it to translate, because if you aren't believing what you're doing it's not going to read and the audience isn't going to believe it either."¹ This illustrates how vital it is for every dancer to be embodying their character, including the moments where they, perhaps, know something no one else does or oppositely, where everyone knows something other than them, creating an interaction between the dancers where the same movement can mean something completely different depending on who is watching; much like the relationship that double entendre in Shakespeare has with the audience. They must show only the knowledge that their character would have of the story that they are in, as the double meanings rely on the withholding of knowledge from some or all. By doing this, every dance becomes a conversation between these multiple perspectives that create multiple different realities of the story, as if one can almost hear the lines being spoken as they dance.

¹ Kathryn Morgan (Former soloist for the New York City Ballet), in discussion with the author, Los Angeles, California, November 2023.
While this mimics how the double entendre works in the dialogue of Shakespeare's plays, it leaves behind the question of why retain this device at all if it is this difficult to adapt? The answer is simple: within the logic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* the mortal characters, the distinction must be made as the faeries are complicated, use ambiguity as a way to disguise information and keep secrets, whether that secret is life and death or simple flirting the method remains the same, and if this were to be left out the ballets it would render them much flatter than the dynamic stories that they are. As Morgan said, to perform "*Romeo and Juliet* is not about the dancing, it's about the story that's told through ballet."2

**Part 1: Adaptation of Play to Ballet**

While it is clear that the ballets use Shakespeare as source material, one might wonder if through the process of adaptation into a ballet the production changes enough that it could no longer be counted as "Shakespeare." This raises the question of how much can be changed within a production before it becomes something else entirely. Certainly, there are many productions of the same Shakespeare play that are wildly different yet still considered to be Shakespeare. However, this approach would imply some authorship by William Shakespeare on the part of the ballets. In light of this, before one tries to examine the similarities between these different art forms, it would be beneficial to ascertain whether or not the ballets are adaptations or stylized productions. In his article "Not Not Shakespeare," Cary Mazer writes that "productions… are located along a continuum"3 and "virtually every production deviates from the original script in intent, aesthetic method, theatrical convention, and ideology; scripts are routinely cut and

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2 Kathryn Morgan, audio message to the author, November 2023.
trimmed, with scenes or segments transposed or repositioned,"\(^4\) which would both imply that there is no one way to create Shakespeare; that creating the productions that are considered to be Shakespeare is already a collaborative effort and so, the ballets are a perfectly valid way to portray these concepts and the plots. It implies that no two productions of Shakespeare are alike, and that to exclude the ballets as adaptations of Shakespeare's work would be reductive to the art form as a whole and these two ballets in particular. It also illustrates that all adaptations of Shakespeare's works are not as far removed from a production of the plays as one might at first believe, whether one is looking at Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* or 10 Things I Hate About You. To not include the ballets, would be to excise the contributions of all the productions not done by William Shakespeare, which would include the vast majority of Shakespeare based work. Furthermore, it would lead "the viewer actively to construct an impression of an “author” out of innumerable possible elements and configurations, all while deluding…that this author already exists …unencumbered by the competing influences."\(^5\) To think of this approach as reality is not indicative of a ballet, or truly any theatrical art form. There is often no one person who can be identified as a creator, but rather a team of people working together to create the story through dance and music. In fact, that is also the core of Shakespeare plays, which are so old that the number of adaptations of them are too numerous to count, and change stylistically from director to director; the ballets are the same, a wordless sister to the verbose plays. Furthermore, by endeavoring to recreate the experience of the plays, the ballets translate the ambiance and impression of the stories to recreate the charm in a different art form.

However in terms of adaptations are ballets the same as any other production or are they doing something unique? For one, many things are shortened or cut entirely from both, or

\(^4\) Mazer, "Not Not Shakespeare," 24
oppositely, are expanded far beyond what they were in the original play. For example, Romeo and Juliet's wedding scene is quickly over and the Nurse barely appears at all, while the Masquerade Scene continues for a fair portion of Act I. Or in *Midsummer*, the faeries take up a greater portion of the stage time than lovers, the actors save Bottom are almost entirely cut, and Theseus and Hippolyta's roles are expanded. But this only serves to make what they decide to keep, for instance the ambiguous speech, even more fascinating. In effect, the adaptation into ballets creates "a distinctive… art form whose textual meanings, cultural functions, … and historical legacy distinguish them in key ways from other Shakespeare adaptations and appropriations." This illustrates how while they are retaining much of the structure of the play, they are doing it in a way that is unique and one must analyze it differently then one would analyze a play, otherwise many facets of the performance will likely be missed. Many of the key aspects of the Shakespeare plays must be translated using body language, facial expressions, and symbolism in order to make sense in a ballet, but this does not mean that they are not present. Far from it, they are simply in a different form than the traditional one; symbolism and body language in the place of poetry and prose.

This manner of showing the audience the inner thoughts of the dancers is clearly highly symbolic, even more so than the source material that they are adapting for a new audience. However this manner of adaptation is counter to a far more popular theory that many subscribe to: that adaptations should endeavor to take the word of the text and turn it into reality. In "Rematerializing Adaptation Theory," Robert Meikle describes this traditional view of adaptation as "imagine[ing] adaptation as a hierarchical process in which adapters convert crude materials into more refined objects - a process that casts books as natural resources and adapters

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6 Colón Semenza "Shakespeare and the Auteurs," 353
as…quarriers employed in the business of natural resource extraction." But would this be feasible or even helpful in the case of translating Shakespeare into a new medium, where so much has to be interpreted silently by the viewer? This theory doesn't fit with adaptation of one performance into another, as neither production has the capability to be more "real" than the other because no matter what the audience can see the stage. Instead, this approach would destroy the ambiance of Shakespeare while also completely discounting the silent emotion of the dancers that makes up the main adaptational method present in the dances. These theories of adaptation have long been applied to Shakespeare, with results both fascinating and confusing. As Marion Kimber details in "Reading the Faeries," 19th century theatergoers would rather hear a reading than watch a production of Midsummer Night's Dream, because it would replace "the physicality of the scantily clad female fairies in staged productions—both an aesthetic and a moral problem for theatergoers—with a suitably respectable reading of the Bard." However this physical element is precisely what gave the ballets their power to adapt the complex unspoken character dynamics of the show. To remove it would be to remove Shakespeare from these Shakespeare Ballets, for it is in keeping this that the ballets are able to retain the effects of double entendre, dramatic irony, and ambiguous language all without saying a word; the exact opposite of a reading in which one has only the word. Instead, "if one regards any Shakespeare production, not as a "realization" of the script, but rather as an independent work of theatrical art made from the raw material of the script, then it is inaccurate and unhelpful to think of a production as "Shakespeare" or "Not Shakespeare." Both the plays and ballets are a form of "Shakespeare," even if one is words written by William Shakespeare and one has been adapted;

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7 Kyle Meikle, "REMATATERIALIZING ADAPTATION THEORY," in Literature/Film Quarterly Vol. 41, no. 3, (Salisbury University: 2013), 174
9 Mazar, "Not Not Shakespeare," 23
they are both attempting to convey the ideas, feeling, and atmosphere of their source material to the best of their abilities. This is not to imply that the dialogue is unimportant, far from it, as the way each line is crafted is constantly adding nuisance into the play, it simply denigrates the ballets to discount how else this effect could be created. As opposed to the readings, the staged plays and ballets both aim to entertain through art rather than provide an almost fanatical devotion to the word of the text, that disregards the character dynamics that give rise to ambiguity in the first place.

Fortunately, the ballets of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* have not attempted to create reality atop their stages, leading to a masterful portrayal of the plays far beyond what "reality" might have looked like and in doing so, manage to portray the double entendre present in the dialogue of scenes better than if they were spoken allowed with no power behind them. The characters dance through fanciful scenes rich with detail that give the world color that words might have provided, allowing the dancer to start "acting in the form of dance...[because for the Shakespeare Ballets] it's about the story ...[while] the vehicle is that it's ballet."10 By relinquishing this hold on reality that adaptation scholars and bored victorians alike have clung to, it opens the door to a new world of understanding in ballets. To be able to identify the moments where the characters are arguing or flirting or using ambiguity in other moments, one has to be able to read between the lines of their dancing to see the purpose beneath. In the opinion of Meikle, "it is time for adaptation scholars to turn their attention from the combination of texts to the combination of things; maybe it is time for adaptation scholars to embrace such stuff as dreams are made of - to embrace the stuff of adaptations."11 It is this interdisciplinary approach to adaptation that works so well for the Shakespeare Ballets, because it can capture the
intrigue of the complex webs of motivations within the characters relationship non-verbally. The combination of these complicated interpersonal relationships, where everyone is rarely operating on the same information, along with no clear cut way to relate them to the audience creates something unique but also completely Shakespearian when the dancers and choreographers circumvent this problem. Instead, they are willing to work creatively and create something new that has been infused with the essence of Shakespeare.

This is why it is critical to use a non-reality based lens when approaching the adaptation of ambiguous language into ballet because if it reflected reality the dancers would simply be talking. Instead one must stay engaged with the action, and read the performers faces, body language, and symbolism in the music, the set, the costumes. "As Meikle writes in "Rematerializing Adaptation Theory,""who better than adaptation scholars to retrieve, record, and recast the most minute shifts in medium, the most material shifts between media? Adaptation scholars thrive in the middle - in the intermezzo." It is this "intermezzo" where the concept of ambiguity and misunderstanding within Shakespeare's plots is found, and as such it is important to include it within the process of adaptation. Furthermore, it is in looking at the adaptations that one can find the truly fascinating aspects of Shakespeare's legacy and might give one some new insight on what it is that makes these stories so engaging, and memorable. While this is a complex question, and there are undoubtedly many factors at play that create these pieces, one facet of these insights may be revealed when looking at the dancers. As per Morgan, it is about "noticing a different glance, making a eye contact with the other people stage because they might throw [her] a different facial expression than they did the previous night or a little gesture that was different than the previous night and it's also…being aware of their subtleties and then …

12 Meikle, "REMATERIALIZING ADAPTATION THEORY," 181
playing off of that." The dancers live threw their character's skins each night, portraying only what their character would know about what is happening in their story, in order to create the hectic sense of crossing motivations that is present in the words of plays. It is within the bodies of the dancers that the spirit of the words can be found and seen by the audience.

"Wreak the love I bore my cousin/ Upon his body that hath slaughtered him:

Purposeful Ambiguity in the Romeo and Juliet Play and Ballet

In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as the eponymous Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet struggle to hide their romance and marriage from their warring families, they both often speak in double meanings in order to conceal knowledge from those around them. However, even then, the lovers do not hold all the knowledge they would require to survive the play, and others perform this same action unto them. Still, the double entendres are meant to hide some kind of information no matter who uses them, although the reason for hiding the information can range from hiding life ending information to not wanting anyone to understand that they are flirting. Furthermore, in both the play and the ballet of *Romeo and Juliet*, this concept of verbal and narrative ambiguity is illustrated most clearly in the scenes of the Capulet's Masquerade, Romeo and Tybalt's duel, and the interplay between the Tomb and Balcony scenes. In each moment, many of the ensemble cast each have pieces of the puzzle that makes up the plot but none has the whole picture, which inevitably leads to conflict. However, one must ask, how exactly are these complex character dynamics and interfamilial politics related to an audience without words? The answer lies in paying attention to the intention behind the actions of the characters, the symbolism that represents lines from the play, and the tone of the music and choreography that illuminates a character's mental state.

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13 Morgan, audio message to the author, November 2023.
In a story that has many moments where no two characters, save Romeo and Juliet, have the same amount of knowledge of what is happening within their worlds, it is at the Capulet's Masquerade where the concept of this dissonance of knowledge is first thrown into sharp relief. In this scene, Act I Scene V, the commencement of the plot truly starts to take form, with Romeo and Juliet meeting, and tension between the Capulets and Montagues running high. While Romeo and Juliet are unaware that the other is the heir of the family with which their family is feuding, Lord Capulet and Tybalt are clearly well aware of this fact even if they have differing conceptions on what they should do about it. However these two moments are divorced from each other, taking place on opposite sides of the ballroom. While the lovers are in each other's arms for the first time, Juliet's father and cousin, Lord Capulet and Tybalt, are arguing over Romeo even being present at the masquerade. For example, Tybalt, after barking at a servant for his rapier, tells his uncle that Romeo "is a Montague, our foe/[and his wrath] fits when such a villain is a guest./ [He'll] not endure him." Tybalt knows of the discontent between their family's and operates based only on that world view, he doesn't see genuine connection forming between the two, only their family names. To him, Romeo is a Montague and is therefore a villain, no matter what Juliet or his uncle may think. This is information that Tybalt perceives as Romeo having tried to hide from them, the masquerade mask serving as a physical form of the doubling that occurs in words. There are no other viewpoints but his own, even when Lord Capulet bids him to "Let [Romeo] alone…[he] would not for all the wealth of all this town/Here in [his] house do [Romeo] disparagement./Therefore be patient. Take no note of him." This response adds nuisance to the perspective of the characters, Lord Capulet has the same knowledge as Tybalt and yet he only wants to enjoy the party, and seems to not take Romeo's

15 Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5.74.
presence as a slight. By examining this moment, one can see a sort of narrative doubling where it is this disconnect between the characters' reactions to the same issue that creates the ambiguity present within the scene. This same event creates vastly different reactions that one must work to fully understand just like the moments of double meanings within a single word. Furthermore, the difference in these perspectives create three distinct ways of seeing the Masquerade depending on whether one is watching Juliet and Romeo, Tybalt, or Lord Capulet.

Even though this narrative doubling was reliant on dialogue in the play, it is a breeze for the ballet to adapt it without losing any of the narrative power. Within the world of the story, just like in the play, Romeo (Suozzi) and Juliet (Morgan) are still dancing with what they see only as a beautiful stranger, while Tybalt (Amar Ramasar) immediately focuses on Romeo. He is outraged that the son of his enemy has crashed his party and is dancing with his young cousin, while Lord Capulet (Jock Soto) would rather focus on the merriment, and his daughter's soon-to-be betrothal to the County Paris, and so is in a generous mood. Of course, none of this set up relies on dialogue to convey its point, and it is the motivations of Paris that must truly be analyzed. In the Ballroom Scene of New York City Ballet's Romeo and Juliet (2007), one can see Tybalt constantly stalking around in the shadows of the crowd of dancers; seeing the young lovers, recognizing Romeo as a Montague and immediately pulling Juliet away and back to Paris while Juliet keeps looking back for Romeo.\(^1^6\) It is a series of moments that one might at first not notice, as in the recording the camera is fixed so that one can see the entire stage, and these moments happen in the background. However, they are far more important than they seem. This moment has a different meaning for every person involved in it, even as none of them wish to show the others that it has affected them. It makes the dissonance between the Capulet family clearer, as none share their encounters, instead trying to keep up the appearance that their future

is perfectly clear. Even Tybalt, while he brings Juliet back to Paris, keeps the knowledge that she was dancing with a Montague himself, perhaps to protect or perhaps to protect the family from shame. Still, in doing so, by adding layers of ambiguity to every action taken that night this illustrates how the hiding of information can lead to more than one understanding of an interaction.

Furthermore by withholding this information from Juliet, he creates a situation where what he knows of the situation and what Juliet understands are entirely in conflict. One could infer that this may be deliberate on Tybalt's part as he is shown throughout both play and ballet to be trying to keep Juliet out of trouble, however, Romeo being rendered mysterious by this lack of information given to her about him only adds to her infatuation and eventual love. Furthermore, the physicalization of Tybalt's internal monologue also lends itself well to creating the same ambiguity present in the play with no dialogue. Instead, Ramasar hits the beats of Tybalt's lines with only action. In his mind, he alone can be burdened with the knowledge of the impropriety of Romeo and Juliet dancing together, and it is clear to the audience that, at that moment, he is also the only one who cares. No one else has picked up the burgeoning romance, only seeing two young people dancing at a party. But Tybalt does not share any of his misgivings about Juliet, choosing instead to handle it himself. This is indicative of how instead of saying these different perspectives on their world out loud, the dancers must rely on playing up the subtext of the characters, as it is the only way to show the unique viewpoints of each character, the ambiguity of the plot, in *Romeo and Juliet*.

This ambiguous language manifests when the characters do want to say what they really mean outright, which in *Romeo and Juliet*, generally ends in disaster even though it is meant to protect the speakers. For example halfway through both the play and the ballet, Romeo and
Mercutio get into a duel with Tybalt just after Romeo and Juliet are married. Each of these men has a different perspective on why or why not they want to fight in the streets, but is either unwilling to relinquish this information or unwilling to listen to the others' side. Since none of them have the same amount of information, it becomes impossible for the encounter to end peacefully. Indeed, Tybalt starts the conflict by telling Romeo that "the love I bear thee can afford/ No better term than this: thou art a villain." By saying this, Tybalt means that he believes that Romeo is his enemy with all his heart, however by using the word "love" a double entendre is formed. Though Tybalt doesn't know it, Romeo is now his cousin by marriage and his own words tease him by acknowledging that Tybalt should love Romeo seeing as they are kin. Yet, it is clear from his dialogue, that he is the hero in his mind, saving his family and his cousin's honor after the loathsome Montagues attended the Capulet's party uninvited. The nuances of his reasoning translate quite well into the ballet. During 'The Fight,' "there is a section… where the first bars of the [Party] theme are belted out by different instruments at different times, simulating the utter breakdown of what happens when feelings are running high," as well as acknowledging Tybalt's primary motivation for accosting the boys in the street. The slightly discordant nature of the theme is also a representation of the breakdown of logic with Tybalt's thought process, while also adding a layer of dramatic irony through the knowledge that Tybalt is attempting to defend his family by killing Romeo, who is also now family. Just as a fight to the death shouldn't be accompanied by party music, the Montagues and Capulets are fighting for ridiculous and petty reasons, something that they hide behind talk of mortal enemies.

This is complicated by the knowledge that Romeo has because Tybalt is unaware of their new relation, Romeo knows it well and is desperate to end the fight swiftly. Yet, he will not

17 Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, 3.1.61-62.
18 (Star Cross'd Lovers 322)
outright tell Tybalt the truth and instead employs ambiguity as a way to, in his mind, protect them both. So Romeo says, "So, good Capulet, which name I tender/ As dearly as mine own, be satisfied [without this confrontation ending in a duel with Mercutio and himself]."19 Even as one could read this line as Romeo only wanting to break up the duel, he, and the audience, knows that Romeo doesn't want to kill his cousin. He tells Tybalt that he loves his name like his own because, in a sense, Capulet now is his name. It's also interesting to note how Romeo and Tybalt keep talking about the "love" they have for each other but they both have vastly different meanings. In fact, while Romeo means it sincerely, Tybalt uses it mockingly as he has no love for him.

Yet, there is an even more compelling example of this doublespeak being used as a sort of armor in a scene between Juliet and her mother, Lady Capulet, that takes place just after the duel, and Tybalt's subsequent death. In the scene, the two are discussing the death of their kinsman and Romeo's banishment for his killing, which one would imagine would be a straightforward conversation. Yet, Juliet is in love with Romeo and refuses to speak badly of him even while hiding this fact from her mother by using double meanings to her phrases. In doing this she utilizes ambiguous language in order to fit into both her own and her mother's different worldviews. This leads to Lady Capulet having an entirely different understanding of Juliet's feelings on the subject of Romeo than what she truly feels. For instance, when her mother suggests sending an assassin after him, Juliet replies that she "never shall be satisfied/With Romeo till [she beholds] him–dead–/ Is [her] poor heart, so for a kinsman vexed."20 This line is fascinating because it means something different to however hears it, much like the ambiguity of the story present in the interiority of each character. To Lady Capulet, Juliet is expressing that

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19 Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.1.72-73.
20 Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5.98-100.
she wishes to 'behold Romeo dead' and that her heart is with her 'kinsman' meaning the late Tybalt; a reading which makes sense with the information that she possesses. However, what Juliet, being Romeo's loving wife, means by this is that she wishes to 'behold Romeo' and that her 'heart is dead' with the grief of being apart from him. Furthermore, as his wife, Romeo would also count as her kinsman seeing as their families have been joined. Another example of this double entendre from Juliet is when she tells her mother she would like to "Wreak the love [she] bore [her] cousin/ Upon his body that hath slaughtered him." Once again, the wordplay here tells two stories. One of a grieving cousin, and one of a heartbroken wife. While the second half of the phrase clearly refers to Romeo, it is the beginning that carries the ambiguity, in particular, the word "Wreak." To her mother "wreaking the love" she bore Tybalt upon Romeo's body would refer to her avenging Tybalt by brutalizing Romeo, however Juliet hides another meaning within the words. "Wreaking the Love " upon Romeo could also be interpreted as Juliet wanting to ravage Romeo in their marriage bed. It is this ambiguity that makes their tragedy so interesting because it illustrates how no one is playing with a full deck of cards, no one knows all of the facts of the plot. Instead, they all see their perception as the version of the world that is true and plan accordingly.

The next instance of this ambiguity is at the very end of the play within the Capulet's finding Juliet after her having apparently killed herself, and within the Tomb Scene just after that, both Romeo and Paris's duel and Romeo's suicide at Juliet's. To start with the Capulet's, when the Nurse comes to wake her on the morning of her marriage to Paris and finds her apparently dead, she first tries in vain to wake her and then screams to bring the Lord and Lady to her side. In response to his daughter's death Lord Capulet tells Paris that "The night before thy wedding day/Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies,'Flower as she was, deflowered by

21 Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, 3.5.106-107.
him." Part of the ambiguity of this moment is that while Juliet is not dead, she has been deflowered, though by Romeo and not Death. Within this moment, the characters once more have entirely separate ideas of what has caused this Tragedy, and all use veiled language in order to hide what they believe to be the secret of Juliet's death from the others. The Capulets know that Juliet has poisoned herself to get out of a marriage she doesn't want, the Nurse knows that it was for love of Romeo that she did this, while Paris only knows that she's dead. Yet, all of these realities can be seen in this line depending on how it's read. Furthermore, this language of flowers is important to the scene as it is represented in the ballet as well. At the beginning of the Death Scene, both Juliet's friends (NYCB Core) and the Nurse (Dena Abergel) arrange a bouquet of white lilies over her sleeping/dead body, ostensibly because it is to be her wedding day. In addition to referencing Lord Capulet's flower imagery, the use of white lilies in particular, a traditional funerary flower, creates an ambiguity that blurs the line between Juliet's wedding flowers and the flowers that would be laid on her grave. By adding this detail to the ballet, the visual language of the flowers is able to create ambiguity in Lord Capulet's lines from the play without ever actually saying a word.

However, the double meanings continue within the final act of the play in Juliet's Tomb. During the first section of this scene when Romeo and Paris, the husband and betrothed of the "late" Juliet, there is once again a moment where two different perspectives clash. Neither man knows the full picture of what is happening, and that is their downfall. To Paris, his love's cousin's killer has now come to defile her grave, as he makes clear when he sees Romeo staying that "This is that banished haughty Montague/That murdered my love's cousin, with which grief/

It is supposèd the fair creature died." In Paris's mind, he is fully justified in attacking Romeo

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22 Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 4.5.41-43.
24 Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3.49-51.
even after Romeo begs him to stop and tries to make peace, before eventually killing Paris in order to get to Juliet. They both fail to see the other side or consider that this could be a nuanced situation until after it's far too late. The double meanings that were meant to keep Romeo and Juliet safe and their love secret, eventually lead to their downfall.

Finally, as Romeo mourns at Juliet's side in the tomb, he once more tries to use the protection of ambiguous language however this time, it is himself that he wishes to trick. As soon as he lays eyes on her apparently dead body, Romeo tells her "Ah, dear Juliet,/Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe/That unsubstantial death is amorous/ …[and keeps] thee here in dark to be his paramour?" In this moment, Romeo comments on the fact Juliet looks alive in death while mourning her, imagining that even Death must love her because of this, while also trying to fool himself into thinking that perhaps she still does live. Of course, the third layer to this line is the knowledge of the audience that Juliet is not actually dead but in a deep sleep. Romeo has noticed this, but because he isn't privy to all knowledge surrounding this incident, it remains an ambiguous undercurrent to his dialogue. This implication of Juliet not appearing dead is skillfully transferred into the ballet version of the Tomb Scene, by Romeo partnering Juliet's limp body in a pas de deux. Specifically, he deadlifts her limp body above his head in a manner that mimics their Balcony Pas de Deux earlier in the ballet while she was able to respond to him. In the same way that Romeo comments on how alive Juliet's dead body looks, he partners her as if she can dance back. In both cases, Romeo tries to breathe life back into Juliet's body by treating her like she's alive, he can make her so, all while unaware that she actually is. Instead of using words to accomplish this, however, the dancers use only the knowledge that their character conceivably has at that point in the Act.

In conclusion, when watching a ballet adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* one might question how they managed to retain the ambiance of the original play without the most iconic aspect: the words. In both the play and the ballet the characters weaponize the ambiguity of their world, their actions, or their words in order to conceal what is hidden within them. In fact, it is their ability to create that sense of interiority, the illusion that each character isn't privy to the rest of the story or the thoughts of their fellow characters. It creates the same, for lack of a better word, dance between the different versions of the story that each one sees as fact. While, it's not a one-to-one translation, this sense that the characters all have different conceptions of the world mimics how ambiguous dialogue and double entendre work as a device in Shakespeare's plays, particularly *Romeo and Juliet*. Furthermore, this adds a beauty to the story that cannot be denied, because it also mimics life. In both the play and the ballet the characters all seem uniquely alive, due to their personal life experiences being the driving force behind their actions. No two people in *Romeo and Juliet* act the same because they all have a different conception of what exactly is going on. And it is this that makes the tragedy of it all so poignant, that the characters were so alive that they seemed like one could climb onto the stage to help them, yet were forced to watch as the web of tragedy closed around them once more.

"Methinks, I see these things with parted eye, When everything sees double:" Ambiguity in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the need for ambiguity and double entendre comes about rather differently than it does in *Romeo and Juliet*, due in main to a multitude of factors, that leads to the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a ballet being so radically different to the adaptation of the latter. This shift may in part be because Mendelsshon "came to be
considered the quintessential “fairy composer,”... Thus, a reading of the play...[must ] ...evoke a fairy world in the listeners’ imaginations without weighty reality impinging on the dreamlike state.” With this in mind, it makes sense that the Balanchine production would focus the world of the ballet on the faeries, in order to easily convey the ambiance of *Midsummer Night's Dream* as opposed to a line by line faithful recreation of the plot. However, this is not to suggest that the lovers' storyline and the love scenes between Nick Bottom (Laurence Matthews) and Titania are lacking in the slightest in the ballet. In fact, the presence of these moments and their clever way of adapting the moments of ambiguity in the dialogue are what makes the ballet a good adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as opposed to a ballet about fairyland. Of course, the shift could also be partially caused by the fact that *Midsummer* is comedy and *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, and so, rather than always attempting to hide information through cleverly concealed words, in *Midsummer*, there is room for the ambiguity to become an avenue for mischief instead. However, this is not to say that none of the ambiguity is used in the same manner as it is in *Romeo and Juliet*, because the lovers retain this aspect of the dialogue. In fact it seems to fall more along the division of who is mortal and who is fae. For example, in the case of the faeries, when Oberon, Titania, and Puck, misunderstand the wording of each other's commands and plots it remains in the realm of good fun. By contrast, the lovers are distressed by the confusion caused by the faeries' machinations, while also deliberately employing double entendre and ambiguity in order to safeguard their secrets. This is complicated by a wrinkle that doesn't appear in *Romeo and Juliet*, however, because in this play the lovers are forced by magic to switch who they are in love with, who they want to be in confidence with. It is because of this that in some moments a character will be clear, while another willfully misunderstands it or treats it like it was ambiguous in order to continue the intimacy that wordplay would between

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27 Wilson Kimber, "Reading the Fairies," 55-56
them. It comes in three main prongs, the first being the accidental misunderstandings caused by the ambiguous commands of the faeries, like the love potion flower that creates the major conflict of the play, how the faeries come to see the mortals as interchangeable, and the changing of Bottom into a foul beast. The next focuses on the dynamics of the lovers and how they act differently within those dynamics, specifically how the love objects react to being doted upon. Lastly, the interplay between the Mortal Lovers and the Immortal Faerie King and Queen, and their courts must be touched on, as well as how this affects both parties' use of ambiguous language, and how this difference is shown in both the ballet and the play.

It is interesting how the faerie's treat ambiguous language and those who use it, as it is far more careless than one would expect given the gravity it's given in Romeo and Juliet. This aspect of the fae is first noticeable when an ambiguously worded order from the Faerie King, Oberon, to Puck, his servant, ends in a magically induced love affair for anyone who crosses their path. To expand, this misunderstanding comes about when Oberon commands Puck to use a magical flower with the power to make the person whose eyes the nectar is dropped into fall in love with the first thing she sees, for two purposes. First, to make the Faerie Queen, Titania, who is having an argument with Oberon, fall in love with a beast, and secondly, to make a young man fall in love with the woman who chases him. While that appears straightforward at first, the ambiguity in this command becomes clear with the specific wording, as Oberon tells Puck that "A sweet Athenian lady is in love/ With a disdainful youth. Anoint his eyes,/ But do it when the next thing he espies/May be the lady."28 This command usually would not have been ambiguous, and indeed, it wasn't meant to be, if there weren't two Athenian couples within the forest. As it stands, Puck enorcels Lysander, beloved of Hermia, to be in love with Helena, his lover

Hermia's friend, who chases after Demetrius, who was the "disdainful youth" that Oberon was referring to. This version of a double meaning is very different from the version seen in *Romeo and Juliet* for a variety of reasons, the chiefest of which is that the information was not purposefully withheld, but instead misunderstood. The faeries have no reason to purposefully use this ambiguity in regards to the humans, in fact, the misunderstanding only came about because Oberon did not find the lovers important enough to warrant him calling them by name. It is as if because the mortals trade in ambiguity while the faeries do not, they are able to be mistaken for one and other while the faeries never are, no matter how many different names they use.

In Balanchine's version of the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ballet, this concept of the interchangeability of the mortal lovers is shown through visual as opposed to verbal markers: their costumes. In the play, when directing Puck who to use the flower's love magic upon, Oberon tells him that "Thou shalt know the man/By the Athenian garments he hath on," not knowing that both Lysander and Demetrius wear these clothes.  

29 This is very cleverly adapted in the ballet, by dressing the lovers in the same costumes as their "Athenian garments," one can understand how Puck (Jean-Pierre Frolich) confused them. In fact, Hermia (Judith Fugate) and Helena (Stephanie Saland), and Lysander (Kipling Houston) and Demetrius (Peter Frame), are dressed identically aside from color, which matches with their respective love interest, putting Hermia and Lysander in blue and Helena and Demetrius in pink.  

30 This design element lends a visual cue to the audience of who is going to end up with who, and making the moments where the mismatched couples dance with their opposites more readable from a distance, as well as giving concrete reason why Puck may have been confused. To him, the mortals are similar enough that distinguishing them would be more trouble than it's worth, which lends them the

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same quality as the ambiguous language that they trade in. Their mortality makes them interchangeable to the fae, Hermia-Helena become the same "sweet Athenian lady" while Lysander-Demetrius are both rendered "the disdainful youth." This thought is also placed onto the audience by the ballet, since with both couples wearing their "Athenian Garments," the stage lights wash out the colors and without all four next to each other, they become a bit difficult to tell apart even by those who know who they are.

This is not the only instance of the fae, usually Oberon, being carelessly ambiguous with their words; not because they are actually intending to use it, but simply because they do not care enough to use specific wording. For example, when directing Puck to use the magic of the flower on Queen Titania, Oberon tells him to "Drop the liquor of it in her eyes./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."31 The wording of this command is non-specific, as Oberon does not care how Puck interprets the ambiguity or what he brings for Titania to fall in love with. This is very different from the carefully picked words the mortal lovers, who wield their double meanings as both a sword and shield, to wound or protect their enemies or lovers, respectively. When compared with this, Oberon make this command with the subtlety of a battering ram, as the unclear meaning is not important to him, only the end goal that "When [she, Titania] wak'st, it is [her] dear/...[and she wakes] when some vile thing is near."32 In both play and ballet, Puck interprets this as creating a monster for his queen to fall in love with and corners the leader of an acting troupe, Nick Bottom, and after causing a commotion to lead the rest of his troupe away, transforms him to give him a donkey's head.33 This is important to the discussion of Oberon's careless ambiguity because, in both formats, this ends up giving Puck, a trickster, free

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reign to make as much mischief as he wants just like what happened with the lovers. The only difference is that this wording is much more careless than it was unintentional, as Oberon does not care what happens with the beast so long as Titania is humiliated. As such, this illustrates how the fae in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have no need to use ambiguity in their language because they do not need to find power in being able control the world around them. They already have that, as immortal beings, they don't need more ways to gain it.

However, while Oberon's command of what beast that Titania falls for was carelessly vague as he didn't care what Puck did with it, the same cannot be said for his command about the lovers. On that occasion, he believes that Puck took liberties with his words; words that weren't meant to be ambiguous. After finding out that Puck has made Lysander fall in love with Helena and jilt his lover, Hermia, Oberon rails at his servant "What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite/And laid the love juice on some true-love's sight./ Of thy misprision must perforce ensue/ Some true-love turned, and not a false turned true."[34] Not only does this prove that the ambiguity in this command was unintentional, but Oberon immediately clarifies his meaning in non-ambiguous language so that Puck has no room to interpret things in his way. Furthermore, in doing this Oberon takes the lovers out of their interchangeable state and makes them individuals in the minds of the faeries once more. This is illustrated beautifully when, later in the scene, Oberon tells Puck to "About the wood go swifter than the wind,/ And Helen of Athens look thou find."[35] This is the first and only time that Oberon refers to one of the lovers by name, however it does imply that he has known their names all along which adds an interesting layer to his first command to Puck. In not using them, he shows that he, as an immortal, did not find the mortal lovers important enough for him to put any effort into his command. This is similar to him being

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nonplussed about Titania's beast lover, but different in the fact that he didn't intend it. The lovers were already ambiguous and interchangeable to him, even if he didn't want them to be.

To further prove the point that the ambiguity was unintentional on the part of Oberon, one must look at his reaction upon seeing what Puck has done to the lovers. Instead of laughing, he tells him that "This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak'st./Or else committ'st thy knaveries willfully." It is clear in this response that Oberon knows that Puck has misread his intention with the mortals, either accidentally or willfully, and is displeased. Unlike with the creation of Titania's monster lover, Oberon had not given his servant leave to interpret his words as he would and is upset that they were taken ambiguously, as they were not intended to be so. However, Puck does not seem chastened to this in the slightest saying that "so far blameless proves [his] enterprise/ That [he has] 'nointed an Athenian's eyes;/ And so far [is he] glad it so did sort,/ As this their jangling [he esteems] a sport." At first glance, this would seem to disprove that the faeries don't trade in ambiguity as Puck took Oberon's words to have another meaning, however this is the case. In fact, this response illustrates that the faeries are extremely literal beings as Puck is not allowing for the acknowledgement of ambiguity in the command. To him the command was to "'noint an Athenian's eyes" which he did and he couldn't care less about any other unintentional meaning that the command may have had. To him, Puck has followed the letter of what his king told him to do, not the spirit, as one might with a more ambiguous statement that the mortals would use. This illustrates why, afterward, Oberon is extremely clear that Puck must find Helen of Athens, and no other.

On the other side of the faerie courts, Titania has a similar disconnect between mortal and immortal speech with her new lover Nick Bottom, freshly transformed to have a donkey's head

on his shoulders. This development doesn't stop him from speaking in the mortals' double entendre, however, as he speaks to the Queen and her attendants telling them that he "must to the barber's,/ monsieur, for methinks [he is] marvels hairy about/ the face. And [he is] such a tender ass, if [his] hair do/ but tickle [him], [he] must scratch." This comment features this ambiguity in the phrase "a tender ass," as Bottom is speaking about two different aspects of himself at once. On one hand, the phrase could mean he's a "sensitive fellow," and that his skin will be irritated if it isn't properly groomed, but it could also reference both his name, Nick Bottom, and the fact that at the moment he has been transformed to have the head of an ass. While this is mainly meant to bring levity, it is still important to note that within this scene that has the mortals and immortals as scene partners, the mortal is the only one who attempts to use this ambiguity. Furthermore, Bottom is attempting to ingratiate himself to Titania's court which is just another form of the same intimacy that the lovers' use double entendre to create within themselves. However, how would this be translated into a ballet? Later in the scene, Bottom asks Titania for food saying "Methinks I have a great desire/ to a bottle of hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no/ fellow." Within the bounds of the ballet, this is used as a way to create the same wordplay on the word "ass" that Bottom just used through the physical comedy of him attempting to eat the fan made of hay that Titania holds while they dance a pas de deux. In doing this, not only is the humor of the moment retained but the wordplay between his name and current form is too, all by calling attention to the fact that Nick Bottom has become an ass, two words which are synonymous. In contrast, Titania's feelings and lines are very clear with little room for ambiguity. As she proclaims to Bottom, "O, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!," it becomes clear that

40 Balanchine, "Titania and Bottom's Pas de Deux No. 1," (50:30-55:45)
Titania has no need to hide behind double meanings. Instead, the Faerie Queen says what she means and does what she wants, both with herself and with the new apple of her eye, Bottom. This dynamic is also shown in their style of dancing, in which Titania is the one who knows how to dance a pas de deux and she manipulates Bottom's hands and legs into the correct position to partner her. Bottom, less elegant goes along with her demands, but is clearly not used to this. This signifies the difference in stature between the two, their pas is mismatched and it is nearly impossible for them to work together. This illustrates the conflict between Bottom's style of speaking, in the mortal way of double meanings, and Titania's, where she expects to have exactly what she wants and would not expect anything less. The dynamic is notably different from both Titania and Oberon's pas de deux and any combination of the lovers', because unlike the others, this one is cross mortality. Thus the differences between their manner of communicating, either in words or in dance, is vastly mismatched and could only spell disaster.

However, one cannot make the argument that the mortals are the ones to employ ambiguity as a device without also focusing on the dynamics between them. In particular, I will focus on the dynamics of the mortal lovers, Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius, as well as the previously mentioned actor, Nick Bottom. This choice is down to the other mortal characters of A Midsummer Night's Dream not being in enough of either the ballet, like Egreus and the others actors, or the play, like Theseus and Hippolyta. As well the fact that the lovers are simply the most important mortals in regards to this conversation. Furthermore, within the lovers' plotline of lovelorn hijinks, there are countless examples of the usage of ambiguous language throughout, with each pairing of the lovers having a different way of using it against or with each other. To start with Helena and Demetrius, in the beginning the two are constantly fighting over

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42 Balanchine, "Titania and Bottom's Pas de Deux No. 1," (50:30-55:45)
her pursuit of him and his pursuit of Helena's friend, Hermia. During one of these fights, after Helena has told him where to find Hermia and her lover in the woods, he asks her "Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?" while questioning why she will not stop her love of him even in the face of him mistreating her. On one hand this could be him asking Helena if he's ever spoken to her civilly, but there's a double meaning of him asking if he's ever called her beautiful and whichever way Helena interprets this it's a devastatingly harsh thing to say. In this case, however, unlike in *Romeo and Juliet*, the ambiguity in his words is not meant to confuse or conceal information with Helena, instead Demetrius would rather her understand both the meanings of his words to stop her from fawning after him. In other words, Demetrius is using these double meanings in order to increase clarity for Helena that he does not want her any longer, and wishes to destroy the intimacy between them that the ambiguity would imply they have. However Helena willfully ignores this in order to continue the intimacy caused by their ambiguity that would have been destroyed if she took the meaning of Demetrius's words as they are. In the ballet, this scene is shown via Helena attempting to dance a pas de deux with Demetrius, while he continuously bats her away from him, drags her across the stage as she attempts to embrace him, and creates unbalanced tableaus as she attempts to have him partner her. The dissonance in their emotions creates two different situations depending on which lover, Helena or Demetrius, one focuses on. In Demetrius's mind, Helena is a fling who he has now forgotten and wishes would leave him alone, whereas for Helena, she is desperate to reclaim the attention of the man she loves and doesn't care how he treats her. As such, this pas de deux encompasses both of those realities, it is both a dance of love and a futile seduction much like the scene between Helena and Demetrius that it represents.

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44 Balanchine, "Helena and Demetrius Pas de Deux No.1," (30:12-31:45)
Another example of this is when Demetrius tells Helena that she does "impeach [her] modesty too much" by following him into the forest alone, because he could easily take her virginity.\textsuperscript{45} But, instead of leaving him as he wants, Helena responds that his "virtue is [her] privilege."\textsuperscript{46} Once again, it is Helena who inserts ambiguity into the clarity of Demetrius' language in order to retain their intimacy as lovers. This line in particular could mean that Helena finds it a privilege to be surrounded by Demetrius's "virtue" or excellence and thus won't leave him. However it could just as easily mean that his "virtue" or his moral goodness, means that her "modesty," or virginity, is safe around him. But either way, Helena's is using the double entendre of lovers to retain a dynamic of flirting that Demetrius is attempting not to engage in unless to make it crystal clear he doesn't want anything to do with her. A second example of the latter is present when Demetrius tells Helena that he "will not stay [her] questions," which could have two meanings but is meant to increase clarity and not ambiguity.\textsuperscript{47} Here the word "stay" changes the meaning of the phrase depending on which way one reads it. It could either mean that Demetrius will not be able to stop Helena from asking her questions or that he will not deign to stay to hear her ask them. Either way, similar to when he asked her if he "speaks [her] fair," Demetrius is attempting to distance himself from Helena by using double entendre to create clarity between them instead of ambiguity, which would destroy that lovers intimacy.

To illustrate what this lovers intimacy would look like in a healthy romance, one must instead look at the exchanges between Lysander and Hermia, who are so in love they run away from Athens in order to get married against Hermia's fathers wishes. Instead of having an unbalanced dynamic where only one of them is using ambiguity to induce intimacy, like Helena and Demetrius, these two work together and have a great understanding of each other's words,

\textsuperscript{45} William Shakespeare, \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, 2.1.221.
\textsuperscript{46} William Shakespeare, \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, 2.1.227.
\textsuperscript{47} William Shakespeare, \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, 2.1.242.
even the little lovers' riddles or double entendres. This balance is shown in their pas de deux in the ballet, where they come onto the stage walking in time with each other and spend their pas de deux supporting each other physically while making symmetrical shapes with their hands and bodies. Furthermore, each time they end a phrase of the dance, Lysander and Hermia end up in an embrace, wrapped around each other with love written all over their faces.\(^{48}\) These two clearly understand each other's minds and bodies as they catch each other before they can fall, which is a lovely way to represent the verbal intimacy of the play where they understand even the most convoluted of their lover's metaphors. For example, as Lysander and Hermia curse the fact that Hermia's father won't let them marry because he wants her to marry Demetrius, Lysander tells her that "if there were a sympathy in choice [of who one loves]./ War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,/…That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and Earth,/And, ere a man hath power to say "Behold!/The jaws of darkness do devour it up./ So quick bright things come to confusion.\(^{49}\) By saying this, Lysander is adding ambiguity to an already strange metaphor by using the adjective "quick." He is saying that if one chooses who they love, the plagues of the world destroy it because great loves are like lightning but can be quickly struck down, while the ambiguity comes at the end. The "quick bright things [coming to confusion]" could either mean that intense, vibrant loves could be stifled or that fast-paced loves burn out quickly. One could argue that Lysander is talking about himself and Hermia in the first meaning, as their true love was stifled, and Demetrius and Helena in the second, as their fling was abandoned by the former. It makes sense that this would be directed only to Hermia, his lover, as to an outsider, this metaphor is strange and hard to parse out. But by saying it to her, Lysander is certain that he will

\(^{48}\) Balanchine, "Hermia and Lysander Pas de Deux No.1," (28:57-30:12).
be understood because she has the ability to understand both his metaphor and the ambiguity baked into it.

Furthermore, Lysander and Hermia also use these double entendres to flirt and maintain the intimacy between them. As they venture into the woods to elope, they stop by a riverbed to sleep for the night and Hermia tells Lysander to sleep a little bit away from for the sake of her modesty. While he does this, he also teases her saying "O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence!/Love takes the meaning in love's conference." The word choice of innocence is important as Lysander is both asking Hermia to understand that he wasn't trying to seduce her by wanting to sleep next to her and telling her to trust that he is as "innocent," or a virgin, as she is. This ambiguity is meant to endear Hermia even further to him, he's using it as a form of flirting that only they could fully understand as they are the ones who have this intimacy existing between them. Furthermore, it's not only Lysander who does this, in fact, only a couple of lines later Hermia tells him that "Lysander riddles very prettily./Now much beshrew my manners and my pride/If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied." In these lines, Hermia implies that she does not count Lysanders riddles as lies because she can understand both the double meanings they contain as complete truths. Both she and Lysander are aware that they are using these lighthearted ambiguous lover's riddles to flirt with each other, and that it is quite successful. This is also what Helena attempts to do with Demetrius, but is unsuccessful as both parties must be on the same page for the ambiguity to work to their advantage. It relies on them understanding each other.

This is further shown through the interactions between Demetrius and Hermia, later an enchanted Lysander and Helena. When Hermia and Demetrius stumble upon each other in the

forest, having both lost their respective lovers, Demetrius immediately tries to create the intimacy through words that Helena was trying to create with him. However, Hermia is having none of it, not least because at that moment she believes that Demetrius may have killed Lysander in order to win her hand. So, she tells him that "If [he] hast slain Lysander in his sleep,/ Being o'er shoes in blood, [to] plunge in the deep/ And kill [her] too," so that she doesn't have to live without her lover, similarly to Romeo and Juliet. Her words are very clear, there is nothing for Demetrius to hold onto or turn into an ambiguous sentiment as Helena did. This illustrates how Hermia stands stronger in her convictions to reject Demetrius than he himself does for Helena. But she doesn't stop there, and starts employing the same clarity tactics that Demetrius himself used before, telling him that "It cannot be but thou hast murdered him./ So should a murderer look, so dead, so grim." Here Hermia tells Demetrius that there is no other explanation for him to look as he does, in her words "dead," unless he's murdered Lysander, and it is that adjective that makes her feelings abundantly clear. Using only one word, Hermia tells Demetrius that in her eye he is dull-looking, deathly pale, and has a deadly gleam in his eye; he is in no way appealing to her and she strives to make her distaste clearer with the multiple meanings instead of increasing intimacy.

However, just as Helena did, Demetrius clings to this ambiguity and attempts to spin it into intimacy, responding that "So should the murdered look...Pierced through the heart with [her] stern cruelty./ Yet [she], the murderer, look as bright, as clear,/ As yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere." Here Demetrius impresses upon Hermia that he hasn't murdered anyone, much less Lysander, which is true, but he twists it into saying that instead is the murdered and has been killed by Hermia's cruel words. In doing this, he's attempting to give Hermia's murderer

52 William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, 3.2.49-51.
54 William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, 3.2.60-63.
comment a double meaning of its own, as Helena did when she turned his comment about her virtue back onto him. However, the interplay between murderer/murdered and their two comments is less convincing than the wordplay Helena used, and proportionally Demetrius is less successful in creating this intimacy between them. This shows that Demetrius's love for Hermia is less true than Helena's for him, as he thought himself in love with Helena before seeing Hermia and abandoning her. This is also clear in their pas de deux, as Demetrius spends the dance picking Hermia up and forcing her into positions while she claws at him to let her go and runs from him when she gets free, as opposed to Helena's less aggressive manner of begging Demetrius to partner her.55 This visually shows both that Hermia is far more opposed to the concept of loving Demetrius than Demetrius is to Helena, and that he is more forceful with his attempts to make her love him. He doesn't have the "riddles" that Lysander has with her and instead relies on twisting either her words or her body into a shape that is more pleasing to him.

In contrast, the enchanted Lysander uses a technique much more similar to his riddles to Hermia and Helena after Puck has made him love her by the magic of the flower, even while trying to create an intimacy that isn't there by using ambiguous language. The first thing he says to her after the magic has taken hold is "Transparent Helena! Nature shows art,/ That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart."56 In this moment, the word transparent could mean either radiant or see-through, as Lysander implies that it allows him to see her heart. This comment has more in common with one he'd speak to Hermia, only Helena is unable to respond to it as she is not privy to their personal use of double meanings. It is because of this that Lysander ends up acting like Helena does when speaking to Demetrius, because his affection has been switched to Helena, a woman unable to reciprocate in the way that satisfies these riddles.

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55 Balanchine, "Hermia and Demetrius Pas de Deux No.1," (32:12-32:43).
56 William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, 2.2.110-111.
Finally, when thinking about ambiguous language one must think about how mortality/immortality affect the use of it, as I've briefly touched on previously, and how it's shown on the stage versus in writing. To touch on the immortal fae first, they very rarely utilize this form of double entendre, if at all, as their immortality allows them to be unbound from the laws of conduct that govern the mortals. Of course, they still retain some of the witticisms with meanings typical of Shakespeare such as Queen Titania describing her hand maiden as "grow[ing] big-bellied with a wanton wind," meaning that the father of her child was both lewd and gently playful. But, notably, they do not trade in the ambiguous doubling on the level that the mortal lovers do, as if their life and love depend on it whereas the faeries use ambiguity quite sparingly and generally only to make subtle digs. Since, they don't require it to have power or create intimacy, it becomes superfluous for them. Instead, the words of the faeries are meant to be taken literally, and are represented as such in the ballet. For example during the explanation that Oberon and Titania are fighting over who gets to possess one of Titania's attendants, one of her other fairies tells Puck that "[Titania] perforce withholds the lovèd boy,/ Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her/joy." This phrase is not meant to be taken as a metaphor, but as something concrete that Titania does as a symbol of her favor, and it is treated as such within the ballet. After Nick Bottom is transformed by Puck, as previously mentioned, he attempts to eat a fan of grass while dancing a pas de deux with an enchanted Titania, during which she physically crowns his head in flowers as she did to her attendant, and then is lead around by a leash of flowers for the rest of the time he is with the Faerie Queen. As well as being a readable way to illustrate to the audience the depth of her affection, this is a direct adaptation to the play's description of Titania. For instance, Titania's attendant also describes her doing this in the text of

59 Balanchine, "Bottom and Titania," 50:30-54:01, 1:02:11-1:02:34.
the play as well, saying that "she his hairy temples than had rounded/With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers." Together, these moments paint a clear picture of the literal manner that Titania's actions should be taken in. It features the same wording as what she does to her attendant, who has also been described as "her joy." This illustrates how being crowned in flowers by Titania is a clearcut symbol of her favor. She has no need of double meanings, and uses blunt literality instead.

In the "Shakespeare, Ballet, and Dance" section of his book, Rodney Stenning Edgecombe posits that "A good deal of [Balanchine's A Midsummer Night's Dream] ballet's action is inexplicable (the source of the quarrel, the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta, the properties of the pansy juice, the mission of the mechanicals) and presupposes a knowledge of the play." While I will concede that nothing about Theseus and Hippolyta is explained, I disagree that the source of Oberon and Titania's quarrel was unclear. In fact, from the choreography, it was clear that the King and Queen of the Faeries are arguing over who will take this small boy as an attendant, as shown by the fact that they both keep picking him up in an attempt to keep him from the other. This clarity of motion only furthers the point that while mischievous, the faeries of Midsummer do not deal in ambiguous words and actions. They want what they want, and will stop at nothing to get it; there is no quibbling over wordplay for them. Another example of this type of translation from play to ballet springs from a line of Puck's when he describes Titania's new attendant. He says that "She never had so sweet a changeling./ And jealous Oberon would have the child/Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild." The use of the word "train" here is interesting, because in the play it means that Oberon wants this boy to

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60 William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, 4.1.52-53.
62 Balanchine, "The Faerie King and Queen's Quarrel," (9:04-9:50)
follow behind him and be his courtier. However, this notion would be far trickier to represent in the ballet. So they adapt this moment by having Oberon physically wanting the boy to hold the train of his long cape during his fight over him with Titania.\textsuperscript{64} While this is a literal translation of what Oberon wants the boy to do, it works within the context of the quarrel between him and Titania because there were not the copious amounts of layers to their motives as there are for the mortals. This is to say that the mortals are using ambiguity in a way that is consistent with the characters in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, as immortal spirits do not. Instead, they are either entirely clear with their words or unintentionally ambiguous.

This is also evidenced in the way Oberon and Titania communicate love and intimacy to each other. As opposed to the mortals, they speak in a straightforward manner, for example after Oberon disenchants Titania from the flower's magic she says "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."\textsuperscript{65} She asks to be told outright while already assuming that her place is by his side, and not caring who hears them; something that the mortals would attempt to obfuscate so that only they two might understand what they are talking about. This illustrates how Oberon and Titania, as well as their courtiers, don't require the safety and protection that the mortal double speak would lend them because they will never have a problem that could genuinely hurt them. In this way, Oberon and Titania can have lovers, fights, and be awful to each other while being assured that their love and intimacy can never end, as they are not a mortal love. This is also evidenced in their dancing, which remains consistently balanced throughout the entirety of the ballet. Even while they fight they match each beat for beat, fluidly mimicking each other's movements, to say

\textsuperscript{64} Balanchine, "The Faerie King and Queen's Quarrel," (9:04-9:50)
\textsuperscript{65} William Shakespeare, \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, 4.1.103-106.
nothing of their final pas de deux in which the two characters appear to float across the stage.\(^{66,67}\) This proves that they are not subject to the same rules and morals of the mortal characters whose fights affect the manner of their dancing greatly. They are something else entirely, something ancient and eternal that has no patience to indulge in human conventions like ambiguity in their moments of intimacy.

Another example of the dissonance between this mortal convention of multitudes contained in a single word, when Puck meets with Titania's handmaiden early in Act II, she asks if he is the one who "Mislead night wanderers, laughing at their harm?/Those that "Hobgoblin" call you and "sweet Puck,"/ You do their work, and they shall have good luck."\(^{68}\) It is mortals who give Puck all of these names, in a way putting the ambiguity onto him. They see a multitude of different things housed within this entity, much like they give many meanings to a single word. The faeries, instead, do think of this nature of Puck's as fluid, to them he's not changing into something new with each personality change; they do not see him as containing all of these many people only that they are all names and personalities of Puck. This is opposed to how the mortal's use ambiguity for themselves, as previously mentioned. For example, in Helena's entrance to the play Hermia calls out to her and greets her as "Fair Helena," to which Helena responds "Call you me "fair"? That "fair"again unsay./ Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!"\(^{69}\) In saying this, Helena recognizes all the meanings that could be read into Hermia's descriptor, in this case, that Hermia has called her both beautiful and just, but that Demetrius only sees those qualities in Hermia and not herself. It also shows that the intimacy contained

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\(^{66}\) Balanchine, "The Faerie King and Queen's Quarrel," (9:04-9:50).
\(^{68}\) William Shakespeare, \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, 2.1.40-42.
within ambiguous speech is limited to those who are in romantic love with each other, as Helena is able to understand Hermia's ambiguity, by virtue of being her best friend.

At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* after all the faeries spells have been put right again, Hermia seems to recognize this ambiguity that runs rampant between her and friends telling them "Methinks, I see these things with parted eye,/ When everything sees double." In doing this she puts words to this phenomenon that is present in so many of Shakespeare's works and is particularly difficult to translate into the medium of ballet. The characters use this ambiguity, these double meanings, not as a wink at the audience but as an important aspect of their world. By creating these little riddles that make their world seem double, they create a way to conceal information, create intimacy between partners, or push the unwanted away. Furthermore, while it would be difficult to accomplish in theory, the ballets decided to include this unique aspect of Shakespeare within the performances simply by allowing the dancers internal freedom to embody their character combined with a creative approach to choreography, facial expressions and symbolism. To create the perfect storm to achieve this, in the words of Kathryn Morgan, "it's [about]... finding the raw real emotions while doing the dance steps," in order to create that interiority that makes the double meanings land. However, as the ambiguity is triggered by the need to conceal a secret, is the frequency with which it's used warranted? Well, I suppose that "Never there was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

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71 Morgan, audio message to the author, November 2023.
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