

*Study Guide
for
A Midsummer Night's Dream*



The Plot in Brief

by Kenli Doss

Love, war, and fairies—the fantastical plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* takes audiences through a surreal journey following young lovers, proud Athenian nobles, mischievous fairies, and unfortunate play-actors. The play begins in Duke Theseus's Athenian palace, where Theseus reveals that he is to be married to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Into the palace bursts Egeus, a nobleman, with his daughter Hermia, a man called Demetrius, whom he wants Hermia to marry, and Lysander, who has fallen in love with Hermia. Hermia expresses her wishes to marry Lysander and not Demetrius, but Theseus tells Hermia she must obey her father.

Lysander and Hermia flee into the woods to be married outside Athenian law. Helena, having learned of this plan to escape, decides to tell Demetrius, the man she loves, and follows him into the woods after the couple, in hopes she will be able to convince him to love her and not Hermia. It is from here that the audience is introduced to a company of players who have the extraordinary privilege of performing their play, *The Most Lamentable Comedy, and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby*, at the Duke's wedding.

Meanwhile, in the fairy world, Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of fairies, are at war with one another over the rights to a young boy. We learn that this fight between fairies has caused the mortal realm to be thrown into a state of chaos. Oberon, wanting to play a trick on Titania, tells Puck, his fairy servant, to find a special flower, which has been hit by one of Cupid's arrows, so that he may use the juice from that flower to charm the eyes of Titania and make her fall in love with some beast.

While Puck is looking for the flower, Oberon overhears Helena begging Demetrius to love her and decides to help her by telling Puck to take half the flower and drop its juice into the eyes of the young Athenian

man, who is in the forest, but Oberon fails to describe this man precisely. Oberon charms Titania's eyes with the flower's love juice while she is asleep, and Puck happens upon Lysander and Hermia sleeping in the forest. Because Lysander is wearing Athenian garb, Puck assumes he is the man he is meant to charm and, mistakenly, pours the juice into his eyes. Helena, then, seeing Lysander lying on the ground, wakes him, causing him to fall in love with her—those under the juice's spell fall in love with the first creature they see—which Helena takes as a cruel joke.



Riley Shanahan (left) as Lysander, Kelly Rogers as Puck, J. Todd Adams as Oberon, Cassandra Bissell as Helena, and Marco Antonio Vega as Demetrius in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2017 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2017.)

The players are seen again in the forest rehearsing their play, which they prepare in a laughably inept way, and Puck decides he wants to play as well. He transforms Bottom's head into that of a donkey, causing the other players to run away in horror. Titania awakes to see, and therefore falls in love with, the half-donkey Bottom. Puck tells Oberon that he has

charmed the eyes of an Athenian man, but the two realize he has charmed the wrong Athenian, leaving Puck to set things straight.

Helena is followed by Lysander who has been singing her praises, and Demetrius, having been charmed by Oberon, awakes, also falling in love with Helena. Helena decides all three of her friends, Hermia included, must be playing a cruel joke on her, which Hermia denies. Hermia, angry at Helena for taking Lysander from her, decides to fight Helena. The two men run off into the woods for a fight, as do the women. Deeper in the forest, Puck manipulates the men into becoming lost and tired so that they both lie down to sleep. The women both fall asleep as well; and while they are sleeping, Puck uses an herb given to him by Oberon to reverse the effects of the flower's juice into Lysander's eyes.

Meanwhile, Oberon takes pity on Titania after seeing her dote on the grotesque beast that Bottom has become and reverses the flower's effects. She awakens, horrified at what has happened, and leaves with Oberon, who tells Puck to transform Bottom back to his original state. At this moment, Theseus and his attendants find the sleeping foursome at the edge of the woods and wake them, asking for an explanation which, of course, the four cannot give. Demetrius loves Helena. Lysander and Hermia are in love again, and Theseus decides the two couples will be wed alongside himself and Hippolyta.

The wedding ceremony takes place, and the players take the stage in an absolute train wreck of a performance which amuses the Athenian nobles. The play's end bears out the truth of a phrase which Shakespeare would use as the title of another of his plays: "all's well that ends well." Puck has a final speech, directed at the audience, in which he suggests that the entire play has been nothing but a dream, and the play ends as most Shakespearean comedies do, with marriages and dance.

The Plot: Act by Act

by Catherine Beasley

Act One

The play begins as Theseus and Hippolyta happily anticipate their upcoming wedding day that is to take place in four days under the new moon. Their talk of celebration is quickly interrupted by Egeus, who presents his daughter Hermia and her two suitors, Lysander and Demetrius, to Theseus. Egeus explains that despite his command that Hermia marry Demetrius, she refuses because of her love for Lysander. Claiming Hermia as his property, Egeus threatens to order that his daughter be put to death for her defiance, as an old Athenian law empowers him to do. Theseus warns Hermia that she must either live the life of a nun or be executed if she does not accept to wed her father's candidate for marriage. To escape the Athenian law that condemns her, Hermia agrees to run away with Lysander. As the two discuss their plan to flee Athens, Helena, Hermia's friend, enters, and they tell her about their planned elopement. Helena is melancholy after being rejected by Demetrius because of his love for Hermia, and she resents the happiness of the two lovers. She decides



Melinda Parrett as Hippolyta in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2017 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2017.)

that she will reveal their plan to Demetrius in hopes that she will win his favor. Meanwhile, six Athenian tradesmen create the cast for *Pyramus and Thisby*, a play they plan to perform at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding. All must study their given parts and prepare for a rehearsal, the following night, in the moonlit woods outside of Athens.

Act Two



Madison Kisst (left, then clockwise) as First Fairy, Melissa Graves as Moth, Taylor Harris as Cobweb, Andrew May as Mustardseed, Eric Schabla as Peasblossom, Melinda Parrett as Titania, and Joanna Howe as Changeling Child in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2017 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2017.)

Oberon and Titania, king and queen of the fairies, argue over ownership of an Indian boy. The child is Titania's plaything, whom she adorns with flowers, but Oberon wants him to be part of his royal train. Hoping to redirect Titania's love and attention, Oberon instructs Puck, a troublemaker fairy, to find the flower called "love-in-idleness," which

contains magic that causes one to fall in love with the next creature they see. Oberon plans to anoint Titania's eyes with the magical nectar of the flower so that she will fall in love with a beast-like creature, giving him an opportunity to take the Indian boy. As Oberon and Puck put the finishing touches on their plan to divert Titania's attention, Helena and Demetrius appear. Demetrius is trying to find Hermia and Lysander, and Helena follows behind, even though Demetrius implores that she leave him alone. Oberon observes the spectacle of unrequited love, and after Puck returns with the enchanted flower, he gives Puck part of the flower and tells him to search for the two Athenian youths Oberon has observed and to anoint the eyes of Demetrius. The next time Oberon appears, he applies the flower's nectar to Titania's eyes as she sleeps. When he leaves, Lysander and Hermia appear as they make their escape from Athens. The two refugees decide to rest, and they fall asleep in the woods. Puck stumbles upon them and believes them to be Demetrius and Helena, so the mistaken Puck anoints Lysander's eyelids with the nectar. Continuing his search for Hermia, Demetrius enters, running, and Helena chases after him. However, tired from the pursuit, Helena pauses to catch her breath. Suddenly, Lysander awakes, and his eyes fall on Helena, making him fall in love with her. Lysander begins showering Helena with adoration, but she thinks he is mocking her. Lysander vows his newfound hatred for Hermia and follows after Helena. Hermia wakes to find that Lysander is gone, and she recalls her disturbing dream of a snake eating her heart while Lysander watched, cold and sadistic.

Act Three



*Taylor Harris (left) as Snug and James Newcomb as Nick Bottom in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2017 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2017.)*

As the moon washes the forest in silvery light, the tradesmen gather for their rehearsal of *Pyramus and Thisby*. Nick Bottom, the weaver, enthusiastically embraces his role as Pyramus despite his ignorance concerning elements of theater, of which he is unaware. During a monologue as Pyramus, Bottom exits, and Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. When Bottom re-enters to deliver his lines as Pyramus, his friends run away in terror. Bottom, oblivious to his unsightly transformation, concludes that his friends are trying to scare him, so he begins to sing to prove that he is unperturbed. His voice echoes through the wood and wakes the sleeping Titania, who, under the spell of the magical flower, falls in love with him. Ordering her fairies to attend to

Bottom, Titania leads him away to her flowery bower. Away from the unlikely lovers, Puck tells Oberon of the absurdity he has orchestrated between Titania and the beast-like man. Puck also reports that he successfully anointed the eyes of the Athenian man; however, when Demetrius enters pursuing Hermia, Puck and Oberon realize the mistake. Oberon commands Puck to find Helena while he applies the nectar to Demetrius, who is sleeping. Helena enters, accompanied by Lysander, who ardently declares his love for her. The commotion wakes Demetrius, who, after seeing Helena, falls in love with her as well. The two men declare their love for her in harmony, but Helena believes they are mocking her. Hermia arrives, upset that Lysander has abandoned her for Helena. She confronts Helena, but Helena believes Hermia is privy to the joke. Then, Lysander proposes a duel, and he and Demetrius exit to fight for Helena's affection. Oberon instructs Puck to follow the men and to imitate them in the dark until they tire and fall asleep. As planned, the two men are led astray by the counterfeit voices, and they fall asleep. After a day of chaos and turmoil, Helena and Hermia fall asleep, and four sleeping bodies fill the stage. To restore Lysander's sight to its normal state, Puck applies nectar to his eyes.



J. Todd Adams (top) as Oberon, Melinda Parrett as Titania, and James Newcomb as Nick Bottom in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2017 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2017.)



J. Todd Adams (left) as Oberon and Melinda Parrett as Titania in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2017 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2017.)

Act Four

In her blooming bower, Titania dotes on Bottom and attends to his every need. Oberon happily observes the absurdity and tells Puck that now the spell can be reversed since he has successfully obtained the Indian boy.

Oberon applies the nectar to Titania's eyes, removing the spell that caused her infatuation with Bottom. Then, Titania and Oberon use enchanting music to induce Bottom and the four lovers into a deep sleep. While

Bottom is completely unconscious, Puck removes the ass's ears from Bottom's head, restoring him to his normal state. Suddenly, the woods fill with people as they join to celebrate the rites of May. Theseus and Hippolyta lead the train, and Egeus is seen within the crowd. They eventually stumble upon the four sleeping lovers and wake them. His love for Hermia restored, Lysander tells Theseus about their planned escape from Athens, provoking Egeus's anger. Egeus begs that the law condemn Lysander; however, things take an unexpected turn when Demetrius, who will remain under the influence of the love juice, announces his love for Helena. Straight away, Theseus overrules Egeus and declares that the two couples shall be married that night when he, Theseus, will himself marry Hippolyta. The happy couples follow everyone back to Athens, and Bottom wakes up, recalling visions from the night and believing them to be a dream. Meanwhile, the tradesmen lament their unfortunate situation:

without Bottom, they are unable to perform *Pyramus and Thisby*. As they bemoan their misfortune, Bottom joyously appears and announces that their play has been chosen by Theseus to be performed at the wedding. The men excitedly scurry to prepare for the performance.

Act Five

Theseus ignores the lovers' tales of their night, believing them to be imaginary. After viewing the selection of possible entertainment, Theseus chooses *Pyramus and Thisby* for the night's festivities. The play is unintentionally comical, and the audience is amused by the ridiculous performance. The play ends, and the newlyweds go to bed. As they sleep, Oberon and Titania, accompanied by their train of fairies, enter and bless the three marriages. At the end of the play, Puck addresses the audience and tells them to regard the entire play as a dream.

The Characters

by Brianna Abernathy

Theseus: The Duke of Athens, who intends to marry Hippolyta four days after the time of the play as it opens. He also gives Hermia the choice which is warranted by an old Athenian law in case she refuses to comply with her father's wishes: either be put to death or live her life in a nunnery. Theseus has great patience with the timid and inarticulate, not only among the diplomats he has met in the past but also the comical actors who bungle the play they put on for the court. He senses good intentions and appreciates them.

Hippolyta: This Queen of the Amazons is betrothed to Theseus, who defeated her people and took her to Athens as part of his conquest.

Philostrate: The Master of Revels at Theseus's court, Philostrate oversees the court festivities and entertainment for Theseus's celebrations, such as his impending wedding.

Egeus: Hermia's stern father wishes his daughter would marry Demetrius, whom she does not love.

Hermia: Egeus's daughter loves Lysander despite the fact that her father's choice for her is Demetrius. She tells her friend, Helena, of her plot to evade the law with Lysander and escape together into the woods to flee Athens. However, when Lysander falls in love with Helena because of Puck's mistake, Hermia grows angry with Helena and the confusion escalates along with the comedy of it.

Helena: Hermia's childhood friend is in love with Demetrius. She tells him of Helena and Lysander's plan to flee from Athens into the woods. In hopes that she will be rewarded for including him in the plot, she professes her love for him while alone with him in the woods. When both men, Demetrius and Lysander, fall for her because of the potion, she feels ridiculed and taunted by them and accuses Hermia of playing a part in the insulting charade. Helena argues and ridicules Hermia verbally until the

men decide to duel for Helena's hand. In the end, however, she is wedded to her beloved Demetrius.

Lysander: This man does not have Egeus's blessing and loves Hermia nevertheless. He is the one to suggest they flee Athens and elope. In the woods, he is mistaken for Demetrius by Puck, who pours the love nectar into his eyes, unaware that there are two men in Athenian garb in the area. This mistake causes Lysander to fall for Helena briefly. He then leaves with Demetrius to go and fight a duel, and instead, he is tricked by Puck, who puts him to sleep. Puck then anoints Lysander's eyes with the juice of a different flower, an antidote, which reunites him with his love, Hermia, and the two are married in Athens.

Demetrius: Demetrius loves Hermia and has her father's consent, making him the more appropriate choice in the eyes of the law. He follows Lysander and Hermia into the woods, hoping to find Hermia. All the while, Helena lovingly follows him. Oberon sees Demetrius berating Helena for following him, despite his expressed threats and negative feelings towards her. This interaction causes Oberon to give Puck the order to apply the potion to the Athenian's eyes. Puck, however, mistakes Lysander for Demetrius and thereby causes much of the play's comic confusion. Later, the potion is also applied to Demetrius's eyes, causing him to fall in love, finally, with Helena, whom he later marries.

Oberon: The King of the Fairies is currently quarreling with the Queen of the Fairies over a changeling, an orphaned Indian boy, whom he wants as a page in his court. Oberon sends Puck to fetch the "love-in-idleness" flower, instructing him to anoint Demetrius's eyes with it. While Puck sows confusion in the woods by mistaking Lysander for Demetrius, Oberon anoints Titania's eyes with the same flower and causes much comic confusion among the fairies, making Titania fall in love with Bottom. In the end, after all the couples are properly united, Oberon blesses their unions, and he is himself reunited and reconciled with Titania.

Robin Goodfellow/Puck: This spirit, who causes mischief, is in service to Oberon. Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius and leads them into a conflict, which he later diffuses through the use of the love potion and its antidote. Puck also, for his own amusement, transforms Bottom by giving him the head of an ass. In the end, after all the confusions of the play are resolved, Puck turns to the audience and says that if the play has offended them, they should think of it as nothing more than a mere dream.

Titania: The Queen of the Fairies is quarrelling with Oberon over a changeling child, an orphaned Indian boy, whom she wants to keep as her own. The Queen bears loyalty to the child's mother, who had been her friend until she died in childbirth. Titania, who keeps the child out of this loyalty, refuses to give the child to Oberon. Titania is later subjected to the flower's magic by Oberon and tricked thereby into falling in love with Bottom, who, at the time, bears the head of an ass.

Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed: These are Fairies in Titania's court assigned to Bottom's service.

Nick Bottom: Bottom is a weaver who plays Pyramus during the interlude. Bottom is a rather eccentric man, a ham actor, who is prone to mispronouncing words or using wrong ones in their place. While rehearsing in the woods, he leaves the other players. Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass, and before he knows it, Bottom is lying in Titania's court. The weaver awakens Titania with singing, whereupon she, having the love nectar in her eyes, falls in love with him and has her fairies tend to him. Puck and Oberon later collect him, the former of which removes the ass head. Bottom then meets up with his fellow actors to perform the play after awakening from what he assumes must have been a strange dream.

Peter Quince: This carpenter recites the Prologue in the Pyramus and Thisbe play in the interlude. He is also in charge of the play's organization and announces each man's part.

Francis Flute: This bellows-mender plays Thisbe during the interlude.

Tom Snout: This tinker plays the part of the Wall during the interlude.

Snug: This joiner plays the Lion during the interlude. He also suggests the warning prior to the beast's roaring so as not to scare the ladies in the audience.

Robin Starveling: This tailor plays the role of Moonshine during the interlude.

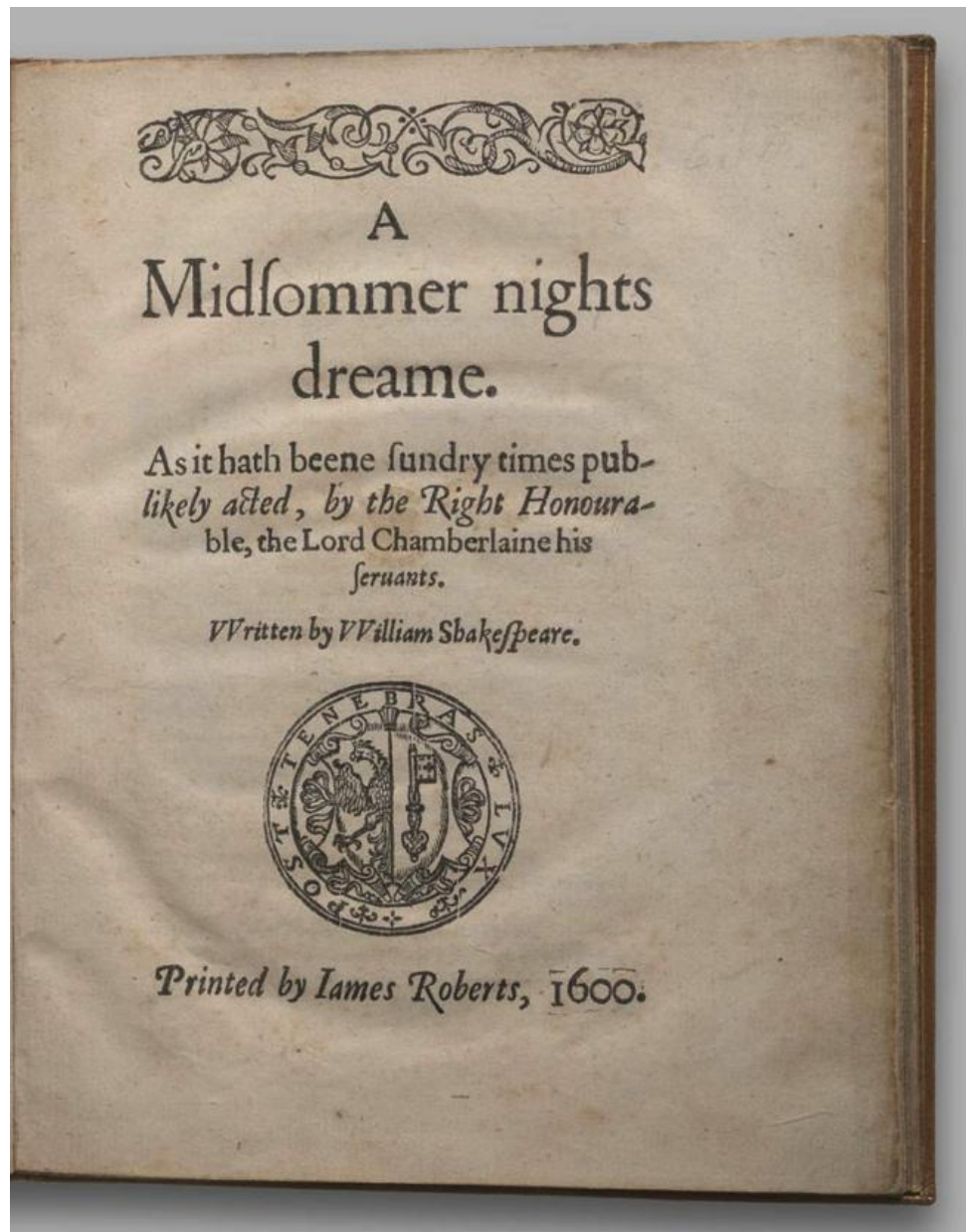
Unnamed Characters: There are Lords and Attendants on Theseus and Hippolyta, and other unnamed fairies.

Composition History

by Carmine Di Biase

Shakespeare's plays were first collected by two of his fellow actors, John Heminges and Henry Condell, in the *First Folio* of 1623, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was among the plays included there, but there were earlier editions of this play. The earliest we have is a quarto edition (a smaller format) that came off the press in the year 1600. The following image is of the title page of the copy owned by the British Library.

Francis Meres, an English churchman and writer and one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, mentioned the play in 1598, and most scholars agree that it was written even earlier, around 1595 or 96, five or six years after we know that Shakespeare, for certain, had arrived in London. *Midsummer*, in short, is among Shakespeare's early plays, written during the same period as *Romeo and Juliet*, with which it shares a number of stylistic similarities. In these plays we can sense the excitement of



Shakespeare's own poetic discoveries, among them the power of the list. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, we recall how Shakespeare mocks conventional love poetry by making Romeo himself recite an unadorned list of oxymora—self-contradictory images—which the thirteenth-century Italian poet, Francis Petrarch, had exploited with great success, and which English poets had imitated, often in uninspired ways:

O brawling love! O loving hate!
O any thing, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is! (I.1.176-181).

We can sense here the thrill that Shakespeare must have felt as he discovered the power of the list as a form, whether mocking and destructive, as it is here, or constructive of beautiful poetic images, as it is in Titania's orders to her fairy servants, who must procure the following for Bottom:

Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs,
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
To have my love to bed and to arise;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.

(III.1.166-73)

Two different ways of making lists, with two different purposes: this is a poetic lesson that Shakespeare masters in his early period.

Another artistic trait we can see developing in this early period is Shakespeare's habit of bringing together disparate historical periods and melding them into something new and coherent. In *Romeo and Juliet*, we have a story set in Renaissance Italy, more specifically in Verona, but in that play, Shakespeare mixes his Early Modern Italy with numerous

references to other times and other worlds. There, mingling together, we have not only classical Greece and Rome—recall, for example, Juliet’s “Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, / Towards Phoebus’ lodging; such a waggoner / As Phaeton would whip you to the west” (III.2.1-3)—but also the more native world of English folklore that Mercutio brings in. His reference to Queen Mab, a stock English name for a slut, must have made the play strangely familiar to his first audiences. Such too is the case with *Midsummer*, which brings together, into one unified work of art, several otherwise unrelated worlds and times. Like Queen Mab, Titania and Oberon were well-known characters out of English folklore; Edmund Spenser had built the greatest epic of his time, *The Faerie Queene*, around them just a few years before Shakespeare’s play appeared. The main setting of *Midsummer*, however, is classical Greece, and the low-born characters—Bottom the weaver, Snug the joiner, Flute the bellows-mender, and the rest of them—are very English, down to their very names. It seems that in this youthful period Shakespeare was deliberately challenging himself. His willingness, and his ability, to bring such disparate elements together is perhaps an act of bravura, but it is also a measure of Shakespeare’s awareness that English literary art, or at least his own art, had to operate like a crucible, into which he had to pour all of his learning, and then, with the heat of his artistic powers, meld his ingredients into something new, something uniquely his own.

Brief Performance History

by Carmine Di Biase

A Midsummer Night's Dream has inspired a long history of notable performances. Some scholars believe that the play, with its several betrothals, was written expressly as a wedding entertainment. And there is indeed evidence to suggest that the play was first performed in the middle or late 1590s to celebrate the marriages of members of the English nobility. Certainly, it was performed at the court of King James in 1604, shortly after the death, in 1603, of Queen Elizabeth. The 1640s threw England into turbulent civil wars, which resulted in the dissolution of the monarchy and the closing of the public theaters. When they reopened in 1660, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* enjoyed something of a revival.

Of the seventeenth-century performances, however, perhaps the most famous one was recorded on May 29, 1662, in one of the greatest of all diaries, that of Samuel Pepys. Here are his impressions of the play:

I sent for some dinner and there dined, Mrs. Margaret Pen being by, to whom I had spoke to go along with us to a play this afternoon, and then to the King's Theatre, where we saw "Midsummer's Night's Dream," which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.

Here, either wittingly or unwittingly, Pepys echoes what Hippolyta says to Theseus when Bottom and his gang begin their inept performance of the Pyramus and Thisbe play: "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard" (V.1.210). It is clear that Pepys did not like this play much, if at all, but his response is valuable because it serves as a measure of how far ahead of his time Shakespeare was. Pepys is also perhaps representative of his time. The writers of his generation were neoclassical in spirit; their art was governed by reason, symmetry, rules that had their roots in a universe that was believed to have been made by a rational creator. John Dryden,

one of Pepys's contemporaries, actually rewrote Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in order to make it conform to what he, Dryden, took to be prescriptive rules governing the making of tragedies. These he got from Aristotle's treatise on tragedy, *The Poetics*. Given the rule-governed art of the age, it is no surprise that *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—with its love potion, its fairy world, its fantastical transformations—did not appeal to Samuel Pepys.

In 1970 the great Shakespearean director, Peter Brook, staged a remarkable performance of the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Part of what made this performance remarkable was that Brook had one actor play both Theseus and Oberon, while the woman who played Hippolyta also played Titania. In this way, Brook dramatized his interpretation (centuries ago, “to interpret” actually meant “to act”) of the play: he saw Oberon and Titania as imaginative extensions, or psychological projections, of Theseus and Hippolyta. The entire fairy world, in short, was the human imagination. In 2016 Erica Whyman, again for the Royal Shakespeare Company, directed the play to great success, touring England with it and involving amateur actors with the professionals. How profoundly appropriate this approach is to a play which includes, as a play-within-the play, a group of amateur actors. (The Shakespeare Project, which employs local amateurs and young apprentices not only as actors but also to help with costuming and stage building, adopts a similar approach for all of its productions.)

Because so much of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* happens out of doors, it is easily, and naturally, adapted to natural make-shift settings such as parks and wooded lots, with or without amphitheaters. A performance at Rice University (in Houston, Texas) in 2013 made wonderful use of outdoor spaces, blurring the division between audience and actors, and it took place at night, nicely evoking the moonlight that pervades this play. YouTube makes that performance available in its entirety (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P-bJjrV0tI>). A much more lavish outdoor performance, directed by Lear de Bessonet, was produced by New York City's Public Theater in the summer of 2017. This

production, which ran for five weeks in Central Park, included Broadway luminaries such as Phylicia Rashad and Danny Burstein. A brief video clip captures a sample of the delicious Broadway music and choreography this performance offered:

<https://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2017/08/10/review-midsummer-nights-dream-public-theatres-shakespeare-park/>

As many of Shakespeare's plays have done, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has inspired artists of every kind. In 1843 Felix Mendelssohn, the great German composer, wrote music inspired by the play, music which is performed today by the world's greatest orchestras. And in the realm of film, one of the most charming and fanciful adaptations is Woody Allen's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), a hilarious and wacky modern departure from the original.

Readers of Shakespeare often complain about performances that depart from, or that in some way "violate," the original. Shakespeare himself, however, had to adapt his plays as they moved from one venue to another; even for him there was hardly such a thing as the "original." When Hippolyta complains about the ineptitude of the actors putting on the Pyramus and Thisby play, Theseus replies in a voice that might just be Shakespeare's own: "The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them" (V.1.211-12). In other words, the audience too is expected to have an imagination elastic enough to allow the spectacle to work its magic.

Enchanted Visions: Recurring Themes

by Catherine Beasley

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare fuses reality and the dream world, revealing the blurred lines that separate these two hemispheres of our existence. Through a two-fold setting, Shakespeare provides a concrete manifestation of reality and dreams. The play begins in Athens, a city inhabited by mortals and governed by laws; however, adjacent to this realistic domain exists an otherworldly wood brimming with imperial fairies and charmed flowers. Athens is an extension of our consciousness, a world in which everything makes sense; yet, on the fringes of our consciousness lies the fantastical wood, a domain for unconsciousness. In the play, these two settings collide when the characters from the mortal world enter the dreamy woods. This blend of reality and dreams is disorienting, and the barriers that once separated the two become cloudy. After the surreal events of the night, Demetrius wonders whether his existence is an illusion: “Are you sure / That we are awake? It seems to me / That yet we sleep, we dream” (4.1.201-3). Demetrius here echoes this idea of blurred lines separating reality and dreams and captures Shakespeare’s thematic point: embedded within reality lies the impossible—a fantastical world only a dream away.

A related thematic strand woven throughout the play concerns the nature of love. Intoxicated by the love-begetting nectar, Lysander, Demetrius, and Titania experience a sudden, inexplicable shift in perspective, illustrating the blindness, or irrationality, of love. Love is liquefied in the form of the nectar, which seizes control of its host and dictates their affections, distorting their view. Dripping with passion, the characters manipulated by the nectar pursue unlikely and absurd subjects. It is impossible to think that Lysander would leave Hermia for Helena, yet he does. Likewise, no one would expect Demetrius to declare his undying love for the girl he once despised, yet he does. Furthermore, it would be preposterous for the beautiful and delicate Titania to become enamored by a beastly man with the head of a donkey, yet she does! At the beginning

of the play, Helena establishes love as a blinding force: “Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind; / And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind” (1.1.240-1). With Helena’s words ringing in our ears, we observe the comic spectacle of bewitched lovers blindly going through the motions of love. In the words of Lysander, “The course of true love never did run smooth” (1.1.136).

On the Uses of Prose and Verse

by Kenli Doss

It is a generally accepted thought that verse is reserved for more elevated, or else emotionally complex characters and scenes in Shakespeare's plays. Throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, every character except those in the acting troupe speaks in verse. In fact, the only time one of the players of the acting company attempts any sort of poetry at all, especially during their performance, it is so inept that it only reinforces their low stature.

To no surprise, the four central lovers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* continually speak in verse, usually rhyming verse. In Shakespeare's time, drama had generally dropped end rhyme and adopted iambic pentameter (a ten-syllable line) blank verse. Some of the best, the most sincere and deeply felt, verse in the play is blank verse. When Theseus explains to Hippolyta what the job of the poet is, in fact, we seem to hear the voice of Shakespeare himself:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to aery nothing
A local habitation and a name.

(V.1.4-17)

Here he is, in the same scene with the sleeping Lysander, about to put the love nectar, mistakenly, into his eyes:

Through the forest have I gone,
But Athenian found I none,
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower's force in storing love.
Night and silence—Who is here?
Weeds of Athens he doth wear.

(II.2.66-71)

Puck's language here, with its simple rhyme, expresses his playfulness and recklessness, even some insincerity, something an Elizabethan audience would expect to hear from this mischievous spirit out of English folklore.

Representing the use of prose in this play is the less educated, though genuine character Nick Bottom, as well as the other members of his acting troupe. They are the only characters who speak in prose, which is generally set aside for simple characters who either speak or think plainly. When Bottom or his companions do make an attempt at poetry, it is hilariously bad, lacking in any refinement, and comically clumsy in its rhymes. This comedy is on full display of course in their botched play. Here is a telling example, in which Bottom, playing Pyramus, mispronounces the name of King Ninus:

Pyramus: O, kiss me through the hole of this vild wall!

Thisby: I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.

Pyramus: Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?

Thisby: 'Tide life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

(V.1.200-

203)

This inept rhyming, along with the malapropisms, forms a contrast with the elevated blank verse that comes from the mouths of higher born

characters, also serves to add comedy to the four lovers, even though they use rhyming verse without the malapropisms. The natural language, however, of Bottom and his cohorts, is prose, and it too is riddled with comical errors.

And yet Bottom, because he is genuine, can be profoundly moving. Here he is, getting his senses jumbled as he tries to recall his exquisite time with Titania and wanting to preserve the memory of his experience by having Peter Quince write it down for him in a ballad, which was itself a popular poetic form, meant to be sung, and danced to, for those who could not read :

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. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. 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 ballet of this dream. It shall be call'd "Bottom's Dream," because it hath no bottom.

(V.1.205-16)

We laugh at this, of course, but when performed well, this monologue is moving, for Bottom, a complete human being with all the feeling that the play's high born characters have, will be among the unmarried at the end, not only alone but unable to record his own fleeting, dreamlike experience of love. He is unable, as Theseus says, to give that experience, "a local habitation and a name," which is doomed to remain, as a result, an "aery nothing."

Shakespeare's Books: the Play's Main Sources

by Carmine Di Biase

Of the two most important sources of this play, one, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is from the classical period and the other, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, is Medieval and very English. There are other sources, as well, but that Shakespeare was able to draw from these two, very different works to create such a seamless, and original, play as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a testament to his imaginative power to synthesize his experience of books.



(The title page of a 1593 copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated into English in 1567 and reprinted several times in Shakespeare's day.)

The Metamorphoses, written about eight years after the birth of Christ, was perhaps Shakespeare's favorite book. He would draw from it, directly and indirectly, all his working life. Shakespeare read the work in Arthur Golding's 1567 English translation and probably knew the original Latin version as well. *The Metamorphoses* was so widely read in Shakespeare's England, even in English, that alluding to a story from this book was an efficient way for him and other writers of his time to announce or to enrich some thematic concern, or to lend the authority of the classical world to a new, English work. Shakespeare, however, never merely sprinkled in classical allusions just to put his learning on display: he always worked, not as a scholar, but as an artist.

In his earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, he actually has a copy of *The Metamorphoses* brought onto the stage by a young boy and opened up to the tragic story of Philomel, a story which is analogous to the one Shakespeare is telling; the same is true of one of his final plays, *Cymbeline*, in which the heroine falls asleep while reading the same story, which here too is analogous to the heroine's plight. At the center of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, is a different, but also tragic, Ovidian story, that of Pyramus and Thisbe. This story, which Bottom and his comical cohorts adapt for the stage and perform, or botch rather, before the court of Athens, is one that was dear to Shakespeare, especially during this period, during which he also wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. This play, and Ovid's story, both involve the suicides of two young lovers whose union is opposed by their parents.

Why, then, did Shakespeare place this tragic story at the center of a comic play? The answer lies in Shakespeare's belief that comedy "contains" tragedy; that is, comedy not only includes tragedy but it thwarts it, stops it, and its presence is what creates the dramatic tension that keeps us reading, or watching, with interest: we want to see how that tragic potential is defeated. Remember that Egeus, Hermia's father, wants her to marry Demetrius, not Lysander, the man she really loves. And Egeus is stern enough, and angry enough, to exercise his right under Athenian law and have his disobedient daughter put to death: "As she is

mine, I may dispose of her; which shall be either to this gentleman [Demetrius] / Or to her death, according to our law / Immediately provided in that case” (I.1.42-45). Remember too that Theseus has just returned from a bloody war and that Hippolyta, to whom he is betrothed, is his battle trophy, the queen of the defeated Amazons (a mythological kingdom ruled by women). In the end, when Bottom and his fellow actors botch their play, to the great merriment of the onlookers—not only the other characters who form his audience but us, too—what we witness is a tragic story performed with such comical ineptitude that we breathe a sigh of relief. This comes, of course, at the end of the play when all the lovers are happily united, and not just the two pairs at the center of the play but also Theseus and Hippolyta, who were once enemies at war with each other, and Oberon and Titania, who until this point in the play are themselves at odds with each other. In this way, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* “contains” the tragic potential represented by Ovid’s story of Pyramus and Thisby.

The same can be said of the other most important source of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: the “Knight’s Tale,” from Chaucer’s medieval masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer’s tale is also tragic, and even more bloody, as it involves war, unburied corpses, jealous imprisoned lovers who, because they are in love with the same person, do battle with each other and pine away and nearly starve, and one of them actually dies in the end. What is notable, however, is that whereas in Chaucer’s tale it is two jealous men, once fast friends, who are in love with the same woman, in Shakespeare it is two women, Helena and Hermia, whose friendship is threatened by the same man, Lysander, has courted both of them. This theme—of pure, platonic, non-romantic love threatened by the violent emotions of romantic love—attracted the attention of Shakespeare, who, however, rewrote the story with at least two important changes. First, as with the story of Pyramus and Thisby, Shakespeare uses Chaucer’s story to accentuate the tragic potential of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, only to diffuse it by adding a fourth lover, Demetrius, who satisfies Helena’s romantic desires and thereby restores her friendship with Hermia. And this friendship, which in Shakespeare’s

play is not between two men but between two women, is his second important change.

This threatened friendship inspired some of the finest, most lyrical blank verse of this play, and it comes out of the mouth of Helena:

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds
Had been incorporate. So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem.

(III.2.203-11)

This pure love between the two women is preserved in the end, at the expense of Demetrius's independence, who must remain—and this is part of the comedy—under the influence of the love potion forever (Lysander, like Titania, gets the antidote). Why did Shakespeare give this important role to the women of this play, and not, as Chaucer had done, to the men? Was it perhaps that he might have had Queen Elizabeth in mind? She was on the throne at the time and it was customary for Shakespeare's acting company to perform for her at Christmas time. Or was this change due simply to the fact that Shakespeare, like any deeply gifted artist, was egalitarian and felt that women could be as silly as men, and as serious? Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Shakespeare used his reading never as a means by which to drop names and impress his audience but rather to deepen and enrich his own, new work.

Relevant Biography

by Carmine Di Biase

The wild mix of settings (ancient Greece and fairy land) and characters (comical English tradesmen, ancient Greek rulers, a captured queen of a legendary matriarchal civilization) make it difficult to imagine that there is anything autobiographical about this play. And yet there is: Shakespeare's experience of the theater itself. Much of this play, after all, has to do with public performance, whether in an actual play or, as we shall see, in the kind of theater we have in politics or, for that matter, in common everyday life.

We can sense in this play the excitement that Shakespeare must have felt as he explored his notion that all of life was, in one way or another, theater. The profession he chose to follow, that of playwright and actor, excluded him from nothing at all: his extraordinary empathic ability, something which every imaginative writer needs, allowed him to create, even to become, anyone he wanted to be. For Shakespeare, all human experience, in and out of theaters, consisted of scripts and performances, and he could write his way into any world he wanted. And that Shakespeare's theater was called The Globe, which suggested its capacity to represent all of human experience, is a sign that he was not alone in this sentiment. Nor, as this play bears out, was this imaginative ability the exclusive privilege of the writer: it was, and ought to be, everyone's way of being.

The most English part of this play involves Bottom the weaver, Snug the joiner, Quince the carpenter, Snout the tinker, Flute the bellows-mender, and Starveling the tailor. In addition to their very English sounding names, the trades which these characters practice evoke the English artisan guilds, whose members, ever since the Middle Ages, were responsible for putting on moralistic plays on special occasions, plays based on Biblical stories and meant to instruct audiences of commoners, who were for the most part illiterate. (The profession of acting would not

develop until Shakespeare's day, and even then it would not be a widely respected one.) This whole English tradition of amateur acting is gently satirized by Shakespeare's treatment of Bottom's production. He and his cohorts get their cues wrong, mispronounce words, and fear that their audience will be unable to separate performance from reality, feigned violence and death from real. All of this makes for great comedy, but it also represents the kind of audience that the actors of the old moralistic plays could have expected. Shakespeare would have seen such performances, and such impressionable, easily moved audiences, when he was a boy in Stratford.

Shakespeare satirizes that kind of theater, therefore, which his more modern kind replaced, but he makes us love his incompetent actors because he believes that their kind of theater shares something important with every kind of theater: the requirement that both the audience and the actors must cooperate, must engage their imaginations, if the magic of theater, and indeed the magic life, is to happen at all.

This notion is illustrated for us towards the end of the play, in the exchanges between Theseus and Hippolyta. When he tells the complaining Hippolyta that the audience's "imagination" can "amend" or repair whatever damage the actors do to their scripts (V.1.214), he means it, and, like Shakespeare himself, considers it indeed a way of life. Notice his response to Hippolyta, a few lines earlier, when she first begins to sneer at the actors: "they can do nothing," she says of them. Theseus replies with an account of an experience of his own, an experience which has nothing to do with actual theaters and everything to do, instead, with politics and war:

The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake;
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
Takes it in might, not merit.
Where I have come, great clerks have purposed
To greet me with premeditated welcomes;

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,
Make periods in the midst of sentences,
Throttle their practis'd accent in their fears,
And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,
Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
Out of this silence yet I pick'd a welcome;
And in the modesty of fearful duty
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
In least speak most, to my capacity.

(V.1.88-105)

This example of the theater of real life should strike close to home for Hippolyta—she is, after all, Theseus's war bride—but it also reveals how freely and how thoroughly Shakespeare's favorite metaphor, life as performance, shaped his vision of human experience. If *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is autobiographical in any way, then, it is in its dramatization of the passing of one kind of theater and the arrival of another, more professional and realistic kind.

This dramatization, however, comical though it is—we laugh of course at the asses' ears on Bottom's head—is deeply respectful. It is the mighty Titania, after all, the queen of the fairies, who falls in love with him and his ears. In this way, Shakespeare erases, if only momentarily, any differences in rank that one might entertain between those at the “bottom” of the human scale and those who are above the top of it. Shakespeare himself, we will recall, was not a member of the nobility; he was born into a humble family; his grandfather in fact had been a tenant farmer. If all human experience is inescapably a performance, then social class is itself a theatrical illusion. Perhaps Shakespeare was saying, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that we can all rewrite the scripts of our lives. What he is certainly saying in this play, however, and saying it from his own lived experience, is that the magic of theatrical illusion—and

therefore the magic of life itself—will not happen unless everyone cooperates with an engaged imagination.

Classroom Exercises

The Rhyming Couplet as Actor's Cue

by Kenli Doss

Oftentimes when reading or analyzing Shakespearean text, it can be easy to forget that what is laid out before you is not just a beautiful poetic piece of art, which many would agree *A Midsummer Night's Dream* most certainly is, but also a play written for an audience that was largely illiterate and could be expected to be drunk during the performance. Fortunately, there are ways of overcoming, and even embracing, the antiquated slang and specific references often used throughout Shakespeare's plays. I have devised a simple classroom exercise that may serve as a spark of creativity or a channel through which readers and actors alike may find connection with Shakespeare's plays, ideally making the process of further analysis more enjoyable and perhaps even a little easier. Now, for the purposes of this activity, I will focus on a very basic technique used by all Shakespearean actors called "cue listening" or "cue detecting." It is worth noting that this is by no means the miracle cure to understanding Shakespeare's words, but it may be useful in the short term to help connect with the text on a more serious level.

Generally speaking, when acting in a Shakespearean play today, most actors and actresses use a layering of techniques—starting with the basic tenets of Konstantin Stanislavski, a widely accepted father of contemporary acting, and adding to that the elevation called for by the language of Shakespearean plays. To contrast this, during the time in which Shakespeare would have written *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (around the year 1600), actors mainly served as conduits of language, meaning they would memorize the lines, sometimes adding to them what they wished, and stand on stage in a pretty pose reciting the poetry to an audience with absolutely no realistic acting. For most contemporary audiences, this presentational style of drama feels insincere and can

become boring. This is why most actors today start with the realistic acting work of Stanislavski and move into a “heightened” style of acting which still honors the poetry in Shakespeare’s plays.

Actors from the early 17th century would often receive what is called a “cue script” that included their own lines and the three or four line before as a “cue” to step down the stage and begin reciting. Often with only a few days or, if they were lucky, a week to memorize entire plays, actors would rely on other means of communication to remember their cues. Shakespeare would sometimes use rhyming couplets—two lines of verse joined by rhyming final syllables—to remind an actor of his or her cue: whoever recites the rhyming couplet knows it is also a cue to step offstage, and the next actor knows it is a cue to come onstage and begin speaking. I’ve created an exercise, which I view as more of a fun game, to help with listening for and responding to cues. The exercise is as follows:

- 1) Establish a “Lead Actor/Actress.” This person will be reading lines of dialogue from the script aloud to the class. This person will need to lead the exercise in a standing position.
- 2) The rest of the class will act as “The Company.” The group may remain sitting in the beginning.
- 3) The Lead Actress will select a passage from the play and reading. The Company will need to listen very closely. When The Company hears a rhyming couplet at the end of a monologue or section of text, the members of The Company should stand and recite the line, “Shakespeare is easy.”

This game can be played with a full classroom or as few as two people and should help with listening and understanding both onstage and in the classroom, not to mention that it can serve as a fun refresher for a class studying Shakespeare’s plays.

Of course, there can be difficulties with the rhyming cue idea. A *Midsummer Night’s Dream* is filled with rhyme—both from the fairies

and the Athenians—and not always to signal a change in speaker. This can be a bit confusing at first, but, with practice, it should become evident when a rhyme is used to signify the end of a monologue. Of course, an obvious sign that there has been a misunderstanding is the awkward silence which comes after the delivery of said monologue and before The Company picks up its cue, but the more the game is played the quicker the cues will be spotted and picked up.

The Dramaturg's Note

by Rebecca Weaver

“More strange than true: I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.”
(*Midsummer*, 5.1.2-9)

Our imagination allows us to fight monsters on the raging seas, hunt for hidden treasures on lost islands, or travel through space – the final frontier. Fairies, monsters, and magical potions were part of our reality as children. Where does that sense of imagination, of play, disappear to when we begin to grow up? When does fantasy dissolve into reality, where our sole focus is on work and responsibilities? Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* invites us to relive our childhood, to remember those days when we could run off into the forest and be caught up in the affairs of fairy creatures. As today's society does, Shakespeare's relied heavily on imagination, which was necessary in understanding, creating, and inventing. However, as Theseus suggests, imagination combined with passion, more often than not, overrules reason and can lead to misplaced love and mistaken identity. Such erring, however, can also make way for new possibilities.

In the midst of COVID-19, we have faced an onslaught of trauma and grief, often with no way of softening the blow. This global pandemic has forced children to grow up quicker than they should, and the pleasures of childhood have been replaced with grim statistics and mask mandates. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* pits the real against the imagined and reason against passion. Our co-directors, Dr. Michael Boynton and Gregory Heathcock, have based their concept for our performance of this play on the idea that Shakespeare's characters are

searching for their childhoods again. The uptight, reason driven Athenians have forgotten what love, passion, and child-like wonder feels like. The lovers, led by passion, are forbidden – by law – from marrying anyone other than a spouse approved of by a father. The fairies, however, in order to get what they want – and to have a little fun – exercise their imagination and sense of playful chaos as they cause mischief and play pranks. In the end, it is the fairies who are responsible for fixing the turmoil in which the lovers begin this story. Their ability to apply child-like wonder, imagination, and play to the situations they are faced with allows them, and their victims, to examine things from a new perspective. In fact, it is Oberon’s passion (combined with Puck’s mischievousness) that allows Demetrius to fall in love with Helena, and thereby the lovers’ quarrel is righted.

Nevertheless, the question remains: what is the point of imagination if at the end of the day you find yourself facing, again, the reality of the world around you? On our first day of rehearsal, one of the first questions that we went around the room asking one another was, “what was your favorite childhood toy?” It sparked a sense of play, of nostalgia, and started conversations among us about the role which imagination played in our childhood. Even though some of us are well into our adulthood, we still remember our favorite childhood toy. We remember that sense of creativity and playfulness that toy gave us, despite the adult realities that now weigh down on us every day. This escape through memory, this ability to imagine, helps us through the hard times. Much like Theseus and Hippolyta, we sometimes need reminding of that child-like sense in order to make us see the bigger picture. After all, if we refuse to accept imagination and passion, reality may leave us resentful and alone – much like Egeus. In the end, one could argue that Shakespeare is fighting for society to recognize the importance of child-like curiosity because of its ability to see beyond reason and tragedy. So, friends, let us lend our eyes and ears to the playfulness we have constructed here. For if we have some earned luck, perhaps this experience will show us a new perspective, a way to find happiness, when facing the often tragic realities of our so-called adult world.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM ABRIDGED 2021

ACT I, SCENE I. Athens. The palace of THESEUS.

Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA

THESEUS

Fair Hippolyta, how slow this old moon wanes!
She lingers my desires.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night,
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;

THESEUS

Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
And won thy love, doing thee injuries;
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

Enter EGEUS, HERMIA, LYSANDER, and DEMETRIUS

EGEUS

Happy be Theseus, our renowned duke!

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus. What's the news with thee?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.
Stand forth, Lysander.
This man hath bewitch'd the bosom of my child.
Thou, thou, Lysander, hast interchanged love-tokens with my child;
With cunning hast thou turn'd her obedience,
which is due to me, to stubborn harshness.
My gracious duke,
If she will not here before your grace
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
Which shall be either to this gentleman,
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS

What say you, Hermia?
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

In himself he is;
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA

I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

THESEUS

Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA

I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS

Either to die the death or to live
A barren sister all your life.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires.
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun.

HERMIA

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
Unto his lordship.

THESEUS

Take time to pause, and by the next new moon,
The sealing day betwixt my love and me,
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius;
Or on Diana's altar to protest for single life.

DEMETRIUS

Relent, sweet Hermia; and Lysander, yield

Thy crazed title to my certain right.

LYSANDER

You have her father's love, Demetrius.
Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.

EGEUS

Scornful Lysander!
She is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER

I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possess'd; my love is more than his,
My fortunes every way as fairly rank'd
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Nedar's daughter Helena
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS

I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof.
Demetrius, Egeus; you shall go with me.
I have some private schooling for you both.
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else the law of Athens yields you up
To death, or to a vow of single life.
Come, my Hippolyta. What cheer, my love?

Exeunt all but LYSANDER and HERMIA

LYSANDER

Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;

HERMIA

If then true lovers have been ever crossed,
It stands as an edict in destiny.

LYSANDER

A good persuasion; therefore hear me, Hermia.
I have a widow aunt
And she hath no child:
From Athens is her house removed seven leagues.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee,
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us. If thou lov'st me, then
Steal forth thy father's house to-morrow night;
And in the wood there will I stay for thee.

HERMIA

My good Lysander!
I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER

Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.
Enter HELENA.

HERMIA

God speed, fair Helena! Whither away?

HELENA

Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!
Sickness is catching; O, were favour so!
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia; ere I go.
O teach me how you look, and with what art
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA

O that my prayers could such affection move!

HERMIA

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA

None but your beauty. Would that fault were mine!

HERMIA

Take comfort: he no more shall see my face.
Lysander and myself will fly this place.

LYSANDER

Helena, to you our minds we will unfold.
To-morrow night, when fairies oft behold
The time that lovers' flights are then concealed,
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

HERMIA

And in the wood,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet;
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes.
Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us,
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius!
Keep word, Lysander. We must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

LYSANDER

I will, my Hermia.

Exit HERMIA.

Helena, adieu:
As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

Exit LYSANDER.

HELENA

How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she,
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
He will not know what all but he do know.
Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,

So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.
For ere Demetrius look'd on Hermia's eyes,
He hail'd down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he to-morrow night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense:
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

Exit HELENA.

ACT I, SCENE II. Athens. QUINCE'S house.

Enter QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT

QUINCE

Is all our company here?

BOTTOM

You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

QUINCE

Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit through all Athens to play in our interlude before the duke and the duchess, on his wedding-day at night.

BOTTOM

First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on; then read the names of the actors; and so grow to a point.

QUINCE

Marry, our play is, 'The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe.'

BOTTOM

A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.

QUINCE

Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver?

BOTTOM

Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE

You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM

What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE

A lover that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM

That will ask some tears in the true performing
of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I
will move storms; I will condole in some measure.
To the rest yet, my chief humour is for a tyrant.
I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to
make all split.

The raging rocks

And shivering shocks

Shall break the locks

Of prison gates,

And Phibbus' car

Shall shine from far,

And make and mar

The foolish Fates.

This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players. This
is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein. A lover is more
condoling.

QUINCE

Francis Flute, the bellows-mender?

FLUTE

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.

FLUTE

What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?

QUINCE

It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE

Nay, faith, let me not play a woman. I have a beard coming.

QUINCE

That's all one. You shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM

If I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: 'Thisne, Thisne!' – 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!'

QUINCE

No, no. You must play Pyramus; and Flute, you Thisbe.

BOTTOM

Well, proceed.

QUINCE

Tom Snout, the tinker?
You, Pyramus' father; myself, Thisbe's father;
Snug, the joiner, you the lion's part; and I hope here is a play fitted.

SNUG

Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE

You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM

Let me play the lion too. I will roar that I will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the duke say 'Let him roar again, let him roar again.'

QUINCE

If you should do it too terribly, you would fright the duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL

That would hang us, every mother's son.

BOTTOM

I grant you, friends, if you should fright
the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more
discretion but to hang us. But I will aggravate my
voice so, that I will roar you as gently as any sucking
dove; I will roar you as 'twere any nightingale.

QUINCE

You can play no part but Pyramus; for Pyramus is
a sweet-faced man, a proper man as one shall see in
a summer's day, a most lovely gentlemanlike man:
therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM

Well, I will undertake it.

QUINCE

Masters, here are your parts; and I request you to con them by to-morrow night
and meet me in the palace wood a mile without the town
by moonlight. There will we rehearse; for if we meet
in the city, we shall be dogged with company.
In the meantime, I will draw a bill of
properties, such as our play wants. I pray you, fail me
not.

BOTTOM

We will meet, and there we may rehearse most
obscenely and courageously. Take pains, be perfect.
Adieu.

QUINCE

At the duke's oak we meet.

BOTTOM

Enough. Hold, or cut bow-strings.

Exeunt.

ACT II, SCENE I. A wood near Athens.

Enter, from opposite sides, a FAIRY, and PUCK.

PUCK

How now, spirit, whither wander you?

FAIRY

I do wander everywhere
Swifter than the moon's sphere,
And I serve the Fairy Queen
To dew her orbs upon the green.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone.
Our queen and all her elves come here anon.

PUCK

The king doth keep his revels here to-night.
Take heed the queen come not within his sight;
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath
Because that she, as her attendant, hath
A lovely boy stolen, from an Indian king:
She never had so sweet a changeling.
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.
And now, they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,
But they do square, that all their elves, for fear,
Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

FAIRY

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call'd Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery?
Those that call you "sweet Puck,"
You do their work, and they shall have good luck.
Are not you he?

PUCK

Thou speak'st aright:
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
But, room, fairy! Here comes Oberon.

FAIRY

And here my mistress. Would that he were gone.

Enter, from one side, OBERON, with his train; from the other, TITANIA, with hers.

OBERON

Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

TITANIA

What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence.
I have forsworn his bed and company.

OBERON

Tarry, rash wanton. Am not I thy lord?

TITANIA

Then I must be thy lady;
Why art thou here, come from the farthest Steppe of India,
But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,
Your buskin'd mistress and your warrior love,
To Theseus must be wedded; and you come
To give their bed joy and prosperity.

OBERON

How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,
Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?

TITANIA

These are the forgeries of jealousy;
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
No night is now with hymn or carol blest.
And through this distemperature, we see
The seasons alter: the spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter change
Their wonted liveries; and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension:
We are their parents and original.

OBERON

Do you amend it then; it lies in you.
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
I do but beg a little changeling boy
To be my henchman.

TITANIA

Set your heart at rest.
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress of my order;
And in the spiced Indian air by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die,
And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
And for her sake, I will not part with him.

OBERON

How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA

Perchance till after Theseus' wedding-day.
If you will patiently dance in our round
And see our moonlight revels, go with us;
If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.

OBERON

Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

TITANIA

Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!
We shall chide downright if I longer stay.

Exit TITANIA with her train.

OBERON

Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury.
My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rst
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song?

PUCK

I remember.

OBERON

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth
Cupid, all arm'd. A certain aim he took
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.

It fell upon a little western flower.
The juice of it, on sleeping eye-lids laid,
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

PUCK

I'll put a girdle round about the earth
In forty minutes.

Exit PUCK.

OBERON

Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep
And 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.
And ere I take this charm from off her sight,
As I can take it with another herb,
I'll make her render up her page to me.
But who comes here? I am invisible,
And I will overhear their conference.

Enter DEMETRIUS, HELENA, following him.

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
The one I'll slay; the other slayeth me.
Thou told'st me they were stolen unto this wood;
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant;
Leave you your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?
Or rather do I not in plainest truth
Tell you I do not, nor I cannot love you?

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel, and Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.
Use me but as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you.

DEMETRIUS

You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not,
To trust the opportunity of night
And the ill counsel of a desert place
With the rich worth of your virginity.

HELENA

Your virtue is my privilege, for that
It is not night when I do see your face.
Therefore I think I am not in the night.

DEMETRIUS

I'll run from thee and hide me in the brakes,
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

HELENA

The wildest hath not such a heart as you.
Run when you will, the story shall be changed:
Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase.

DEMETRIUS

I will not stay thy questions. Let me go;
Or if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

HELENA

Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field
You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius!

Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex.
We cannot fight for love as men may do;
We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo.

Exit DEMETRIUS.

I'll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell,
To die upon the hand I love so well.

Exit HELENA.

OBERON

Fare thee well, nymph. Ere he do leave this grove,
Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love.

Re-enter PUCK.

Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

PUCK

Ay, there it is.

OBERON

I pray thee, give it me.
I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows.
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies.
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove:
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. Thou shalt know the man
By the Athenian garments he hath on.
Effect it with some care, that he may prove
More fond on her, than she upon her love:
And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

PUCK

Fear not, my lord; your servant shall do so.

Exeunt.

ACT II, SCENE II. Another part of the wood.

Enter TITANIA, with her train

TITANIA

Come, now a roundel and a fairy song;
Sing me now asleep;
Then to your offices, and let me rest.

FAIRIES

(Sing.)

Lulla, lulla, lullaby; lulla, lulla, lullaby.
Never harm, nor spell, nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh.
So good night, with lullaby.
Weaving spiders, come not here –
Hence, you long-legg'd spinners, hence!
Beetles black, approach not near,
Worm nor snail do no offence.

Exeunt Fairies. TITANIA sleeps.

Enter OBERON and squeezes the flower on TITANIA's eyelids.

OBERON

What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take;
Love and languish for his sake.
Be it cat, or boar with bristled hair
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.
Wake when some vile thing is near.

Exit OBERON. Enter LYSANDER and HERMIA.

LYSANDER

Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood,
And to speak troth, I have forgot our way.
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.

HERMIA

Be it so, Lysander. Find you out a bed,
For I upon this bank will rest my head.

LYSANDER

One turf shall serve as pillow for us both,
One heart, one bed, two bosoms and one troth.

HERMIA

Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,
Lie further off yet. Do not lie so near.

LYSANDER

O take the sense, sweet, of my innocence:
Love takes the meaning in love's conference.
I mean that my heart unto yours is knit
So that but one heart we can make of it:
No bed-room me deny;
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

HERMIA

Lysander riddles very prettily.
Lie further off, in human modesty:
Such separation as may well be said
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid,
So far be distant, and good night, sweet friend.
Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end!

LYSANDER

Amen, amen, to that fair prayer say I,
And then end life, when I end loyalty!
Here is my bed; sleep give thee all his rest!

HERMIA

With half that wish the wisher's eyes be
press'd!

They sleep. Enter PUCK.

PUCK

Through the forest have I gone.
But Athenian found I none
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower's force in stirring love.
Night and silence – who is here?
Weeds of Athens he doth wear.
This is he, my master said,
Despised the Athenian maid;
And here the maiden, sleeping sound

On the dank and dirty ground.
Pretty soul, she durst not lie
Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.
Churl, upon thy eyes I throw
All the power this charm doth owe.
When thou wak'st, let love forbid
Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.
So awake, when I am gone;
For I must now to Oberon.

Exit PUCK. Enter DEMETRIUS and HELENA, running.

HELENA

Stay, though thou kill me, sweet Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS

I charge thee, hence, and do not haunt me thus.
Exit DEMETRIUS.

HELENA

O, I am out of breath in this fond chase!
The more my prayer, the lesser is my grace.
Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies,
For she hath blessed and attractive eyes.
How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears;
If so, my eyes are oftener wash'd than hers.
No, no: I am as ugly as a bear,
For beasts that meet me run away for fear;
But who is here? Lysander, on the ground!
Dead, or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.
Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.

LYSANDER

[*Awaking*]
And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake.
Transparent Helena, nature shows art,
That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.
Where is Demetrius? O, how fit a word
Is that vile name to perish on my sword!

HELENA

Do not say so, Lysander, say not so
What though he love your Hermia? Lord, what though?
Yet Hermia still loves you; then be content.

LYSANDER

Content with Hermia? No, I do repent
The tedious minutes I with her have spent.
Not Hermia, but Helena I love.
Who will not change a raven for a dove?

HELENA

Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born?
When at your hands did I deserve this scorn?
Is't not enough, is't not enough, young man,
That I did never, no nor never can
Deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye,
But you must flout my insufficiency?
O that a lady of one man refused.
Should of another therefore be abused!

Exit HELENA.

LYSANDER

She sees not Hermia. Hermia, sleep thou there,
And never mayst thou come Lysander near!
And all my powers, address your love and might
To honour Helena, and to be her knight!

Exit LYSANDER.

HERMIA

[*Awaking*]

Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.
Lysander – what, removed? Lysander! Lord –
What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?
No, then I well perceive you all not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately.

Exit.

ACT III, SCENE I. The wood.

TITANIA lying asleep. Enter QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, and SNOUT.

BOTTOM

Are we all met?

QUINCE

Here's a marvellous convenient
Place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our
stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring-house; and we
will do it in action as we will do it before the duke.

BOTTOM

Peter Quince, --

QUINCE

What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM

There are things in this comedy of Pyramus
and Thisbe that will never please. First, Pyramus must
draw a sword to kill himself, which the ladies cannot
abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT

I believe we must leave the killing out,
when all is done.

BOTTOM

Not a whit: I have a device to make all well.
Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say
we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus
is not killed indeed; and for the more better assurance,
tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom
the weaver. This will put them out of fear.

QUINCE

Well, we will have such a prologue.

FLUTE

Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

SNOUT

I fear it, I promise you.

BOTTOM

Masters, you ought to consider with yourself: to

bring in – God shield us! – a lion among ladies, is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living, and we ought to look to 't.

SNOUT

Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM

Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck, and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect: 'Ladies,' or 'Fair-ladies, I would wish you,' or 'I would request you,' or 'I would entreat you, not to fear, not to tremble: my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing. I am a man as other men are.' And there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner.

QUINCE

Well, it shall be so. But there is two hard things: that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber; for you know Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight.

BOTTOM

Why, then may you leave a casement of the great chamber window, where we play, open; and the moon may shine in at the casement.

QUINCE

Ay, or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern, and say he comes to disfigure or to present, the person of Moonshine. Then there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber; for Pyramus and Thisbe, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

FLUTE

You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM

Some man or other must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some roughcast about him, to signify Wall; and let him hold

his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus
and Thisbe whisper.

QUINCE

If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down
every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. Pyramus,
you begin. When you have spoken your speech,
enter into that brake; and so every one according to
his cue.

Enter PUCK behind.

PUCK

What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here,
So near the cradle of the Fairy Queen?
What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor;
An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

QUINCE

Speak, Pyramus. Thisbe, stand forth.

BOTTOM

Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet --

QUINCE

Odours, odours.

BOTTOM

-- odours savours sweet.
So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.
But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile,
And by and by I will to thee appear.
Exit BOTTOM.

PUCK

...A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here.

Exit PUCK.

FLUTE

Must I speak now?

QUINCE

Ay, marry, must you. For you must understand
he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come
again.

FLUTE

Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
Of colour like the red rose on triumphant brier,
As true as truest horse that yet would never tire,
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

QUINCE

'Ninus' tomb,' man. Why, you must not speak
that yet. That you answer to Pyramus. You speak all
your part at once, cues and all. Pyramus, enter; your
cue is past. It is, 'never tire.'

FLUTE

O, --

As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.

Re-enter PUCK, and BOTTOM with an ass's head.

BOTTOM

If I were, fair Thisbe, I were only thine.

QUINCE

O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray,
masters; fly, masters! Help!

Exeunt QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, and SNOUT.

BOTTOM

Why do they run away? This is a knavery of
them to make me afeard.

Re-enter SNOUT.

SNOUT

O Bottom, thou art changed! What do I see
on thee?

BOTTOM

What do you see? You see an ass-head of your
own, do you?

Exit SNOUT. Re-enter QUINCE.

QUINCE

Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art

translated.

Exit QUINCE.

BOTTOM

I see their knavery. This is to make an ass of me, to fright me if they could; but I will not stir from this place, do what they can. I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

BOTTOM sings.

The finch, the sparrow and the lark,
The plainsong cuckoo gray.

TITANIA

[*Awaking*] What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

BOTTOM

(Sings.)

Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay--

TITANIA

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:
Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note.
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape,
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM

Methinks, mistress, you should have little
reason for that. And yet to say the truth, reason and
love keep little company together nowadays.

TITANIA

Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

BOTTOM

Not so neither; but if I had wit enough to get out
of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.

TITANIA

Out of this wood do not desire to go.

Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.
I am a spirit of no common rate:
The summer still doth tend upon my state,
And I do love thee; therefore go with me.
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so,
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.
Peaseblossom! Cobweb! and Mustardseed!

PEASEBLOSSOM

Ready.

COBWEB

And I.

MUSTARDSEED

And I.

ALL

Where shall we go?

TITANIA

Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.
Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes.
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs and mulberries.
The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
And for night-tapers, crop their waxen thighs
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
To have my love to bed and to arise;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.

PEASEBLOSSOM

Hail, mortal!

COBWEB

Hail!

MUSTARDSEED

Hail!

TITANIA

Come, wait upon him; lead him to my bower.
Tie up my love's tongue, bring him silently.

Exeunt.

ACT III, SCENE II. Another part of the wood.

Enter OBERON and then enter PUCK.

OBERON

I wonder if Titania be awaked;
Then what it was that next came in her eye.
Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spirit?

PUCK

My mistress with a monster is in love.
Near to her close and consecrated bower,
While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,
The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort,
Who Pyramus presented in their sport,
Forsook his scene and entered in a brake,
When I did him at this advantage take:
An ass's nole I fixed on his head.
And forth my mimic comes. When they him spy –
Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky.
Their sense, thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,
Made senseless things begin to do them wrong;
I led them on in this distracted fear,
And left sweet Pyramus translated there;
When in that moment, so it came to pass,
Titania waked and straightaway loved an ass.

OBERON

This falls out better than I could devise.
But hast thou yet latch'd the Athenian's eyes
With the love-juice, as I did bid thee do?

PUCK

I took him sleeping -- that is finish'd too, --
And the Athenian woman by his side,
That when he waked, of force she must be eyed.

Enter HERMIA and DEMETRIUS.

OBERON

Stand close. This is the same Athenian.

PUCK

This is the woman, but not this the man.

DEMETRIUS

O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe.

HERMIA

If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
plunge in the deep and kill me too.
It cannot be but thou hast murder'd him.
So should a murderer look: so dead, so grim.

DEMETRIUS

So should the murder'd look, and so should I,
Pierced through the heart with your stern cruelty.

HERMIA

What's this to my Lysander? Where is he?
Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?

DEMETRIUS

I had rather give his carcass to my hounds.

HERMIA

Out, dog, out, cur! Thou drivest me past the bounds
Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him then?
Henceforth be never number'd among men!

DEMETRIUS

I am not guilty of Lysander's blood,
Nor is he dead, for aught that I can tell.

HERMIA

I pray thee, tell me then that he is well.

DEMETRIUS

And if I could, what should I get therefore?

HERMIA

A privilege never to see me more.
And from thy hated presence part I so.
See me no more, whether he be dead or no.

Exit HERMIA.

DEMETRIUS

There is no following her in this fierce vein;
Here, therefore, for a while I will remain.

DEMETRIUS lies down and sleeps.

OBERON

What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite,
And laid the love-juice on some true love's sight.
About the wood go swifter than the wind,
And Helena of Athens look thou find.
By some illusion see thou bring her here.
I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.

PUCK

I go, I go, look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.

Exit PUCK.

OBERON

Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with Cupid's archery,
Sink in apple of his eye.
When his love he doth espy,
And thou wak'st, if she be by,
Beg of her for remedy.

Re-enter PUCK.

PUCK

Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand,
And the youth mistook by me
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

OBERON

Stand aside. The noise they make
Will cause Demetrius to awake.

Enter LYSANDER and HELENA.

LYSANDER

Why should you think that I should woo in scorn?
Look when I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
In their nativity all truth appears.

HELENA

You do advance your cunning more and more.
These vows are Hermia's: will you give her o'er?

LYSANDER

I had no judgment when to her I swore.

HELENA

Nor none, in my mind, now you give her o'er.

LYSANDER

Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you.

DEMETRIUS

[Awaking]

O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!
To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!

HELENA

O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent
To set against me for your merriment.
If you were civil and knew courtesy,
You would not do me thus much injury.
Can you not hate me, as I know you do,
But you must join in souls to mock me too?
If you were men, as men you are in show,
You would not use a gentle lady so,
To vow and swear and superpraise my parts
When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.
You both are rivals, and love Hermia,
And now both rivals to mock Helena.
A trim exploit, a manly enterprise,
To conjure tears up in a poor maid's eyes.

LYSANDER

You are unkind, Demetrius; be not so,
For you love Hermia: this you know I know.
And here with all good will, with all my heart,
In Hermia's love I yield you up my part;
And yours of Helena to me bequeath,
Whom I do love, and will do till my death.

HELENA

Never did mockers waste more idle breath.

DEMETRIUS

Lysander, keep thy Hermia; I will none.
If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.

LYSANDER

Helena, it is not so.

DEMETRIUS

Look, where thy love come: yonder is thy dear.

Re-enter HERMIA.

HERMIA

Lysander, why didst thou leave me so?

LYSANDER

Why should he stay, whom love doth press to go?

HERMIA

What love could press Lysander from my side?

LYSANDER

Lysander's love, that would not let him bide:
Fair Helena, who more engilds the night
Than all you fiery oes and eyes of light.
Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know,
The hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?

HERMIA

You speak not as you think. It cannot be.

HELENA

Lo, she is one of this confederacy!
Now I perceive, they have conjoin'd all three
To fashion this false sport in spite of me.
Injurious Hermia! most ungrateful maid!
Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
To bait me with this foul derision?
Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For parting us -- O, is all forgot?

All schooldays' friendship, childhood innocence?
And will you rent our ancient love asunder,
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?
It is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly.
Our sex, as well as I, may chide you for it,
Though I alone do feel the injury.

HERMIA

I am amazed at your passionate words.
I scorn you not; it seems that you scorn me.

HELENA

Have you not set Lysander, as in scorn,
To follow me and praise my eyes and face?
And made your other love Demetrius,
Who even but now did spurn me with his foot,
To call me goddess, nymph, divine and rare,
Precious, celestial? Wherefore speaks he this
To her he hates? And wherefore doth Lysander
Deny your love, so rich within his soul,
And tender me, forsooth, affection,
But by your setting on, by your consent?

HERMIA

I understand not what you mean by this.

HELENA

Ay, do, persèver, counterfeit sad looks,
Make mouths upon me when I turn my back,
Wink each at other, hold the sweet jest up.
If you have any pity, grace or manners,
You would not make me such an argument.
But fare ye well. 'Tis partly my own fault,
Which death or absence soon shall remedy.

LYSANDER

Stay, gentle Helena; hear my excuse,
My love, my life my soul, fair Helena!

HELENA

O excellent!

HERMIA

Sweet, do not scorn her so.

LYSANDER

Helena, I love thee, by my life I do.
I swear by that which I will lose for thee
To prove him false that says I love thee not.

DEMETRIUS

I say, I love thee more than he can do.

LYSANDER

If thou say so, withdraw, and prove it too.

DEMETRIUS

Quick, come!

HERMIA

Lysander, whereto tends all this?

LYSANDER

Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing let loose,
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!

HERMIA

Why are you grown so rude? What change is this?
Sweet love, --

LYSANDER

Thy love! Out, tawny Tartar, out!
Out, loathed medicine; O hated potion, hence!

HERMIA

Do you not jest?

HELENA

Yes, sooth, and so do you.

LYSANDER

Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.

DEMETRIUS

I would I had your bond; for I perceive
A weak bond holds you. I'll not trust your word.

LYSANDER

What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead?
Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.

HERMIA

What, can you do me greater harm than hate?
Hate me! Wherefore? O me! What news, my love!
Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.
Since night you loved me, yet since night you left me.
Why, then you left me -- O, the gods forbid! --
In earnest, shall I say?

LYSANDER

Ay, by my life,
And never did desire to see thee more.
Therefore be out of hope, of question, of doubt;
Be certain, nothing truer: 'tis no jest
That I do hate thee, and love Helena.

HERMIA

O me! You juggler! You canker-blossom!
You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stolen my love's heart from him?

HELENA

Fine, i'faith!
Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie! You counterfeit, you puppet, you!

HERMIA

Puppet? why so? Aye, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures: she hath urged her height,
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevail'd with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak,
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

HELENA

I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me. I was never curst;
I have no gift at all in shrewishness.
You perhaps may think
Because she is something lower than myself,
That I can match her.

HERMIA

Lower! Hark, again.

HELENA

Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
I evermore did love you, Hermia.
Did ever keep your counsels, never wrong'd you.
And now, so you will let me quiet go,
To Athens will I bear my folly back,
And follow you no further. Let me go.
You see how simple and how fond I am.

HERMIA

Why, get you gone. Who is't that hinders you?

HELENA

A foolish heart, that I leave here behind.

HERMIA

What, with Lysander?

HELENA

With Demetrius.

LYSANDER

Be not afraid. She shall not harm thee, Helena.

DEMETRIUS

No, sir, she shall not, though you take her part.

HELENA

O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd!
She was a vixen when she went to school;
And though she be but little, she is fierce.

HERMIA

'Little' again! Nothing but 'low' and 'little'!
Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?
Let me come to her.

LYSANDER

Get you gone, you dwarf,
You minimus, of hindering knot-grass made,
You bead, you acorn.

DEMETRIUS

You are too officious
In her behalf that scorns your services.

LYSANDER

Now she holds me not.
Now follow, if thou darest, to try whose right,
Of thine or mine, is most in Helena.

DEMETRIUS

Follow? Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl.

Exeunt LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS.

HERMIA

You, mistress, all this coil is due to you:
Nay, go not back.

HELENA

I will not trust you, I,
Nor longer stay in your curst company.
Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray;
My legs are longer, though, to run away.

Exit HELENA.

HERMIA

I am amazed, and know not what to say.

Exit HERMIA.

OBERON

This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak'st,
Or else committ'st thy knaveries wilfully.

PUCK

Believe me, king of shadows, I mistook.
Did not you tell me I should know the man
By the Athenian garments he had on?
And so far am I glad it so did sort,
As this their jangling I esteem a sport.

OBERON

Hie therefore, Robin, overcast the sky;
Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye,
To take from thence all error with his might,

And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.
Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy;
And then I will her charmed eye release
From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.

Exit OBERON.

PUCK

Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down.
I am fear'd in field and town.
Goblin, lead them up and down.

Re-enter LYSANDER.

LYSANDER

Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now.

PUCK

Here, villain, drawn and ready. Where art thou?

Exit LYSANDER, as following the voice Re-enter DEMETRIUS.

DEMETRIUS

Lysander!
Thou coward, art thou fled?
Speak! In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

PUCK

Come, recreant, come, thou child.

DEMETRIUS

Yea, art thou there?

PUCK

Follow my voice. We'll try no manhood here.

Exeunt PUCK.

Re-enter LYSANDER.

LYSANDER

He goes before me, and still dares me on;
When I come where he calls, then he is gone.
Now fallen am I in dark uneven way,

And here will rest me.

Lies down.

Come, thou gentle day!

Sleeps.

DEMETRIUS

Thou runn'st before me, shifting every place,
And dar'st not stand nor look me in the face.

PUCK

Come hither. I am here.

DEMETRIUS

Now go thy way.
I'll measure out my length on this cold bed.

Lies down and sleeps.

Re-enter HELENA.

HELENA

O weary night, O long and tedious night,
Abate thy hours!
That I may back to Athens by daylight.

Lies down and sleeps.

PUCK

Yet but three? Come one more.
Two of both kinds make up four.
Here she comes, curst and sad.
Cupid is a knavish lad,
Thus to make poor females mad.

Re-enter HERMIA.

HERMIA

Bedabbled with the dew, and torn with briers,
My legs can keep no pace with my desires.
Here will I rest me till the break of day.
Heavens shield Lysander, if they mean a fray!

Lies down and sleeps.

PUCK

On the ground
Sleep sound.
I'll apply
To your eye,
Gentle lover, remedy.

Squeezing the juice on LYSANDER's eyes.

When thou wak'st,
Thou tak'st
True delight
In the sight
Of thy former lady's eye;
And the country proverb known,
In your waking shall be shown.
Jack shall have Jill,
Nought shall go ill,
Each mate shall have their mate again, and all shall be well.

Exit PUCK.

ACT IV, SCENE I. The Woods.

TITANIA

Come sit thee down upon this flowery bed
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

BOTTOM

Where's Peaseblossom?

PEASEBLOSSOM

Ready.

BOTTOM

Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Monsieur Mustardseed?

MUSTARDSEED

What's your will?

BOTTOM

Nothing, good Monsieur, but to help Cavalier Cobweb to scratch.

TITANIA

Oh say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat.

BOTTOM

Truly, I could munch your
good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a
bottle of hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow.
But I pray you, let none of your people stir me.
I have an exposition of sleep come upon me.

TITANIA

Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.
Fairies, be gone, and be always away.

Exeunt fairies.

So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.
O how I love thee! How I dote on thee!

They sleep. Enter PUCK and OBERON.

OBERON

[Advancing]

See'st thou this sweet sight?
Her dotage now I do begin to pity.
For meeting her of late behind the wood,
When I had at my pleasure taunted her,
And she, in mild terms, begged my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child,
Which straight she gave to me.
And now I have the boy, I will undo
This hateful imperfection of her eyes.
And gentle Puck, take this transformed scalp
From off the head of this Athenian swain,
That he may think no more of this night's accidents
But as the fierce vexation of a dream.
But first I will release the Fairy Queen.
Now, my Titania, wake you.

TITANIA

My Oberon, what visions have I seen!
Methought I was enamour'd of an ass.

OBERON

There lies your love.

TITANIA

How came these things to pass?
O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!

PUCK

Fairy king, attend and mark:
I do hear the morning lark.

TITANIA

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.

BOTTOM

[Awaking]

When my cue comes, call me, and I will
Answer. My next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.' Heigh-ho!
Peter Quince? Flute, the bellows-mender? Snout, the
tinker? Stolen hence, and left me asleep! 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 to expound this dream. Methought
I was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I
was -- and methought I had – but
man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what
methought I had. 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.

Exit BOTTOM. Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS, and train.

THESEUS

Go one of you, find out the forester;
My love shall hear the music of my hounds.

HIPPOLYTA

I was with Hercules and Cadmus once

When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear
With Hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding;
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

THESEUS

My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind.
But soft: what nymphs are these?

EGEUS

My lord, this is my daughter here asleep,
And this Lysander, this Demetrius is,
This Helena,
I wonder of their being here together.

THESEUS

No doubt they rose up early, to observe
The rite of May;
But speak, Egeus, is not this the day
That Hermia should give answer of her choice?

EGEUS

It is, my lord.

THESEUS

Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine is past:

LYSANDER

Pardon, my lord.

THESEUS

I pray you all, stand up.
I know you two are rival enemies.
How comes this gentle concord in the world,
To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity?

LYSANDER

My lord, I shall reply amazedly,
I cannot truly say how I came here.
I came with Hermia hither. Our intent
Was to be gone from Athens, where we might
Without the peril of the Athenian law –

EGEUS

Enough, enough, my lord; you have enough.

I beg the law, the law, upon his head.

DEMETRIUS

My lord, fair Helena told me of their stealth,
Of this their purpose hither to this wood,
And I in fury hither follow'd them,
Fair Helena in fancy following me.
But my good lord, I wot not by what power –
But by some power it is – my love to Hermia,
Melted as the snow.
And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helena.
Now I do wish her, love her, long for her,
And will for evermore be true to her.

THESEUS

Fair lovers, you are fortunately met.
Egeus, I will overbear your will;
For in the temple, by and by, with us,
These couples shall eternally be knit.
Away with us to Athens. Three and three,
We'll hold a feast in great solemnity.
Come, Hippolyta.

Exeunt THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS, and train.

DEMETRIUS

Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream. Do not you think
The duke was here, and bid us follow him?

HERMIA

Yea; and my father.

HELENA

And Hippolyta.

LYSANDER

And he did bid us follow to the temple.

DEMETRIUS

Why then, we are awake. Let's follow him,
And by the way let us recount our dreams.

Exeunt.

ACT IV, SCENE II. Athens. QUINCE'S house.

Enter QUINCE, then FLUTE, SNOUT, and SNUG.

QUINCE

Have you sent to Bottom's house? Is he come home yet?

SNOUT

He cannot be heard of. Out of doubt he is transported.

FLUTE

If he come not, then the play is marred.

Enter BOTTOM.

BOTTOM

Where are these lads? Where are these hearts?

QUINCE

Bottom! O most courageous day! O most happy hour!

BOTTOM

Masters, I am to discourse wonders; but ask me not what. For if I tell you, I am no true Athenian. All that I will tell you is that the duke hath dined. Get your apparel together. Meet presently at the palace, every man look o'er his part; for the short and long is, our play is preferred.

Exeunt.

ACT V, SCENE I. Athens. The palace of THESEUS.

Enter THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA.

HIPPOLYTA

'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

THESEUS

More strange than true. I never may believe

These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.

HIPPOLYTA

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images
And grows to something of great constancy,
But howsoever strange and admirable.

Enter LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HERMIA, and HELENA

THESEUS

Come now, Is there no play
To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?

ENTER PHILOSTRATE.

PHILOSTRATE

A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as brief as I have known a play.
But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
For in all the play there is not one word
Apt, one player fitted.

THESEUS

What are they that do play it?

PHILOSTRATE hands THESEUS a note.

PHILOSTRATE

Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
Which never labour'd in their minds till now.

THESEUS

'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus
And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth.'
Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?
That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow.

PHILOSTRATE

It is not for you: I have heard it over,

And it is nothing, nothing in the world.

THESEUS

I will hear that play;
For never anything can be amiss
When simpleness and duty tender it.
Go bring them in.
Exit PHILOSTRATE.

HIPPOLYTA

I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,
And duty in his service perishing.

THESEUS

Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.

HIPPOLYTA

He says they can do nothing in this kind.

THESEUS

The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake.
And what poor duty cannot do,
Noble respect takes it in might, not merit.
And in the modesty of fearful duty,
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
In least speak most, to my capacity.

Enter Pyramus and Thisbe, Wall, and Lion.

QUINCE - Prologue:

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;
But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.
This man is Pyramus, if you would know.
This beauteous lady Thisbe is certain.
This man, with lime and roughcast, doth present
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder,
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
To whisper; at the which let no man wonder.
This man, with lantern, dog and bush of thorn,
Presenteth Moonshine.
By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn
To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.
This grisly beast, which Lion called by name,

The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,
Did scare away, or rather did affright;
And as she fled, her mantle she did fall,
Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,
And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain;
Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broach'd his boiling bloody breast,
And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,
His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,
Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall and lovers twain
At large discourse, while here they do remain.

Exeunt Prologue, Thisbe, and Lion.

THESEUS

I wonder if the lion be to speak.

HIPPOLYTA

No wonder, my lord. One lion may, when
many asses do.

SNOUT - Wall

In this same interlude it doth befall
That I, one Snout by name, present a Wall;
And such a wall, as I would have you think,
That had in it a crannied hole or chink,
Through which the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe
Did whisper often, very secretly.

HIPPOLYTA

It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard
discourse, my lord.

THESEUS

Pyramus draws near the wall: silence.

Enter Pyramus

BOTTOM - Pyramus

O grim-look'd night! O night with hue so black!
O night, which ever art when day is not!
O night, O night! alack, alack, alack,
I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot!
And thou, O wall, O sweet, O lovely wall,
That stand'st between her father's ground and mine!

Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely Wall,
Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne!

Wall holds up his fingers.

Thanks, courteous Wall. Jove shield thee well for this!
But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.
O wicked Wall, through whom I see no bliss!
Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!

THESEUS

The wall, methinks, being sensible, should curse again.

BOTTOM - Pyramus

No, in truth, sir, he should not. 'Deceiving me'
is Thisbe's cue. She is to enter now, and I am to spy
her through the wall. You shall see, it will fall
pat as I told you: yonder she comes.

Enter Thisbe

FLUTE - Thisbe

O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!
My cherry lips have often kiss'd thy stones,
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.

BOTTOM - Pyramus

I see a voice. Now will I to the chink,
To spy if I can hear my Thisbe's face.
Thisbe?

FLUTE - Thisbe

My love thou art, my love I think.

BOTTOM - Pyramus

Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace;
O kiss me through the hole of this vile Wall!

FLUTE - Thisbe

I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.

BOTTOM - Pyramus

Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?

FLUTE - Thisbe

Come life, come death, I come without delay.

Exeunt Pyramus and Thisbe. Exit Wall.

HIPPOLYTA

This is the silliest stuff that e'er I heard.

THESEUS

The best in this kind are but shadows; and the
Worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

HIPPOLYTA

It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs.

Enter Lion and Moonshine.

SNUG - Lion

You, ladies, you whose gentle hearts do fear
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am
No lion fell, nor else no lion's dam.
For if I should, as Lion, come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.

THESEUS

A very gentle beast, of a good conscience.

HIPPOLYTA

The very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.

THESEUS

Let us listen to the moon.

SNOUT - Moonshine

All that I have to say is to tell you that the
lantern is the moon, I the man in the moon, this thorn-
bush, my thorn-bush, and this dog, my dog.

Enter Thisbe.

FLUTE - Thisbe

This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?

SNUG - Lion

[Roaring]
Oh—

Thisbe runs off.

HIPPOLYTA
Well roared, Lion.

THESEUS
Well run, Thisbe.

HIPPOLYTA
Well shone, Moon. Truly, the moon shines
with a good grace.

The Lion shakes Thisbe's mantle, and exit.

THESEUS
Well moused, Lion.

HIPPOLYTA
And so the lion vanished.

THESEUS
And then came Pyramus.

Enter Pyramus.

BOTTOM - Pyramus
Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.
I thank thee, Moon, for shining now so bright.
For by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams,
I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight.
But stay, O spite!
But mark, poor knight,
What dreadful dole is here!
Eyes, do you see?
How can it be?
O dainty duck! O dear!
Thy mantle good,
What, stain'd with blood!
Approach, ye Furies fell!
O Fates, come, come,
Cut thread and thrum,
Quail, crush, conclude, and quell!

HIPPOLYTA

Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.

BOTTOM - Pyramus

O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame?
Since Lion vile hath here deflower'd my dear.
Come, tears, confound;
Out, sword, and wound
The pap of Pyramus:
Ay, that left pap,
Where heart doth hop.

Stabs himself.

Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.
Now am I dead,
Now am I fled;
My soul is in the sky.
Tongue, lose thy light.
Moon, take thy flight.

Exit Moonshine.

Now die, die, die, die, die.

Dies.

THESEUS

With the help of a surgeon, he might yet recover.

FLUTE - Thisbe

Asleep, my love?
What, dead, my dove?
O Pyramus, arise!
Speak, speak. Quite dumb?
Dead, dead? A tomb
Must cover thy sweet eyes.
These lilly lips,
This cherry nose,
Are gone, are gone:
Lovers, make moan.
His eyes were green as leeks.
O Sisters Three,
Come, come to me,
Tongue, not a word.

Come, trusty sword,
Come, blade, my breast imbrue:

Stabs herself.

And farewell, friends;
Thus Thisbe ends.
Adieu, adieu, adieu.

Dies.

THESEUS

Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

HIPPOLYTA

Ay, and Wall too.

BOTTOM

[Starting up]

No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted
their fathers. Will it please you to see the epilogue?

THESEUS

No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs
no excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all
dead, there needs none to be blamed.

HIPPOLYTA

Marry, if he that
writ it had played Pyramus and hanged himself in
Thisbe's garter, it would have been a fine tragedy; and
so it is truly, and very notably discharged.

THESEUS

The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve.

HIPPOLYTA

Lovers, 'tis almost fairy time.
I fear we shall outsleep the coming morn.
Sweet friends, to bed.
A fortnight hold we this solemnity,
In nightly revels and new jollity.
But come, your Bergomask.

THESEUS

Let your epilogue alone.

They dance. Enter PUCK.

PUCK

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends;
And Robin shall restore amends.