

Paper Topics
English 117E – Shakespeare
(Paper #1 [3-5 pp.]: due in Section the week of January 29th)

1. Compare and contrast the role of 'music' in MND and/or TN. Focus on one scene in each play and show the similarities and differences between Shakespeare's use of music performed on the stage or mentioned by the characters in the two plays.
2. How do servants function in the plays? Choose a scene from one or two plays and explore the role of the servants both within the world of the play and/or as a device that Shakespeare uses to convey a message.
- ✓ 3. How do power relationships shift in these plays? What is the effect/outcome of that shifting? You may want to focus on Bottom's transformation and/or Olivia's cross-dressing. Are these two transformations related in any way? How are they different?
4. Look at the opening scene of any of the plays and do a close-reading of the first major speech. How does the speech introduce us to the main themes of the play? What do we learn about the characters? Are we misled in any way? How does the language work?
- ✓ 5. Historically, literary critics have found the mixture of comic and anti-comic elements in Shakespeare's plays troubling or problematic. Choose a scene in either MND, TN, or MM, identify what is comic and what is not comic (and perhaps even disturbing), and comment on how this combination is successful, or not, from a dramatic and thematic point of view.
- ✓ 6. Shakespearean comedy often ends with a double wedding/betrothal (e.g. MND, TN, and even MM). Taking one of these plays, try to explain what is gained by this doubling of the marriage plot.
7. Describe the thematization of 'seeing' (or spectatorship) in one of the comedies we have looked at.
8. Compare the Duke in MM and Oberon in MND.
9. According to one critic, MND "is built upon the idea that the public world of day cannot resolve itself apart from resolutions in the private forces of night." Examine the tension between public and private spheres in one of these comedies. Is the conflict satisfactorily resolved and if 'yes,' how so?
10. Clowns and clown-like figures are often central to Shakespeare's comedies. Compare and contrast two of these clowns. Are they merely onstage for jokes, or do they serve a more complicated role for the other characters and for the audience watching the play?