

# Shakespeare's Sleeping Workers

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THERE ARE MANY ONSTAGE SLEEPERS in the Shakespeare canon.<sup>1</sup> There are also many workers of various stripes, ranging from artisans to apprentices to needleworkers. But there are only two sleeping workers in Shakespeare, and both of them are tied directly to theatrical enterprise. Both Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–96) and Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594) are lower-order workers who sleep onstage, and their sleep is linked in both plays to actual or imagined theatrical production. Despite their unique status, however, Bottom's and Sly's position as sleeping workers has gone unexplored in Shakespeare criticism, perhaps because the very concept of a sleeping worker as an intriguing dramatic character is a counterintuitive one. Although recent scholarship has considered both plays in terms of their representations of theatrical labor and scholars have separately explored the rich significance of onstage sleep, these two lines of inquiry have never been brought to bear on each other. In doing so, this essay proposes that the unlikely figure of the sleeping worker can tell us a great deal about lower-order work and its connection to Shakespeare's theater. I argue that the sleeping figures of Bottom and Sly enable Shakespeare to justify theatrical enterprise in terms that depend upon rather than eschew the instability of lower-order labor. As such, this essay reevaluates the significance of such labor to the drama and suggests that work at the lower orders could be valued as both disruptive and generative, serving as a surprising source of theatrical creativity.

Much Shakespearean criticism has explored the development of the theater as a business and, therefore, as a space of labor associated with professionalism and industry. Douglas Bruster notes that the "erection of London's amphitheaters came as a gesture, by those involved in the business of playing, toward a kind of profes-

sional stability," while the work of Roslyn Knutson and others details the theater's development of "business protocol and repertory practices" based on guild models "that enabled individual companies to flourish and the industry itself to expand."<sup>2</sup> Most of these arguments emphasize that it is the professionalization of theater that is crucial to its emerging self-definition and increased legitimization in the period. In his discussion of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, for example, Theodore Levinwand argues that not only is Bottom the artisan-weaver "concerned with strategies of accommodation amenable to the play's nobility" but that "the artisan-playwright, William Shakespeare, also accommodates himself to the aristocracy with whom he finds himself in such close proximity."<sup>3</sup> And writing about *The Taming of the Shrew*, Tom Rutter suggests that the play depicts the actor as a "trained professional earning money through legitimate work" rather than an "idle rogue or vagabond."<sup>4</sup> That is, Shakespeare posits theatrical labor as dignified, overtly productive, and even elite in order to mark it as unthreatening and, indeed, as economically beneficial to early modern society.

These arguments about theatrical labor are highly suggestive in that they articulate how Shakespeare might have responded to anti-theatricalist concerns about the theater as a space of idleness, a place in which work was notably absent. John Northbrooke, for instance, forthrightly claims that "more Idlenesse can there not bee, than where such Playes and Enterludes are," and William Rankins complains that plays transform audience members so that they no longer remember "the profitable fruites of vertuous labor." In *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) Stephen Gosson attacks the players more directly, alleging that many actors are "men of occupations, which they have forsaken to lyve by playing."<sup>5</sup> The public theater, according to these tracts, was produced through and in turn invoked idleness, luring people away from "vertuous labor" and proper occupations. This theme was reiterated in late-sixteenth century legal documents such as the Act of the Court of Aldermen (dated between 1582 and 1587) and the 1597 Lord Mayor's letter to the Privy Council, which denounced actors as idle vagrants and rogues. Collectively, these texts respond to the purpose-built professional theaters and regular performances coming to characterize the late-sixteenth-century English stage by arguing that "the theatre is bad for business," luring apprentices, servants, and other workers away from legitimate sites of labor.<sup>6</sup> However, as

recent scholarship has demonstrated, beginning in the 1590s Shakespeare and other professional playwrights interrogated the antitheatricalists' equation of theater and idleness by defending their occupations as such. As Rutter argues, one strategy Shakespeare in particular employed was to legitimize acting as work by staging the business of acting as a "skill acquired through careful practice and diligent training."<sup>7</sup> In depicting theater as professional work, Shakespeare thus directly refutes the terms of antitheatricalist debate, offering a material response to these attacks by emphasizing the industrious nature of acting and theatrical enterprise.

However, one limitation of these arguments is that they presume that for the theater to be justified as a space of work, lower-order work itself must be sanitized, transformed into virtue or respectable occupation. That is, they accept to a degree the antitheatricalists' own claims, namely that idleness and sloth are purely negative characteristics, posing similar threats to the social order as vagrancy and roguery. Indeed, antitheatricalists further emphasized the connection between the stage and idleness by explicitly linking theater to the antithesis of work: sleep. In *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), for example, Gosson insists that the theater leads playgoers "from pyping to playing, from play to pleasure, from pleasure to slouth, from slouth to sleepe, from sleepe to sinne."<sup>8</sup> Theater is sinful because it is affiliated with sloth and excessive sleep, behaviors that are opposed to the orderly body prescribed by humoral theory and disciplined labor. As Patricia Fumerton has demonstrated, itinerant and other lower-order laborers were frequently aligned with both vagrancy and idleness in the early modern cultural imagination, and authorities had "difficulty distinguishing the unemployed, the underemployed, and the multi-tasked or in-transit laboring poor from the incorrigibly 'idle' or 'sturdy' beggar."<sup>9</sup> Given these assumptions, the figure of the sleeping worker would seem to invoke the antitheatricalists' worst fears, combining the instability and illegitimacy of lower-order labor with the sloth of undisciplined sleep.

I will argue, however, that in both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare revises the pejorative association between theater, sleep, and undisciplined idleness by staging a sleeping laborer who becomes a direct source of artistic creativity and theatrical enterprise. In these plays, Shakespeare participates in the process of theatrical legitimization not only by representing acting as a learned skill but, in a somewhat more sur-

prising manner, by yoking creative potential to theatrical labor through the unlikely medium of the sleeping worker. Because lower-order labor was often transitory and marginal, it often resists direct stage representation and, as a result, critical scrutiny. Tracing the relationship between lower-order labor and theatrical artistry thus necessitates reading differently, even counterintuitively, by, for example, being attentive to the suggestive verbal and dramaturgical connections made between the working-class male body and the productive liminality of sleep.<sup>10</sup> Onstage slumber highlights both the disruptive instability of the lowborn laborer's socio-economic position and the theatrical uses to which such instability can be put. In emphasizing Bottom and Sly's status as artisan and itinerant workers, Shakespeare offers a transvaluation of antitheatrical discourse, as he associates the sleep of these low-status working men with both inspiration and a valorized theatrical labor. I demonstrate that work functions for Shakespeare in both material and aesthetic terms, as theatrical labor and creativity get discursively imagined in and through the body of lower-order laborers. As such, this essay suggests a new strategy for reading the intersection between theater and work, one that insists on the importance of the marginal, the ephemeral, and the low status to discourses of theatrical artistry. The aesthetics of work traceable through this process reveals that the instability of marginal labor in the period was not just a problem to be solved, but a valuable source of creative power and theatrical potential.

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Although the antitheatricalist tracts tended to denigrate both sleep and theater as opposites of work, the contrast between sleep and labor was not usually figured in such negative terms. Sleep in early modern England was generally celebrated as an antidote to work, a respite from earthly cares. Expressing a familiar sentiment, for example, Henry V compares the sleepless nights of kings to the experiences of commoners who could wind up "days with toil and nights with sleep" (4.1.261).<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Sir Philip Sidney in sonnet 39 of *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) apostrophizes sleep as "The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release, / Th' indifferent judge between the high and low."<sup>12</sup> Sleep offers relief from quotidian troubles and the rigors of labor, in part because it dissolves the material realities of the daytime. In addition, sleep was widely considered essential for good health because sleep (together with its

opposite, waking) was understood as one of the six Galenic “non-naturals,” physical and environmental factors that needed to be kept in due proportion in order to ensure bodily fortitude. Sleep thus possessed a protective quality, in that it could ward off illness and preserve physical well-being.<sup>13</sup>

But writers of the period shared with the antitheatricalists a certain distrust of sleep, despite its necessary restorative benefits. Sleep is commonly described as a source of flux and instability in early modern literary and medical texts. While sleep was understood as necessary for good health, it needed to be kept in proper balance, as either excessive or insufficient sleep was viewed as harmful, even sinful. Indeed, “immoderate sleep was thought dangerous enough to bring about bubonic plague.”<sup>14</sup> Because sleep made the body particularly susceptible to both physical and mental influences, moderation and self-control were essential. Early modern men and women needed to sleep with the utmost care, avoiding such dangers as sleeping on the ground outside, sleeping on one’s back, or sleeping during the day.<sup>15</sup> The notion that sleep was a fragile rather than a restful state was not unique to medical texts but permeated literary culture as well. Playwrights of the period clearly understood the dramatic potential of sleep’s instability, as they frequently deploy the figure of the onstage sleeper to suggest transformation and the power of imagination. In contrast to medieval drama, as David Bevington has argued, the Renaissance stage emphasized the ambiguities of sleep and the “fluid boundaries between reality and illusion.”<sup>16</sup> One need only call to mind the reclining figure of Old Hamlet in the garden or Duncan in Macbeth’s castle to appreciate the implicit dangers of slumber and their dramatic potential.

Furthermore, sleep, like the rest of early modern society, was inflected by the differentials of social status. The emphasis on the sleeper’s moderation and self-control was thus a civic and social issue as well as a matter of bodily health. Sleep was believed to reveal specific bodily protocols aligned with the sleeper’s social rank or position. Classical and contemporary treatises, for example, connected the status and overall social disposition of the sleeper to the quality of one’s sleep and dreams.<sup>17</sup> The material conditions of sleep in premodern England also resulted in significant discrepancies between sleepers of different social ranks. As A. Roger Ekirch has shown, due to physical impediments including illness, insects, excessive noise, and inadequate bedding, the slumber of the work-

ing poor in the pre-industrialist period was "highly vulnerable to intermittent disruption," often resulting in fatigue and sleep deprivation rather than "blissful repose." Contrary to King Henry and Sidney's pronouncements, then, sleep for those lower on the social scale was more likely to be troubled than for those of more elite status, who could afford better beds, feather mattresses, or heavier curtains in order to ensure more restful slumber.<sup>18</sup>

And yet, despite the many ways in which sleep could mark distinctions of social status, it could also, particularly in literary texts, be the great social leveler (the "indifferent judge," in Sidney's phrase), disrupting the standard social hierarchies that pertain in daylight hours. In part, Sidney's statement reflects (as does King Henry's) his own social privilege, which enables him to elide the material differences between sleepers at the higher and lower orders and romanticize the sleep of commoners. At the same time, the concept of sleep as a temporary eraser of social distinction, however fanciful, suggests the dangerous potential for sleep to transform social identity and thus disrupt rather than maintain social order. This is precisely the sentiment that underlies Gosson's associative chain linking sloth to sleep and sleep to sin. Like the theater, sleep, especially sleep that is excessive or morally coded as negligent, produces idleness and social disorder.

Shakespeare, I propose, offers an intriguing response to this position in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Rather than rejecting the connection between sleep and theater outright or sidestepping the troubling socioeconomic indeterminacy of sleep, Shakespeare confronts these issues head on in the figures of Bottom and Sly. For these characters, sleep both instantiates their position as lower-order working men and dramatically displays the potentially disruptive and generative liminality of that position. Through them, Shakespeare vividly stages the doubled signification of sleep—sleep as a marker of class status and sleep as a social leveler—and demonstrates that the figure of the lower-class sleeper can be an unexpected source of creative energy and, as such, the grounds of theatrical enterprise.

Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of the most memorable sleepers in the entire Shakespeare canon. Asleep onstage in several key scenes of the play, Bottom's magically induced slumbers and subsequent "dream" help constitute the comic and emotional center of the action in the Athenian woods. However, it is through Bottom's simultaneous status as sleeper, artisan, and

would-be actor that Shakespeare investigates and redefines the theater as a place of work. To begin with, Shakespeare emphasizes Bottom's lower-class status as part of the play's tripartite social structure, situating him and the other mechanicals in contradistinction to the aristocratic Athenian society and to the world of the fairies. Bottom, Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout, and Starveling are each explicitly identified according to their occupations, and Bottom is specifically singled out and named by Quince as "Nick Bottom, the weaver" (1.2.14). As has been noted in criticism of the play, Bottom's status as a weaver would have had particular social significance at the time that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed in the mid-1590s. This period in England was one of notable economic hardship, marked by bad harvests as well as frequent riots on the part of apprentices and artisans, especially clothmakers. The presence of artisan characters such as Bottom in the play thus indexes broader class tensions and concerns about the potential disorderliness of lowborn workers in sixteenth-century England. By emphasizing Bottom's occupation as an artisan-weaver, Shakespeare brings questions of social stability to the forefront of his comedy, setting the stage for the possibility of class tensions in the play while at the same time "holding off . . . the dramatic scene of violent social protest."<sup>19</sup> Through his sleep and subsequent "dream," Bottom becomes a particularly trenchant figure for examining the instability of social status, the possibility that differentials of rank can lead to disruptions of social order. Ultimately, however, this instability is not only disruptive but productive, as the transgression associated with Bottom's lower-order work in the play becomes an unexpected source of creative energy and theatrical pleasure.

In staging Robin's magical transformation of Bottom into an ass-headed working man who becomes the beloved of a fairy queen, Shakespeare vividly dramatizes the fundamental malleability of social status and the comic disruptions such fluidity can cause. Upon first encountering Bottom, for instance, Titania remarks on his "mortal grossness" (3.1.142), thereby associating him with lower-order physicality and discourses of the carnivalesque and highlighting the unsettling difference between his social position and hers. It is through his sleep, however, that the play explores Bottom's ability to disrupt categories of social distinction most acutely. When Bottom requests of Titania: "But I pray you, let none of your people stir me. I have an exposition of sleep come upon me," she

responds: "Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms . . . So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle / Gently entwist; the female ivy so / Enrings the barky fingers of the elm" (4.1.34–36, 37, 39–41). Bottom's desire for sleep is transformed in Titania's magically inflected narrative from an association with lethargy or "mortal grossness" to one of lightness and sensuality. His slumber will not be that of the rustic, lowborn man lacking in proper bodily discipline but the sleep of gentleness, sweetness, and blissful repose. Indeed, the entire episode visually reworks narrative structures borrowed from traditional aristocratic romance. Asleep in Titania's arms, Bottom is comically reminiscent of knightly heroes who are unmanned by a female temptress, such as Verdant in book 2 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596) who becomes the lover of Acrasia and lays "a slombering, / In secret shade, after long wanton ioyes."<sup>20</sup> As Garrett Sullivan has demonstrated, such scenes from romance in themselves parody and overturn the "logic of the quest" characteristic of epic,<sup>21</sup> so Bottom's symbolic participation in this romance convention nicely articulates the ability of sleep to transform one's social identity and purpose. With this visual nod to romance narrative, Shakespeare dramatizes Bottom's ability to disrupt and reimagine the forms of social differentiation.

Bottom's sleep thus reimagines social hierarchies by temporarily redefining the bodily characteristics of the lower-class working man and deploying them for their comic potential. However, like much else in the greenworld space of the play, the peaceful sensuality associated with Bottom the sleeper is short-lived. Removing the magic from Titania's eyes, Oberon interprets Bottom's sleep and his experiences with Titania as "the fierce vexation of a dream" (4.1.66). Titania herself joins in his sentiment, wondering how it came to pass "That I, sleeping here was found / With these mortals on the ground" (4.1.99). Returning full circle to her critique of Bottom's "mortal grossness," Titania's dismissive confusion aims, in a Bakhtinian sense, to purge her own experiences of the lowborn disruptions afforded by Bottom the weaver.

And yet, the mixing of high and low discourses and bodies in the sensual sleep of Bottom and Titania offers a more complex picture of the lower-order working man's ability to disturb social order than a carnivalesque framework allows. If Bottom's sleep endangers traditional categories of social privilege, that threat does not entirely vanish the moment he awakes, regardless of Oberon and Titania's pat assertions to the contrary. Rather, the potential dan-

gers of sleep continue to permeate waking life in the play. Titania's exclamation of surprise at awaking "[w]ith these mortals on the ground" is a case in point. As William Bullein and other contemporary medical writers agreed, sleeping on the ground rather than in a clean and temperate bedchamber was particularly harmful to bodily health.<sup>22</sup> So Titania's wonderment at being found with Bottom "on the ground" speaks as much to her own sense of physical danger as it does to her concept of the proper hierarchy of species. That is, Titania's waking sensibilities do not simply reinstate the status quo but continue to register the underlying bodily threat of sleeping on the ground with her arms entwined about an artisan worker, an activity that exposes her own body to the elements and aligns her with the bodily position of a lower-class figure.

Bottom's sleep with Titania thus both reiterates differentials of social rank and threatens to undermine them. Early modern writers emphasized sleep's ability to challenge hierarchical relationships among humans and even between humans and other species. Treatises on dreams in the period, for instance, often connect the vulnerability of sleep to concerns about the fragility of humanity itself and in so doing reveal a fundamental skepticism about the "authority of the status of the human" as opposed to other animal species.<sup>23</sup> Such concerns about sleep's ability to confuse status categories extend to its temporal qualities as well, as it interrupts the progression of waking life by promulgating alternative stories that are often incoherent or subversive. This dilative amplification of sleeping and dreaming challenges the orderly social arrangements typically assumed in early modern culture and throws into question the unchangeable nature of human identity.<sup>24</sup> Of course, Bottom himself disrupts narrative and social order throughout his interactions with the fairies. He interrupts the enforced, formal courtliness of the service offered by Titania's fairies, telling Mustardseed and the others to "leave your courtesy" and to scratch his face when they ask politely: "What's your will?" (4.1.19, 20). He also calls for rustic music (the "tongs and the bones" (4.1.27) to be played in Titania's bower, further disrupting the rarefied, courtly setting in which he finds himself and the narrative arc in which Titania is attempting to place him. Bottom's sleep thus continues the pattern of discordant interjection and juxtaposition that threatens to dissolve social hierarchy, a risk physically embodied in Titania's sleep with Bottom "on the ground."

Although sleep exemplifies and extends the social and verbal

disruptions of working-class masculinity, it also defines such masculinity as productive and, as such, as central to theatrical enterprise. The very instability of Bottom's slumber provides Shakespeare with the grounds for connecting sleep to creativity and, ultimately, to a valorized form of theatrical labor. Shakespeare embraces the antitheatricalists' anxieties about sleep's ability to disturb social order, suggesting that it is precisely the disorderly nature of Bottom's sleep that makes it the source of creative, theatrical energy in the play. For one thing, despite Bottom's lower-class status and his penchant for interruption, Titania's account of Bottom's slumber as gentle, sweet, and even erotic remains the most resonant verbal description of his sleep in the play. Such associations stand in direct contrast to both the historical realities of the period, which usually resulted in intermittent and disruptive sleep for lowborn workers, and common wisdom, which tended to associate those lower in social status with poorer-quality sleep. By highlighting this discrepancy between Bottom's pleasant and restful sleep on the one hand and his social standing as an artisan worker on the other, the play suggests that the very same act of sleep that can so disrupt social conventions can also be the source of pleasure. Indeed, though it is but one of his many malapropisms, Bottom's initial insistence to Titania that "an exposition of sleep" has come upon him nicely draws attention to the fact that sleep could be both an "expulsion"—an action that is disruptive or out of place—and a creative activity involving interpretation and commentary.<sup>25</sup> That is, the pejorative context of sleep, especially sleep that is excessive or otherwise improper as Bottom's is, might be understood to go hand in hand with its creative potential. In this sense, Bottom's sleep represents not only the disquieting mixing of high and low but also the potentially appealing and seductive force invoked by the body of the lowborn artisan. In presenting Bottom as a sweet and even charming worker, Shakespeare creates a space in which to suggest that the lowborn laborer is himself a source of powerful creative potential.

Sleep, as we've seen, had multiple and often conflicting implications in early modern discourse; depending on context, it could signify good health, sloth, sin, or physical fragility. But throughout the period, sleep was also frequently associated with the processes of creativity and artistic inspiration. Analyzing debates about the nature of divine inspiration in the writing and visual arts of early modern Italy, for instance, Maria Ruvolt demonstrates that "the im-

agery of sleep offered a powerful visual sign” of creative inspiration “characterized by the loss of reason.” Though sleep was often associated with melancholy and vice, Italian Renaissance writers, including Marsilio Ficino and others, redefined sleep in terms of *vacatio*, “a state in which the soul is freed from the constraints of the body and from reason and is able to commune with the divine.” As a result, “as a form of *vacatio* and as a prerequisite for dreaming, sleep had the potential to move away from negative implications of sloth and moral failure.” Sleep’s value as a source of artistic creativity thus stemmed directly from its instability and its embodiment of the abstraction characteristic of madness. This concept of sleep, which had its roots in classical and biblical thought, especially Platonic philosophy, enabled in turn a new model of inspiration that emphasized the irrational and the emotional instead of the practical and sensory. Such a model “offered an alternative to Aristotelian models of rule-based systems of study and imitation, restoring the balance between *ingenium*, an innate quality, and *ars*, learned skill, originally proposed by ancient theories of poetics.” Is artistic talent an inherent quality, acquired passively and idiosyncratically, or is it a skill developed and practiced deliberately over time? Although the iconography of sleep, Ruvolt demonstrates, suggested the former, early modern debates about the relative necessity of creativity and labor to artistic production often implied that the two must be balanced for true artistry to emerge.<sup>26</sup>

In the figure of Bottom Shakespeare makes a similar, though differently inflected, effort to associate sleep with creativity and, in turn, to balance inspiration with practical skill. On the one hand, Shakespeare posits Bottom’s sleep as the source of creativity and pleasure. He does this, however, not by directly affirming the value of sleep but by drawing on its negative connotations as slothful and disorderly and reframing them as positive signs of sleep’s potential to inspire. Bottom’s disruptive ability to realign hierarchical social relationships—a trait that is theatrically celebrated and developed via his sleep—thus becomes a source of creative potential. Put another way, Bottom’s sleep tropes the irrational, idiosyncratic creativity necessary to artistic endeavor. At the same time, by staging the sleep of a working artisan and passionate actor, rather than (say) an aristocratic artist or philosopher, Shakespeare emphasizes the lower-order work that must accompany creativity in order to produce theater.<sup>27</sup> Shakespeare strikes a balance between inspiration and labor in the theater, between *ingenium* and *ars*, enabling

him to break down the binary opposition separating theater and work in much antitheatrical discourse. But he does so in this case not by emphasizing the professional or refined nature of theatrical work as other critics have argued. Instead, Shakespeare highlights rather than evades the instability intrinsic to both lower-order work and sleep. The figure of the sleeping artisan actor, in other words, allows Shakespeare to argue that acting is inspired artistry *because* it is the product of marginal labor, articulating a model of theatrical enterprise that fundamentally depends upon lower-order work.

Shakespeare deploys Bottom's potentially disruptive status as an artisan actor to fuel his creative energy, demonstrating that theatrical creativity, articulated and developed through Bottom's onstage sleep, is born out of the very instability the antitheatricalists so decried. Despite the vivid presence of the mechanicals as lower-order working characters in the play, the only labor we actually see Bottom and his companions perform onstage is the work of rehearsing and performing *Pyramus and Thisbe* for Theseus and Hippolyta's nuptials.<sup>28</sup> However, in representing Bottom as a working actor, Shakespeare does not emphasize his professionalism or virtuous employment in any straightforward way. Instead, he draws attention to Bottom's lack of refinement and his contagious excesses. From his very first appearance in the play, Bottom is notable for his energy, action, and passion, even to the point of excess. As Peter Quince provides the details of plot and character that constitute *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Bottom eagerly asserts his willingness to play all of the necessary roles in the tragedy. In his assertion that he will call up tears "in the true performing" of his roles, he likewise promises to move the audience to passion: "I will move stones" (1.2.19, 20). Bottom's enthusiasm may be infectious, but it also marks him as potentially unrefined and lacking in self-control. Such excess of passion positions Bottom in opposition to codes of ideal elite masculinity in the period, which often emphasize qualities such as strength, discipline, and temperance that are achieved through a balance of the bodily humors and through regulated labor.<sup>29</sup> Non-elite working men such as Bottom were often compared against these idealized codes and found wanting, and yet, as Alexandra Shepard has argued, lowborn and other men who were excluded from the privileges of elite status often developed alternative codes of masculinity in which reveling, excess, and even violence could be accommodated. She notes for example that laboring men often turned to social spaces such as the alehouse as places of

“respite from patriarchal evaluative schemes” in which “bravura and ‘good fellowship’” rather than thrift or moderation became the privileged markers of masculine status.<sup>30</sup> Bottom’s excessive vigor in rehearsal signifies his low status, but at the same time it underscores the potential appeal and creativity made possible through the body of the lowborn laborer. Bottom’s passionate excesses suggest both his position outside of traditional ideologies of masculine conduct and his potential revision of those ideologies through his standing as a vigorous working artisan—a man who might literally “move stones” through industrious labor as well as touch the hearts of an audience. Bottom’s effervescence in the rehearsal sequences thus figures lower-order labor as disruptive and non-normative on the one hand and surprisingly creative and revisionary on the other. In these scenes, Shakespeare melds labor with inspiration not by sanitizing or eliding lower-order work but by capitalizing on its productive capacity.

Sleeping onstage later in the play, the gently reclining figure of Bottom in Titania’s arms visually and verbally connects the working artisan with potent creativity. This connection is more fully realized in terms of its theatrical potential and implications for dramatic narrative in the speech in which Bottom awakes and famously attempts to recount his “dream.” Waking, alone onstage, Bottom announces:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t’expound this dream. . . . 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 was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called “Bottom’s Dream,” because it hath no bottom, and I will sing it in the latter end of a play before the Duke.

(2.1.199–210)

In many ways, Bottom’s attempt to recount his magically induced “dream” signals a return to social order in that it resituates Bottom in his proper, lowly place in the play’s hierarchy. The language of his speech revives the excessive animation and passion witnessed in the earlier rehearsal scenes, but the frequency of malapropisms and the prominent display of synesthesia identify Bottom as an artisan not fully in command of proper English speech. Furthermore, the deferral of “Bottom’s Dream” beyond the scene and, as it turns out since the “ballad” is never performed onstage, beyond the play

ensures that the aristocratic romance plot will naturally supersede the low comic interlude that temporarily takes precedence in the greenworld.

Nevertheless, the speech continues to highlight the powerful uncertainty and creative potential of both sleep and low-status bodies, even as it gestures toward a return to the status quo. The synesthesia that betrays Bottom's lack of verbal prowess, for example, does so by unsettling social and linguistic norms: it functions as a parody of 1 Corinthians 2:9–10, producing in the process a revision of standard text and doctrine.<sup>31</sup> And though the retelling of Bottom's dream is deferred, that deferral suggests that this particular worker's imaginary vision may extend beyond the bounds of the play and the theater in which it is performed. Because it is not enclosed by the narrative boundaries of the play, Bottom's dream never completely dissolves, but survives through the imaginative afterlife of the theatrical audience. That projected, always anticipated performance of the ballad "at the latter end of a play" creates a narrative arc that leads from sleep, to invention, to theatrical performance. In addition, Bottom's "vision" affiliates him not only with the irrationality of sleep itself but also with the visual tradition of the sleeping artist whose sleep signifies the processes of invention.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the sleep and dreams of the Athenian lovers, Bottom's sleep takes on dramatic significance as his sleep becomes the direct source of a future (in this case hypothetical) theatrical performance.

The necessary link in this creative process is Bottom's status as an artisan worker. Indeed, in connecting sleep and artistic creativity through the body of a lower-class artisan, Shakespeare may be drawing on some of the lived realities of sleep in early modern England that differed according to one's social position. As Ekirch's historical research has revealed, for instance, premodern sleep was characterized by what he refers to as "segmented slumber," in which "up to an hour or more of quiet wakefulness, midway through the night interrupted the rest of most Western Europeans." Such segmentation was especially typical of the sleep of the working classes. One of the intriguing consequences of segmented slumber was that dreams were more frequently remembered and recollected more vividly than if the sleeper had not awoken until the morning. Citing premodern accounts of dreams as well as modern clinical research on sleep patterns by Thomas Weir, Ekirch notes that awakening in the middle of the night is associated with

rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and with dreaming. At such times, the “transitions to wakefulness” are typically “accompanied by particularly vivid dreams” notable for their “narrative quality.”<sup>33</sup> The segmented sleep typical of early modern workers was thus not only a condition of material circumstances but also a rich source of narrative imagination and intensified visions. Bad sleep, it seems, could make for great dreams. The vividness of Bottom’s recollected dream expresses a fundamental creativity and potential narrative quality that is intimately bound to his status as a lower-order worker. Narrative invention, that is, is not simply the product of greenworld magic but rather occurs through the body and labor of a lowborn man.

However, the play is far from uniform in its validation of lower-order work as an unmediated source of theatrical creativity. The final act of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* posits a different, and somewhat more expected, depiction of the theater as a site of both labor and creativity, one that sidesteps the irregularity and instability of the lowborn worker by refining his labor into something magical, much as Bottom himself is transformed into a “gentle” man via his sleep in Titania’s arms. We can see this transformation at work in Egeus’s introduction and description of the mechanicals prior to their performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. When Theseus asks, “What are they that do play it?,” Egeus responds:

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

(5.1.71–75)

The mechanicals are clearly identified according to their status as manual laborers: they are “hard-handed men” who work for a living. What is noteworthy about Egeus’s dismissive introduction, however, is that it distinguishes the mechanicals’ work as artisans from the more refined labor required of them as actors, a labor that occurs “in their minds.” Egeus’s disparaging assessment of the mechanicals as actors enables a shift in emphasis that focuses attention on the refined nature of theater and the interpretive work needed from theatrical audiences rather than giving credit to the creative authority of the artisans themselves. Through this process, the artisan-worker becomes distanced from the ultimate product of theatrical labor.

Similarly, one of Theseus's compensatory strategies as a sympathetic viewer of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is to reframe and refine the incongruous nature of the mechanicals' efforts. Theseus announces that in viewing the play, he will endeavor to "take what they mistake" (5.1.90), an interpretive process that shifts agency to the (in this case aristocratic) audience and away from the artisan actors. The conclusion of the play completes this process of displacement and refinement, returning to the image of sleep to establish the theater as a space of productive creativity without reference to the physical labor of acting. In Oberon's final speech, he blesses the bride bed and the future issue it will engender and requests the fairies to bless the palace itself with "sweet peace," so that its owner "[e]ver shall in safety rest" (5.2.48, 50). Oberon's invocation of sleep incorporates both palace and theatrical audience, while the pun on "rest" posits both bed and theater as places of safety and repose. Through a positively valenced image of sleep and a tacit link between poetic and biological progeny, Oberon articulates the theater as a place of safety, creativity, and productive energy.

In the epilogue, Robin similarly connects theater to sleep in beneficial terms. The audience has "but slumbered here" while theatrical "visions did appear" (3-4). Sometimes read as a standard apology for the play's presumed weaknesses, the epilogue instead crafts a potent argument in favor of theatrical invention, transforming the typically negative associations between sleep and theater into the stuff of magical creativity. As in Bottom's dream, sleep becomes exquisitely productive in dramatic terms. What is missing, of course, from Robin's account is any mention of the work of the actors involved. The artisan actor has been excised in favor of the sleeping audience, the final arbiters of theatrical invention. One could read this shift at the end of the play as Shakespeare's ultimate justification of the theater—a move that refines theatrical labor and eschews the troublesome instability represented by the lowborn Bottom and his excessive passion. And this, in general terms, is the argument most critics have made when discussing theatrical labor in Shakespeare: the route to validation of the new business of professional playing is through an emphasis on its decorum, professionalism, and refined industry.

I would suggest, however, that while one of the functions of act 5 may be to refine the concept of theatrical labor by redirecting the energy of the artisan actor for explicitly dramatic purposes, this is not the entire story. Shakespeare ultimately suggests that theatrical

enterprise depends on lower-order work—work that is neither sanitized nor elided—for its creative spark. Despite the words of Puck, Oberon, and Theseus, the mechanicals' performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, a performance solidly dependent on artisan labor, dominates the action of act 5. Even Egeus's derogatory speech about the mechanicals highlights the continuity between their unskilled labor and what he imagines to be the more refined labor of acting. In his speech, Egeus repeatedly invokes of the category of "work" to describe not only the mechanicals' menial occupations but also their performance of the play at hand. And though the verb "toiled" is meant to ridicule the forced nature of the mechanicals' performance, it also suggests that performing *Pyramus and Thisbe* is difficult work. Despite Egeus's intentions, then, the passage makes explicit the connection between lower-order labor and the labor of theater. Just as Bottom's sleep provides a transfiguration of lower-order status for comedic and theatrical ends, the theater itself offers a continuum between work and play, between labor and creativity. In staging the sleeping Bottom, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* highlights the latent creative potential of the early modern artisan and implicitly redefines the theater not as an escape from low-order work, as many of its opponents charged, but as an imaginative extension of it.

This connection between work and theater is made even more explicit in *The Taming of the Shrew*, another play that prominently features a working man who sleeps onstage. In the play's Induction, a lord and his huntsmen find the lowborn Christopher Sly intoxicated and sleeping on the ground and decide to trick him into believing that he is a lord, hiring a group of traveling players to perform the subsequent *Taming of the Shrew* for his entertainment. Sly, like Bottom, adamantly defines himself in terms of his status as a lower-order laborer. In response to being addressed as "your honor" and praised as a "mighty man," Sly retorts: "What, would you make me mad? Am not I Christopher Sly—old Sly's son of Burton Heath by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bearherd, and now by present profession a tinker? (Induction 2.12, 13, 16–19). Sly defines himself through a series of occupational positions, resisting the fanciful terms hoisted upon him by the lords by reinstating his specific location within the structure of the work economy.

However, unlike Bottom, Sly is notable for the variety and range of occupations with which he identifies, including stints as a ped-

dlers of wares and as a cardmaker, a maker of metal combs used in preparing wool for spinning. Although his "present profession" as a tinker, a mender of pots and other household items, seems to offer a suitable telos to his occupational history, his speech suggests that future professions may very well supplant this present one, just as it has supplanted others in turn. Sly, indeed, is portrayed as an itinerant worker, a phenomenon that was becoming increasingly common in England by the end of the sixteenth century. The development and growth of England's consumer economy during this period led to demands for a more socially and geographically mobile workforce that could often be employed for temporary or irregular labor, as seasonal and localized demands required. As a result, "[t]he bulk of the laboring population . . . constituted a large pool of partially employed labour, which was drawn upon selectively as need arose."<sup>34</sup> The presence of such a large group of itinerant, temporary laborers not surprisingly led to concerns about social order, a concern based in part on the belief that displaced labor was not legitimate work. As Fumerton has argued, "[a]nxiety over the perceived rise in physical unsettledness manifested itself in a number of ways" in the period, including "dramatic increases in mandatory and spontaneous roundups of perceived vagrants," the "massive proliferation of beggar and rogue literature," and various proclamations and statutes against vagrancy that appeared throughout the period. Indeed, peddlers and tinkers—the trades that bookend Sly's catalog of employment—were occupations specifically designated as illegal in the vagrancy acts of 1572 and 1598.<sup>35</sup> Sly's labor history marks him as potentially unstable and disorderly not because he is associated with a single occupation (such as Bottom's weaving) that could be linked to disorder in the social imaginary, but because he inhabits a transitory range of occupations that carry connotations of vagrancy, poverty, and social unrest.<sup>36</sup>

Sly is thus another poster child for antitheatricalist concerns: he is a drunk, itinerant laborer who sleeps on the ground. However, Shakespeare harnesses the transformative potential of these disruptive qualities to position Sly as a source of theatrical enterprise within the play. Despite Sly's extensive occupational repertoire, we again (as with Bottom) never see him performing manual labor on-stage. His status as a lowborn laborer is nevertheless crucial to the play's depiction of theatrical endeavor. As does Bottom's exuberance in the rehearsal sequences and his discordant presence in the

fairy kingdom, Sly's initial appearance in the Induction highlights verbal and bodily protocols that signal differences in social rank. In the opening scene, for instance, Sly's verbal inconsistencies and malapropisms signal his lowborn status, his disorderly drunkenness, and the inconsistency of identity characteristic of his status as an itinerant laborer. When the Hostess berates him and calls him a "rogue," Sly responds: "You're a baggage. The Slys are no rogues. Look in the Chronicles—we came in with Richard Conqueror, therefore *paucas palabras*, let the world slide. Sessa!" (Induction 1.2, 3–5). Mistaking William the Conqueror for "Richard Conqueror" and substituting "*paucus palabras*" for "*pocas palabras*," a phrase from Thomas Kyd's enormously popular stage play *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587), Sly reveals his inexact hold on the English language and his inability to perform cultural capital in the form of basic historical and theatrical knowledge. Sly's speech, like Bottom's, exposes deficiencies of rank and education and underscores the marginal nature of Sly's status as an itinerant laborer.

However, the Induction also suggests that Sly's itinerancy, and the potential for social mobility it implies, creates a disruptive instability that can enable creative transformation. Sly's rejoinder to the Hostess, for example, pointedly attempts to identify him in opposition to the label of "rogue" that she has imposed upon him. His muddled response both confirms the hostess's accusation and simultaneously reveals the slippage between criminal rogues and vagabonds (a category that would have technically included tinkers such as Sly) and people of more estimable family lineage or occupation. Though comical, Sly's claim that he is of royal descent touches on very pressing social concerns about upward mobility in the period and the feared possibility that merit earned through work could eventually lead to the same advantages as noble birth. Indeed, Sly's blundered genealogy (repeated in a more straightforward manner when he addresses the lords in the following scene as "old Sly's son of Burton Heath") indexes the ways in which the very concepts of itinerancy and temporary labor disrupt stable hierarchal systems of lineage and social status. The "transmutation" that transforms Sly the cardmaker into Sly the bearherd, and that in turn allows for an almost endless chain of occupational roles as the consumer economy demands, also encodes the possibility of social transformation, a challenge to rigid structures of social order.

Through Sly's onstage sleep Shakespeare rearticulates this socio-economic instability as a potent source of creativity and theatrical

artistry. Sly has clearly been drinking at the Hostess's tavern prior to falling asleep on the ground in the opening scene. Seeing Sly, the lord exclaims: "What's here? One dead, or drunk? See, doth he breathe?" (Induction 1.27). Upon learning that Sly is in fact alive, the lord proclaims: "O monstrous beast! How like a swine he lies. / Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image" (Induction 1.30–31). Drunk and asleep on the ground, Sly blurs the boundary between sleep and death and between human and animal.<sup>37</sup> Physically misplaced and difficult to categorize, Sly's sleep signals a moment of epistemological confusion for the lord and audience alike as they attempt to discern meaning in and through the lower-class working body. In this way Sly, like Bottom, throws conventional social hierarchies into question by embodying liminality and staging it for the lord and his huntsmen. In turn, the position and nature of Sly's sleep reveals the disorderly character of his waking and working life. The dilative excess of his staged body calls into question differentials of class and status and, in so doing, encodes the same threat posed by the itinerant worker who shifted frequently between different occupations and locales. Although the trick subsequently performed upon Sly situates him within a carnivalesque narrative of temporary social reversal that does much to minimize the social tensions of the encounter, Sly the itinerant worker nevertheless becomes initially legible to the lord and his companions through a moment of disruption: the discovery and social confusion produced through disorderly sleep.<sup>38</sup>

This disruption, furthermore, is explicitly marshaled for its dramatic potential. Even more so than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare makes explicit in *The Taming of the Shrew* the potential payoffs for theatrical enterprise embedded in the figure of the sleeping worker. Sly's drunken sleep is not simply disruptive; in the combination of drunkenness, sleep, and apparent death, Shakespeare marks Sly as a potential source of inspiration. Although many early modern treatises condemned drunkenness as a sign of moral lassitude, other texts, following strands of thought in classical, biblical, and patristic sources, emphasized the connection between excessive drinking and "transcendent experience." Typological readings of the story of Noah, for instance, often interpreted drunken slumber as a form of "divine rapture," figuratively connecting Noah to the sleeping philosopher.<sup>39</sup> And, as Joshua Scodel has demonstrated, English lyric poetry by Ben Jonson and others draws on Anacreontic and Horatian traditions to celebrate

“drinking as a source of poetic inspiration,” figuring the poet as “inspired drinker.”<sup>40</sup> Even the lord’s confusion as to whether Sly is dead or merely drunk helps to reinforce the creative potential of the scene, as death was frequently viewed as an extension and solidification of the temporary transcendence offered by sleep, the ultimate “opportunity to achieve insight through contact with the heavenly realm.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, as Shepard has demonstrated, lowborn men could construct alternative codes of masculine behavior that were founded in such seemingly disruptive practices as reveling and drinking. Like Bottom’s excessive passion in rehearsal, Sly’s drinking suggests both his alienation from dominant codes of elite masculinity and the appealing and energetic (if undisciplined) alternative he offers to such protocols. The onstage combination of sleep, drunkenness, and seeming death thus highlights not only social disruption and epistemological confusion but also the potential for creative transformation embedded in Sly’s recumbent figure.

The creative energy latent in Sly’s sleep is directly converted into theater by the lord and his huntsmen. Sly’s sleep is, of course, the material impetus for the lord’s trick and the subsequent play-within-a-play that becomes the main theatrical event of *The Taming of the Shrew*. This connection between Sly’s transformation and playacting is emphasized when Sly is removed from the stage at the end of the first Induction scene. Affirming his eager participation in his lord’s plan to trick Sly, the first huntsman announces: “My lord, I warrant you we will play our part / As he shall think by our true diligence / He is no less than what we say he is” (Induction 1.65–67). By playing his part, the huntsman will transform the lowborn Sly’s idle, disorderly sleep into entertainment through “true diligence.” Playacting, that is, is a form of labor that produces social transformation and alleviates rather than contributes to idleness or sloth. A few lines later, a servant announces the entrance of the “players” to “offer service” to the lord (73, 74). In verbally linking the lord and his men’s playacting with the actual labor of the acting troupe who appears onstage, Shakespeare affirms the “true diligence” required of both the lord’s men and the professional troupe of traveling players visiting the lord’s home. Acting, quite simply, is hard work. But at least for the lord’s men, it is also a form of labor predicated on the imaginative possibilities latent in the figure of the sleeping tinker. Asleep onstage, Sly creates the scene of possibility for the lord’s performance trick and for the play-

within-a-play that will ultimately dominate the entire theatrical experience. The body of the sleeping, lowborn laborer thus becomes a rich source of theatrical meaning.

By staging the prequel to this event in terms of a sleeping worker and the labor required to transform and entertain him, Shakespeare emphasizes the degree to which the main play is itself a continuation of work rather than an abrupt break from it. In effect, *The Taming of the Shrew* is Sly's waking dream. Through this formulation, Shakespeare taps into Sly's liminal social status—typified in his disorderly staged sleep—to exploit its creative potential, the possibility that the vivid dreams of the lowborn working man might produce precisely the kind of entertainment demanded and appreciated by audiences in the public theaters. The theater is not an antidote to or escape from work, despite what the antitheatricalist tracts propound. Rather, the theater and the imaginative worlds it creates are constituted by work, even—or perhaps especially—by the difficultly classified work performed by lowborn, itinerant laborers such as Sly and by actors in theatrical companies. Indeed, we might read Sly's rejoinder to the Hostess that "The Slys are no rogues" not only as a comical moment of status confusion but also as an implicit response to antitheatrical writers who defined play-acting in terms of roguery and vagrancy. If Sly, the sleeping itinerant laborer, calls to mind the supposed idleness of professional players, Shakespeare deftly makes use of him to resituate concerns about acting, sloth, and vagrancy as integral to the construction of the theater as a space of both creativity and productive labor. Redefining sleep as a source of artistic creativity, Shakespeare in turn reframes the theater as a workplace.

We might qualify the creative potential of Sly's sleep and subsequent theatrical "dream" by arguing that, as with Bottom, the imaginative transformation of the lowborn sleeper is imposed from without. Upon first encountering the sleeping Sly, the Lord boldly states to his men: "Sirs, I will practise on this drunken man" (Induction 1.32), clearly asserting that Sly is someone to be played *on* rather than an actor in his own right. The men notably "practise on" Sly through the lush description and presentation of luxury goods that prove his status as a lord. In addition to servants, musicians, hawks, and rich food and drink, Sly is led to believe he possesses lavish erotic paintings of "Cytherea all in sedges hid" and "To as she was a maid" (Induction 2.49, 52). Sly's belief in his own personal transformation is thus dependent on the manipulation of

material goods as forms of elite commodity consumption by the lord and his followers. In addition, through the subsequent vivid narrative that they spin on his behalf, the Lord and his servingmen reconstruct Sly's previous waking life as merely the stuff of dreams. The second servingman tells Sly: "These fifteen years you have been in a dream, / Or when you waked, so waked as if you slept" (Induction 2.76–77). As a result, Sly comes to what he believes to be a new self-realization of both his somatic state and his occupational identity. He exclaims to the men:

Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?  
Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?  
I do not sleep. I see, I hear, I speak.  
I smell sweet savours, and I feel soft things.  
Upon my life, I am a lord indeed.  
And not a tinker, nor Christopher Sly.

(Induction 2.66–71)

The route to Sly's assertion that he is not in fact "Christopher Sly" proceeds through his interrogation of his status as awake instead of dreaming followed by his acquiescence to the reiterated claims that he is a lord and "not a tinker." Like the theater itself, the lord and his men have effectively blurred the boundaries between dreams and life and between work and sleep: Sly's "real" working life as a tinker gets rewritten as a fifteen-year dream. Read analogically, the labor-intensive business of theater transforms quotidian working life into the playful fancy of dreams. But if Sly's itinerant labor provides the raw materials for theatrical creativity, it does so only through the external labor and force of the lord and his men. Sly is not the author of his own waking dream.

As is the case with Bottom, who is both acted on by Puck's magic and denied space in the text to recite or otherwise perform "Bottom's Dream," Sly is not credited with authority over the creative material he inspires. The material for *The Taming of the Shrew* that constitutes Sly's "dream" is not written or imagined by Sly, only for him. Sly's passivity in his own transformation and in the correlative shift from itinerant labor to theatrical entertainment that the play stages, a passivity emblemized through his onstage sleep, distances the lowborn laborer from the end product of theatrical endeavor, much as we saw in act 5 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>42</sup> In the process, Shakespeare figures creative control as solely within the purview of the lord and his servants (under his direction), ren-

dering the lowborn sleeper as the medium rather than the agent of theatrical transformation. Passivity, however, should not be read as a mark of insignificance for either Bottom or Sly. Counterintuitive as it may seem, much of the creative potential at the heart of both of these play resides in the figure of the sleeping worker, rather than his active counterpart. Indeed, it is the seemingly oxymoronic quality of the sleeper as a viable *dramatic* figure that makes it so powerful. The impropriety of both Bottom and Sly as working men, visualized for a theatrical audience that witnesses them sleeping on the ground or falling asleep drunk, has the potential to yield great creative benefits. Through onstage sleep, Shakespeare filters and modifies the latent energy in the figures of Bottom and Sly and highlights that energy as central to the dramatic narratives that unfold in both plays. The figure of the sleeping worker thus serves not as an agent but as a vital *locus* of creative potential in the drama, a dramatically resonant figure through which to explore the imaginative potential—and inherent risk—of theatrical enterprise.

As we see in both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, arguments in favor of the theater as a form of labor could indirectly gain their persuasive authority through the (recumbent) figure of the male worker. In these plays, Shakespeare capitalizes on the creative potential of sleep by staging it as a transformative rather than inert or idle process, a process that reframes the lowborn itinerant or artisanal worker as the impetus for theatrical practice. As such, these sleeping figures provide the grounds for claiming acting and theatrical artistry more generally as "real" work. The sleeping worker in these texts is central to the justification of the public theater as not only a vital art form but also a respectable business, but a business that depends on rather than eschews the messiness, instability, and marginality of lower-order labor. In part, Shakespeare's transvaluation of sleep in these plays serves to diffuse antitheatricalist concerns about artisan actors and itinerant laborers because it shifts focus away from lower-order work as such; Bottom never weaves and Sly never mends pots on stage. At the same time, however, Shakespeare trades on the volatile combination of social instability and latent creative energy embodied in both Bottom and Sly to generate a justificatory celebration of the inherent risks and attendant pleasures that constitute the business of theater. In these plays, the instability, excess, and liminality associated with the lowborn working man are redefined as potential pathways to theatrical creativity, a process that is

staged not through direct representations of acting or theatrical labor so much as through the unlikely medium of sleep. In its very fragility, sleep signifies the uncertainty that lies at the heart of artistic inspiration, an uncertainty compounded (at least in antitheatrical writings) by the dubious social positioning of the early modern theater. Shakespeare deploys this uncertainty for dramatically useful ends, staging the sleep of Bottom and Sly as a material metaphor for theatrical creativity. In doing so, he illuminates an aesthetics of theatrical work that validates the low status rather than the elite and the disunified rather than the systematized or the occupational. Reading theatrical labor not solely through mimetic representations but through the more idiosyncratic ways in which it is figuratively constructed in the drama enables us to understand more fully how such work was discursively imaged in the period, as it helps make visible what might otherwise go unnoticed: the material and the aesthetic potential of the lowborn working body.

### Notes

1. For a comprehensive survey of this topic, see David Bevington, "Asleep on Stage," in *From Page to Performance: Essays in English Drama in Memory of Arnold Williams*, ed. John A. Alford (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 51–83.

2. Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2 and Roslyn Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7. See also Walter Cohen, *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of Adult Professional Theater in Elizabethan London* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); David Kathman, "Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freeman and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2004): 1–49; and Theodore Levinwand, *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999);

3. Theodore Levinwand, "'I believe we must leave the killing out': Deference and Accommodation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Renaissance Papers* (1986): 11–30, esp. 11.

4. Tom Rutter, *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 48–49.

5. John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes &c. Commonly Used on the Sabbath Day, Are Reproved by the Authoritie of the Word of God and Auntient Writers* (London, 1577), K3r; William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters* (London, 1587), C4v; and Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (London, 1582), G6v.

6. Rutter, *Work and Play*, 36.

7. Rutter, *Work and Play*, 45. See also Douglas Bruster, "Local Tempest: Shakespeare and the Work of the Early Modern Playhouse," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25, no. 1 (1995): 33–53 and Andrew Gurr, "Industrious Ariel and Idle Caliban," in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, ed. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 193–208.

8. Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (London, 1579), A6v-A7r.

9. Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 27.

10. Writing about early modern empire, Walter Cohen similarly advocates against the "overvaluation" of "mimesis" in critical studies of the drama. He argues, for instance, that much scholarship incorrectly assumes "that the influence of empire on Renaissance literature is to be found exclusively in depictions of empire." See "The Literature of Empire in the Renaissance," *Modern Philology* 102, no. 1 (2004): 1–34, esp. 6. In a similar vein, in his study of citizenship in Shakespeare's plays, John Archer traces "citizen language" rather than "direct representation of citizens" throughout Shakespeare texts, emphasizing that "[w]hat was heard on stage is at least as important as what was seen." See *Citizen Shakespeare: Freeman and Aliens in the Language of the Plays* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 20.

11. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2008).

12. Sir Philip Sidney, "Sonnet 39," *Astrophel and Stella*, *Sir Philip Sidney: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3–4.

13. See Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "Sleep: Theory and Practice in the Late Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 41, no. 4 (1986): 415–41, esp. 415–16 and Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 156–57. The six non-naturals were: 1) air, 2) food and drink, 3) sleep and waking, 4) movement and rest, 5) retention and evacuation, and 6) the passions or emotions.

14. Rebecca Totaro, "Securing Sleep in *Hamlet*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 50, no. 2 (2010): 407–26, esp. 412. On sleep as a physically vulnerable state, see also Roger A. Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost: Pre-Industrial Slumber in the British Isles," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 2 (2001): 343–86.

15. Many medical treatises from the period advocated the proper balancing of sleep in order to ensure good health. See for example Andrew Boorde, *A Compendyous Regyment or a Dyetary of health* (London, 1567 [1547?]); Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989–94); and Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health* (London, 1605). On the connection between immoderate sleep and sin, see Garrett Sullivan, "Sleep, Epic, and Romance in *Antony and Cleopatra*" in *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, ed. Sara Munson Deats (New York: Routledge, 2005), 259–73, esp. 260–61 and Garrett Sullivan, "Romance, Sleep, and the Passions in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Old Arcadia*," *ELH* 74, no. 3 (2007): 735–57, esp. 741.

16. Bevington, "Asleep on Stage," 68.

17. On the connection between good sleep and social order, see Ekirch, "Sleep

We Have Lost,” 351. For the link between social status and the quality of dreams, which dates back to Aristotle, see Dannenfeldt, “Sleep: Theory and Practice,” 418.

18. Ekirch, “Sleep We Have Lost,” esp. 358, 362, and 352. Interestingly, the sleep of the lower classes may very well have also been interrupted by work. As Ekirch argues, despite the fact that the 1563 Statute of Artificers theoretically required that English workers labor only during daylight hours, “a wealth of evidence indicates that nocturnal labor became surprisingly widespread in preindustrial communities” due to the growth of regional economies and the emergence of new markets and consumer demands. See *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: Norton, 2005), 157 and 156.

19. Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 69. See also Leinwand, “I believe we must leave the killing out”; Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protests and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 325; and Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586–1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 3, 10–42.

20. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2nd ed., ed. A.C. Hamilton (Harlow, Eng.: Longman, 2007), II.xii.72.6–7. Sullivan discusses this scene and the connection it makes between sleep and heroic unmaning in “Romance, Sleep, and the Passions,” 746–47.

21. See Sullivan, “Romance, Sleep, and the Passions,” 746.

22. See Dannenfeldt, “Sleep: Theory and Practice,” 425.

23. Erica Fudge, “‘Onely Proper Unto Man’: Dreaming and Being Human,” *Reading the Early Modern Dream: The Terrors of the Night*, ed. Sue Wiseman, Katharine Hodgkin, and Michelle O’Callaghan (New York: Routledge, 2007), 31–43, esp. 42.

24. On the dilative nature of sleep, see Sullivan, “Sleep, Epic, and Romance,” who discusses sleep in the context of romance, following Patricia Parker’s identification of romance with “the wilderness of wandering, ‘error,’ or ‘trial’” in *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4. Sullivan also notes that excess sleep in particular was linked to “animality” in the period (“Sleep, Epic, and Romance,” 263).

25. See the *OED* definitions 1a, 5a, and 5b for “exposition.”

26. Maria Ruvolt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dreams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2, 13, 22, and 14.

27. As an artisan-weaver in an urban setting, Bottom suggestively calls to mind the similarly positioned actors within Shakespeare’s own company, highlighting (perhaps coyly) the often necessary relationship between the theater and artisanal labor. On the connections between Shakespeare’s theater and London’s guilds, see Kathman, “Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers.”

28. Louis Montrose has argued that despite the fact that the association of each “actor” with a specific occupation suggests the professional theater’s roots in the medieval craft guild tradition, the rehearsal scenes in the play parody “the amateur acting traditions that had largely declined along with the civic drama by the end of the 1570s.” See *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 190 and also Clifford Davidson, “‘What hempen home-spuns have we swagg’ring here?’: Amateur Actors in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the Coventry Civic Plays and

Pageants," *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987): 87–99. More recently, however, Rutter has argued that the mechanicals' rehearsals "emphasize to the audience the labour that has gone into the performance they are watching" (*Work and Play*, 50). On the work of rehearsal in the play, see also Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

29. On ideal masculinity and its link to the both self-control and the humoral body, see Gail Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Bruce Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and contemporary treatises such as Richard Braithwait's *The English Gentleman* (London, 1630).

30. Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 211.

31. Montrose, for example, discusses the biblical allusion in this speech as an incidence of "sociospiritual inversion" mediated through the comic, artisan figure of Bottom (*The Purpose of Playing*, 192–94).

32. Ruvolt, for example, notes that the image of a "sleeping writer" was frequently associated with "literary inspiration" and that the dream "was understood as a mechanism for invention" (*The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration*, 18).

33. Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost," 344 and 382.

34. Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 308–20, esp. 313. See also Fumerton, *Unsettled*, 1–32.

35. See Fumerton, *Unsettled*, 26, 6, and 1–2. The word "tinker" was itself often associated with itinerancy. The *OED* defines a tinker as "A craftsman (usually itinerant) who mends pots, kettles, and other metal household utensils" (1a). On the anxiety surrounding vagrancy in the period, see also Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

36. Sly's status as an itinerant laborer also invites comparison with the actors in the professional theaters, many of whom were employed on a temporary basis. Nearly half of the members of acting companies around the turn of the seventeenth century were hired hands rather than shareholders, and these men worked on an occasional basis for wages "paid by the year or the week or even the day." See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89.

37. As Sullivan has demonstrated, Shakespeare also emphasizes the connection between sleep and drunkenness in his portrayal of Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* ("Sleep, Epic, and Romance").

38. The fact that the play's framing device is never completed in Shakespeare's text (unlike in the anonymous play *The Taming of a Shrew*, published in 1594, which concludes with a scene in which Sly reflects on the play he and the audience have been watching) also forestalls a reading of Shakespeare's play as straightforward carnival or social containment, in the Bakhtinian sense. For the relationship between *A Shrew* and *The Shrew* as it affects the Sly framework, see especially Margie Burns, "The Ending of *The Shrew*," *Shakespeare Studies* 18 (1986): 41–64; Thelma Greenfield, "The Transformation of Christopher Sly," *Philological Quarterly* 33 (1954): 34–42; Leah Marcus, "The Shakespearean Editor as

Shrew-Tamer," *English Literary Renaissance* 22, no. 2 (1992): 177–200; and Karl P. Wentersdorf, "The Original Ending of *The Taming of the Shrew*: A Reconsideration," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 18, no. 2 (1978): 201–15.

39. Ruvolt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration*, 24–25.

40. Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 199–224, esp. 201.

41. Ruvolt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration*, 24–25.

42. On sleep as a passive form of agency linked to acting, see Ronald Hall, "Sleeping Through Shakespeare," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 12 (1999/2000): 24–32.

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