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RSC

A
MIDSUMMER
NIGHT'S
DREAM



William
Shakespeare

Edited by Jonathan Bate
and Eric Rasmussen



The RSC Shakespeare

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The RSC Shakespeare

William Shakespeare

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen

Introduction by Jonathan Bate



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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare is the poet of double vision. The father of twins, he was a mingler of comedy and tragedy, low life and high, prose and verse. He was a countryman who worked in the city, a teller of English folktales who was equally versed in the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome. His mind and world were poised between Catholicism and Protestantism, old feudal ways and new bourgeois ambitions, rational thinking and visceral instinct. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of his truly essential works because nowhere else is his double vision more apparent than in this play's movement between the city and the wood, day and night, reason and imagination, waking life and dream.

MAGICAL THINKING

Wood, night, imagination, dream. These are the coordinates of the second form of sight, which is best described as magical thinking. It is the mode of being that belongs to visionaries, astrologers, "wise women," and poets. It conjures up a world animated with energies and spirit forces; it finds correspondences between earthly things and divine. The eye that sees in this way rolls "in a fine frenzy," as Theseus says, glancing "from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." It "bodies forth / The forms of things unknown," "Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name."

Magical thinking answers a deep human need. It is a way of making sense of things that would otherwise seem painfully arbitrary—things like love and beauty. An ugly birthmark on a baby would be explained away by the suggestion that the infant might be a "changeling child," swapped in the cradle by some night-tripping fairy. The sheer chance involved in the process of what we now call sexual chemistry may be rationalized in the story of the magic properties of the juice of the flower called love-in-idleness. And in a world dependent on an agricultural economy, bad harvests were somehow more palatable if explained by the intervention of malicious sprites upon the vicissitudes of the weather.

In the age of candle and rushlight, nights were seriously dark. The night was accordingly imagined to be seriously different from the day.

The very fact of long hours of light itself conferred a kind of magic upon midsummer night. This is the night of the year when magical thinking is given full rein. For centuries, the summer solstice had been a festive occasion celebrated with bonfires, feasting, and merrymaking.

Theseus and Hippolyta never meet Oberon and Titania. In the original performance, the respective roles were likely to have been doubled. The contentious king and queen of fairies thus become the dark psychological doubles of the betrothed courtly couple. The correspondence inevitably calls into question the joy of the match between Athenian and Amazon. Oberon actually accuses Titania of having led Theseus “through the glimmering night” when he deserted “Perigenia whom he ravishèd,” of having made the day duke break faith with a succession of paramours. Shakespeare loves to set up an antithesis, then knock it down. Here he implies that there is ultimately no sharp distinction between day and night: the sexual ethics of Theseus are perhaps as dubious as those of the adulterous child-possessor Titania.

Authority figures, representatives of the day world of political power, win little sympathy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For the lovers, the forest may be a place of confused identity, but at least it is an escape from the patriarchal matchmaking of Egeus. In the audience, the characters with whom we engage most warmly are neither monarchs nor lords, but the mischief-making Robin Goodfellow and the ineffable weaver, Bottom. Each in his way is an embodiment of the theatrical spirit that animates everything that is most gloriously Shakespearean. Always a man of the theater, Shakespeare lives in a world of illusion and make-believe that hits at deepest truths; he knows that his world is fundamentally sympathetic to those other counter-worlds which we call dream and magic.

Robin the Puck compares the mortals to fools in a fond pageant: he has a right to think of himself as author of the play, since it is his dispensing of the love juice that fuels the plot. As for Bottom, at one level he is a bad actor. In both rehearsal and performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” it becomes clear that he does not really understand the rules of the theatrical game. But at a deeper level, he is a true dramatic genius: he is gifted with the child's grace to suspend his disbelief. As Pyramus, he puts up a pretty poor performance; as Ass, it is another matter. The comic deficiency of “Pyramus and Thisbe” is that the actors keep telling us that they *haven't* become

their characters. The Assification of Bottom is, by contrast, akin to those brilliant assumptions of disguise—Rosalind becoming Ganymede in *As You Like It*, Viola as Cesario in *Twelfth Night*—through which Shakespeare simultaneously reminds us that we are in the theater (an actor is always in disguise) and helps us to forget where we are (we willingly suspend our disbelief). In that forgetting, we participate in the mystery of magical thinking. With Bottom himself, we in the audience may say “I have had a most rare vision.”

Many members of Shakespeare’s original audience, steeped as they were in the New Testament, would have recognized Bottom’s account of his dream as an allusion—with the attributes of the different senses comically garbled—to a famous passage in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in which St. Paul says that the eye of man has not seen and the ear of man has not heard the glories that will await us when we enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Geneva translation of the Bible, which Shakespeare knew well, the passage speaks of how the human spirit searches “the bottom of God’s secrets.” Jesus said that in order to enter his kingdom, one had to make oneself as a child. The same may be said of the kingdom of theater. It is because Bottom has the uncynical, believing spirit of a child that he is vouchsafed his vision. At the same time, Shakespeare himself offers a dangerously grown-up image of what heaven might be like: the weaver may be innocent but the fairy queen is an embodiment of sexual experience. The “virgin queen” Elizabeth was also known as England’s “fairy queen” and the wood in which the action takes place, with its “nine men’s morris” and English wildflowers, is more domestic than Athenian, so there must have been an inherent political risk in the representation of a sexually voracious Titania. Shakespeare perhaps introduced Oberon’s apparent allusion to a chaste Elizabeth—the “fair vestal thronèd by the west”—in order to dismiss any identification of Titania with the real-life fairy queen who he knew would at some point be a spectator of the play.

METAMORPHOSIS

The comedy and the charm of the *Dream* depend on a certain fragility. Good comedy is tragedy narrowly averted, while fairy charm is only safe from sentimentality if attached to some potential for the grotesque. Fairies only deserve to be believed in when they have the capacity to be seriously unpleasant. Of course we laugh when Bottom

wears the head of an ass and makes love to a queen, but the image deliberately courts the suggestion of bestiality.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's favorite book and the source for the tale of "Pyramus and Thisbe," people are driven by bestial desires and are rewarded by being transformed into animals. In Shakespeare, the ass's head is worn in play, but it remains the closest thing in the drama of his age to an actual animal metamorphosis onstage.

Ovid was rational Rome's great counter-visionary, its magical thinker. His theme is transformation, the inevitability of change. Book fifteen of the *Metamorphoses* offers a philosophical discourse on the subject, mediated via the philosophy of Pythagoras. From here Shakespeare got many of those images of transience that roll through his Sonnets, but in the *Dream* he celebrates the transfiguring and enduring power of night vision, of second sight.

Night is the time for fantasy and for love, the time in which your wildest hopes may be indulged but your worst nightmares may have to be confronted. The action in the forest fills the space between the betrothal and the wedding celebration of Theseus and Hippolyta. For the young lovers it is also a time-between, the time, that is to say, of maturation, of discovering who they really are and whom they really love. When Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius emerge after a midsummer night's madness in the wood, they don't quite know what's happened: "Methinks I see these things with parted eye, / When everything seems double." And they're not all quite sure if they've finally gained the person they want: "And I have found Demetrius like a jewel, / Mine own and not mine own." But on reflection in the cold light of morning, the strangeness of the night has effected a material transformation, leading the lovers to a truer place than the one where they were at court the day before. Perhaps because she is herself a "stranger," an outsider in the "civilized" world of Athens, it is the Amazon queen Hippolyta who understands this best:

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.

THE FESTIVE WORLD

Shortly after the Second World War, the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye published a short essay that inaugurated the modern understanding that Shakespeare's comedies, for all their lightness and play, are serious works of art, every bit as worthy of close attention as his tragedies. Entitled "The Argument of Comedy," it proposed that the essential structure of Shakespearean comedy was ultimately derived from the "new comedy" of ancient Greece, which was mediated to the Renaissance via its Roman exponents Plautus and Terence. The "new comedy" pattern, described by Frye as "a comic Oedipus situation," turned on "the successful effort of a young man to outwit an opponent and possess the girl of his choice."^{*}

The girl's father, or some other authority figure of the older generation, resists the match, but is outflanked, often thanks to an ingenious scheme devised by a clever servant, perhaps involving disguise or flight (or both). Frye, writing during Hollywood's golden age, saw an unbroken line from the classics to Shakespeare to modern romantic comedy: "The average movie of today is a rigidly conventionalized New Comedy proceeding toward an act which, like death in Greek tragedy, takes place offstage, and is symbolized by the final embrace."

The union of the lovers brings "a renewed sense of social integration," expressed by some kind of festival at the climax of the play—a marriage, a dance, or a feast. All right-thinking people come over to the side of the lovers, but there are others "who are in some kind of mental bondage, who are helplessly driven by ruling passions, neurotic compulsions, social rituals, and selfishness." Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing*, Jaques in *As You Like It*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*: Shakespearean comedy frequently includes a party pooper, a figure who refuses to be assimilated into the harmony. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is his most joyous ending because there is no such figure here. At the outset, the fairies have been associated with chaos and disruption (mischief, rough weather, marital discord), but at the end they bring "blessing" and the restoring of "amends."

Even here, though, one might wonder in retrospect whether all has quite ended well. The closing song expresses the hope that the children of all three united couples will not suffer "the blots of Nature's hand," that they will not be marked by "hare-lip, nor scar"

nor any other ill-boding deformation. The very act of warding off such portents brings their possibility into play, and the mythologically literate audience member might recall that the child of Theseus and Hippolyta would be Hippolytus. Some disturbing associations then become apparent: the Theseus of ancient Greek myth would desert Hippolyta and marry Phaedra, sister of Ariadne (whom, as the play reminds us, he had earlier seduced and deserted, after she had assisted him with the thread that led him out of the labyrinth after he had slain the Minotaur). Phaedra would fall in love with her stepson Hippolytus, a young man more interested in hunting than women. She would falsely accuse him of raping her and then commit suicide. Blaming his son, Theseus would exile Hippolytus, who would promptly be thrown to his death when his horse ran wild with fear as a bull-like monster rose from the sea. That monster is a reminder of the Minotaur, the monster in the labyrinth with the head of a bull and the body of a man, who was the fruit of the perverted sexual union between a white bull sent by the sea god and Queen Pasiphaë, the mother of Ariadne and Phaedra.

Neither Hippolytus nor Phaedra is mentioned in the play. Yet the wish in the final fairy song for the issue of Theseus and Hippolyta to be “fortunate,” coupled with the play’s earlier enactment of the lovemaking between a queen and a beast (not to mention the reference to Theseus’ history as a serial seducer and deserter of women), means that the tragic history surrounding the mythological prototypes of the characters is not entirely absent. Seneca’s *Hippolytus* was one of the best-known classical tragedies in the sixteenth century and its hunting imagery seems to inform the play. As so often with Shakespeare, the context may be understood in diametrically opposed ways. Perhaps he is taking dark subject matter—violence, illicit desire, monstrous births—and transforming it into something life-affirming, emptying it of all sinister content, just as the play performed by Peter Quince and friends takes another tragic tale from classical mythology, that of Pyramus and Thisbe, and fills it with “mirth.” Or perhaps he is suggesting that, however joyous comedy’s climactic festivity may be, it offers only a momentary suspension of life’s complications. Midsummer night, May Day, Twelfth Night, the feast of fools in which for an evening the master becomes the servant and vice versa: these festive occasions are celebrations of life and social harmony, but they end in the knowledge that tomorrow we will have to go back to work, to the hierarchies and compromises of

everyday normality. “How shall we find the concord of this discord?” asks Theseus of the paradox whereby the play of Pyramus and Thisbe is both “merry and tragical.” Every production and every reading of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has to make a choice as to the extent to which the “discord” is still apparent behind the “concord” woven by the resolution of the plot.

Northrop Frye’s “The Argument of Comedy” pinpoints a pervasive structure: “the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.” But for Shakespeare, the green world, the forest and its fairies, is no less real than the court. Frye, again, sums it up brilliantly:

This world of fairies, dreams, disembodied souls, and pastoral lovers may not be a “real” world, but, if not, there is something equally illusory in the stumbling and blinded follies of the “normal” world, of Theseus’ Athens with its idiotic marriage law, of Duke Frederick and his melancholy tyranny [in *As You Like It*], of Leontes and his mad jealousy [in *The Winter’s Tale*], of the Court Party with their plots and intrigues. The famous speech of Prospero about the dream nature of reality applies equally to Milan and the enchanted island. We spend our lives partly in a waking world we call normal and partly in a dream world which we create out of our own desires. Shakespeare endows both worlds with equal imaginative power, brings them opposite one another, and makes each world seem unreal when seen by the light of the other.

“THE POET’S EYE ... THE POET’S PEN”

At the beginning of the final act, Theseus suggests that the dream world, which we may also call the green world, is illusory, “more strange than true,” a trick of the “strong imagination”:

More strange than true. I never may believe
These antic 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.
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 airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

Multiple ironies are at work here. Theseus himself is an “antic fable”—the adjective plays on “bizarre/grotesque” and “antique” (antiquated, belonging to a superannuated world of romance and mythology). And the play has suggested that fairies are not merely the invention of lunatics and lovers. Shakespeare's own loyalty must belong to “the poet's eye” and “the poet's pen” that keep company with the lunatic and the lover, the seething brain and the shaping fantasy. The language of poetry, like the art of the actor, is metamorphic: a play on words, a metaphor, an alliterative pairing, sends the imagination leaping from a bush to a bear.

Theseus regards poetry as mere artifice, and the language of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does indeed include many an artificial rhetorical elaboration, many a passage of highly wrought rhyme. Yet the very speech in which Theseus expresses his skepticism about poetry embodies not only the artifice it condemns (the balancing of “from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,” the slippage from “apprehend” to “comprehends”), but also a fluidity of movement—the run of the sentence structure across the line endings imposed by the metrical structure—that enacts the processes of mature thought, of what Theseus calls “cool reason.” *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy of simultaneous innocence and experience. Of all the plays, it is the one that offers most to a child's way of seeing, and which should be everybody's introduction to Shakespeare, preferably well

before the age of eleven. At the same time, it unleashes us into a world of desire that comes to the core of our adult humanity. And it is conceivably Shakespeare's most sophisticated meditation upon the power of theater and of poetry. It is an anatomy of the very imagination by which it is created. There's magic in the web.*

*"The Argument of Comedy," first published in *English Institute Essays 1948*, ed. D. A. Robertson (1949). This article has often been reprinted in critical anthologies, and Frye himself adapted it for inclusion in his classic study, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).

*Selections from critical commentaries on the play, with linking narrative, are available on the edition website, www.therscshakespeare.com.

ABOUT THE TEXT

Shakespeare endures through history. He illuminates later times as well as his own. He helps us to understand the human condition. But he cannot do this without a good text of the plays. Without editions there would be no Shakespeare. That is why every twenty years or so throughout the last three centuries there has been a major new edition of his complete works. One aspect of editing is the process of keeping the texts up to date—modernizing the spelling, punctuation, and typography (though not, of course, the actual words), providing explanatory notes in the light of changing educational practices (a generation ago, most of Shakespeare's classical and biblical allusions could be assumed to be generally understood, but now they can't).

But because Shakespeare did not personally oversee the publication of his plays, editors also have to make decisions about the relative authority of the early printed editions. Half of the sum of his plays only appeared posthumously, in the elaborately produced First Folio text of 1623, the original "Complete Works" prepared for the press by Shakespeare's fellow actors, the people who knew the plays better than anyone else. The other half had appeared in print in his lifetime, in the more compact and cheaper form of "Quarto" editions, some of which reproduced good quality texts, others of which were to a greater or lesser degree garbled and error-strewn.

Generations of editors have adopted a "pick and mix" approach, moving between Quarto and Folio readings, making choices on either aesthetic or bibliographic grounds, sometimes creating a composite text that Shakespeare never actually wrote. Not until the 1980s did editors follow the logic of what ought to have been obvious to anyone who works in the theater: that the Quarto and Folio texts often represent discrete moments in the life of a script, that plays change in the course of rehearsal, production, and revival, and that many of the major variants between the early printed versions almost certainly reflect this process.

If you look at printers' handbooks from the age of Shakespeare, you quickly discover that one of the first rules was that, whenever possible, compositors were recommended to set their type from

existing printed books rather than manuscripts. This was the age before mechanical typesetting, where each individual letter had to be picked out by hand from the compositor's case and placed on a stick (upside down and back to front) before being laid on the press. It was an age of murky rushlight and of manuscripts written in a secretary hand which had dozens of different, hard-to-decipher forms. Printers' lives were a lot easier when they were reprinting existing books rather than struggling with handwritten copy. Easily the quickest way to have created the First Folio would have been simply to reprint those eighteen plays that had already appeared in Quarto and only work from manuscript on the other eighteen. But that is not what happened. Whenever Quartos were used, as in the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, playhouse "promptbooks" were also consulted and stage directions copied in from them. And in the case of several major plays where a well-printed Quarto was available, the Folio printers were instructed to work from an alternative, playhouse-derived manuscript. This meant that the whole process of producing the first complete Shakespeare took months, even years, longer than it might have done. But for the men overseeing the project, John Hemings and Henry Condell, friends and fellow actors who had been remembered in Shakespeare's will, the additional labor and cost were worth the effort for the sake of producing an edition that was close to the practice of the theater. They wanted all the plays in print so that people could, as they wrote in their prefatory address to the reader, "read him and again and again," but they also wanted "the great variety of readers" to work from texts that were close to the theater life for which Shakespeare originally intended them. For this reason, the *RSC Shakespeare*, in both *Complete Works* and individual volumes, uses the Folio as base text wherever possible. Significant Quarto variants are, however, noted in "Textual Notes."

For some specific examples of the theater-derived changes in Folio *Midsummer Night's Dream*, see the discussion of "Text" in "Key Facts," below.

The following notes highlight various aspects of the editorial process and indicate conventions used in the text of this edition:

Lists of Parts are supplied in the First Folio for only six plays, not including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so the list here is editorially supplied. Capitals indicate that part of the name which is used for speech headings in the script (thus "Nick **BOTTOM**").

Locations are provided by the Folio for only two plays, of which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not one. Eighteenth-century editors, working in an age of elaborately realistic stage sets, were the first to provide detailed locations ("another part of the forest"). Given that Shakespeare wrote for a bare stage and often an imprecise sense of place, we have relegated locations to the explanatory notes, where they are given at the beginning of each scene where the imaginary location is different from the one before. We have emphasized broad geographical settings rather than specifics of the kind that suggest anachronistically realistic staging.

Act and Scene Divisions were provided in the Folio in a much more thoroughgoing way than in the Quartos. Sometimes, however, they were erroneous or omitted; corrections and additions supplied by editorial tradition are indicated by square brackets. Five-act division is based on a classical model, and act breaks provided the opportunity to replace the candles in the indoor Blackfriars playhouse which the King's Men used after 1608, but Shakespeare did not necessarily think in terms of a five-part structure of dramatic composition. The Folio convention is that a scene ends when the stage is empty. Nowadays, partly under the influence of film, we tend to consider a scene to be a dramatic unit that ends with either a change of imaginary location or a significant passage of time within the narrative. Shakespeare's fluidity of composition accords well with this convention, so in addition to act and scene numbers we provide a *running scene* count in the right margin at the beginning of each new scene, in the typeface used for editorial directions. Where there is a scene break caused by a momentary bare stage, but the location does not change and extra time does not pass, we use the convention

running scene continues. There is inevitably a degree of editorial judgment in making such calls, but the system is very valuable in suggesting the pace of the plays.

Speakers' Names are often inconsistent in Folio. We have regularized speech headings, but retained an element of deliberate inconsistency in entry directions, in order to give the flavor of Folio. Thus Robin Goodfellow is always so called in his speech headings, but is sometimes Puck in entry directions ("Puck" should probably be understood as a descriptive name, not a personal one—he is "the

puck,” analogous to “a goblin”).

Verse is indicated by lines that do not run to the right margin and by capitalization of each line. The Folio printers sometimes set verse as prose, and vice versa (either out of misunderstanding or for reasons of space). We have silently corrected in such cases, although in some instances there is ambiguity, in which case we have leaned toward the preservation of Folio layout. Folio sometimes uses contraction (“turnd” rather than “turned”) to indicate whether or not the final “-ed” of a past participle is sounded, an area where there is variation for the sake of the five-beat iambic pentameter rhythm. We use the convention of a grave accent to indicate sounding (thus “turnèd” would be two syllables), but would urge actors not to overstress. In cases where one speaker ends with a verse half line and the next begins with the other half of the pentameter, editors since the late eighteenth century have indented the second line. We have abandoned this convention, since the Folio does not use it, and nor did actors’ cues in the Shakespearean theater. An exception is made when the second speaker actively interrupts or completes the first speaker’s sentence.

Spelling is modernized, but older forms are very occasionally maintained where necessary for rhythm or aural effect.

Punctuation in Shakespeare’s time was as much rhetorical as grammatical. “Colon” was originally a term for a unit of thought in an argument. The semicolon was a new unit of punctuation (some of the Quartos lack them altogether). We have modernized punctuation throughout, but have given more weight to Folio punctuation than many editors, since, though not Shakespearean, it reflects the usage of his period. In particular, we have used the colon far more than many editors: it is exceptionally useful as a way of indicating how many Shakespearean speeches unfold clause by clause in a developing argument that gives the illusion of enacting the process of thinking in the moment. We have also kept in mind the origin of punctuation in classical times as a way of assisting the actor and orator: the comma suggests the briefest of pauses for breath, the colon a middling one, and a full stop or period a longer pause. Semicolons, by contrast, belong to an era of punctuation that was only just coming in during Shakespeare’s time and that is coming to an end now: we have

accordingly only used them where they occur in our copy texts (and not always then). Dashes are sometimes used for parenthetical interjections where the Folio has brackets. They are also used for interruptions and changes in train of thought. Where a change of addressee occurs within a speech, we have used a dash preceded by a full stop (or occasionally another form of punctuation). Often the identity of the respective addressees is obvious from the context. When it is not, this has been indicated in a marginal stage direction.

Entrances and Exits are fairly thorough in Folio, which has accordingly been followed as faithfully as possible. Where characters are omitted or corrections are necessary, this is indicated by square brackets (e.g. “[*and Attendants*]”). *Exit* is sometimes silently normalized to

Exeunt and *Manet* anglicized to “remains.” We trust Folio positioning of entrances and exits to a greater degree than most editors.

Editorial Stage Directions such as stage business, asides, indications of addressee and of characters’ position on the gallery stage are only used sparingly in Folio. Other editions mingle directions of this kind with original Folio and Quarto directions, sometimes marking them by means of square brackets. We have sought to distinguish what could be described as *directorial* interventions of this kind from Folio-style directions (either original or supplied) by placing them in the right margin in a smaller typeface. There is a degree of subjectivity about which directions are of which kind, but the procedure is intended as a reminder to the reader and the actor that Shakespearean stage directions are often dependent upon editorial inference alone and are not set in stone. We also depart from editorial tradition in sometimes admitting uncertainty and thus printing permissive stage directions, such as an ***Aside?*** (often a line may be equally effective as an aside or as a direct address—it is for each production or reading to make its own decision) or a ***may exit*** or a piece of business placed between arrows to indicate that it may occur at various different moments within a scene.

Line Numbers are editorial, for reference and to key the explanatory and textual notes.

Explanatory Notes explain allusions and gloss obsolete and difficult words, confusing phraseology, occasional major textual cruces, and so on. Particular attention is given to non-standard usage, bawdy innuendo, and technical terms (e.g. legal and military language). Where more than one sense is given, commas indicate shades of related meaning, slashes alternative or double meanings.

Textual Notes at the end of the play indicate major departures from the Folio. They take the following form: the reading of our text is given in bold and its source given after an equals sign, with “F2” indicating that it derives from the Second Folio of 1632 and “Ed” that it derives from the subsequent editorial tradition. The rejected Folio (“F”) reading is then given. Thus for Act 1 Scene 1 line 142: “**142 eyes** = Q. F = eie” means that the Folio compositor erroneously printed Quarto’s “eyes” as “eie,” and we have restored the Quarto reading.

KEY FACTS

MAJOR PARTS: (*with percentage of lines/number of speeches/scenes on stage*) Bottom (12%/59/5), Theseus (11%/48/3), Helena (11%/36/5), Robin Goodfellow (10%/33/6), Oberon (10%/29/5), Lysander (8%/50/5), Hermia (8%/48/5), Titania (7%/23/5), Demetrius (6%/48/5), Quince (5%/40/4), Flute (3%/18/4), Egeus (3%/13/3), Hippolyta (2%/14/3).

LINGUISTIC MEDIUM: 80% verse, 20% prose. Fairly high incidence of rhyme, including deliberately bad rhyme in “Pyramus and Thisbe.”

DATE: Mentioned in Francis Meres’ 1598 list of Shakespeare’s plays. Reference in Act 1 Scene 2 to courtiers being afraid of a stage lion may allude to an incident in Scotland in August 1594. Strong stylistic resemblances to other “lyrical” plays of Shakespeare’s high Elizabethan period, such as *Richard II* and especially *Romeo and Juliet*: this group of plays is traditionally dated to 1595–96. It has often been speculated that the first performance was a private one at an aristocratic wedding celebration, but there is absolutely no evidence for this: in the Elizabethan period, masque-like entertainments rather than full-length plays were commissioned for festive occasions such as weddings.

SOURCES: The main plot is apparently without a direct source, which is unusual for Shakespeare. The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is derived principally from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, book four. It also has strong structural resemblances to the Romeo and Juliet story, which Shakespeare dramatized around the same time. The play as a whole absorbs much of Shakespeare’s eclectic reading: numerous borrowings of Ovidian mythology, some use of Sir Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch, influence from John Lyly’s comedies (especially *Endimion* for dreaming and *Gallathea* for the interplay of aristocrats and artisans), an element of Chaucer (*The Knight’s Tale* for lovers at the court of Theseus, perhaps *The Tale of Sir Thopas* for the dream of sleeping with an “elf-queen”), perhaps *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius (trans. William

Adlington, 1566) for Bottom's transformation.

TEXT: Quarto 1600, "as it hath been sundry times publicly acted by the Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlain his Servants." apparently typeset from Shakespeare's manuscript or a close transcription of it. Reprinted 1619 (Second Quarto). Folio text was set from a copy of the Second Quarto (thus repeating many of its corrections and errors), but with some consultation of an independent theater-derived manuscript, which provided additional stage directions, some corrections, and signs of a few revisions, most notably an economizing on roles whereby the Philostrate of Quarto becomes a silent character who only appears in the first scene and the role of Master of the Revels introducing the entertainment in the final scene is taken over by Egeus (which makes for nice tension between him and Lysander, the new son-in-law he did not want). Our edition retains this innovation as well as many local Folio corrections and modernizations, but restores Quarto in many cases where words are misset, omitted, or transposed as a result of what was almost certainly compositor's error as opposed to editorial alterations on the basis of the theater manuscript.

A MIDSUMMER
NIGHT'S DREAM

LIST OF PARTS

THESEUS, Duke of Athens

HIPPOLYTA, Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus

EGEUS, an Athenian courtier, father to Hermia

LYSANDER, in love with Hermia

HERMIA, in love with Lysander, but ordered by her father to marry Demetrius

DEMETRIUS, in love with Hermia, though once a suitor to Helena

HELENA, in love with Demetrius

Peter QUINCE, a carpenter and leader of an amateur dramatic group, who speaks the PROLOGUE to their play

Nick BOTTOM, a weaver, who plays PYRAMUS in the amateur play

Francis FLUTE, a bellows-mender, who plays THISBE in the amateur play

SNUG, a joiner, who plays a LION in the amateur play

Tom SNOUT, a tinker, who plays a WALL in the amateur play

Robin STARVELING, a tailor, who plays MOONSHINE in the amateur play

OBERON, King of Fairies

TITANIA, Queen of Fairies

ROBIN Goodfellow, also known as Puck, a sprite in the service of Oberon

Fairies attendant upon Titania

PEASEBLOSSOM

COBWEB

MOTH

MUSTARDSEED

PHILOSTRATE, an official in Theseus' court

Other Attendants at the court of Theseus; other Fairies attendant upon Oberon

Act 1 [Scene 1]

running scene 1

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, with others [Philostrate and attendants]

THESEUS Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour

Draws on *apace*. *Four happy days*² bring in

Another moon: but O, methinks, how slow

This old moon wanes; she *lingers*⁴ my desires,

Like to a *stepdame* or a *dowager*⁵

Long *withering out* a *young man's revenue*⁶.

HIPPOLYTA Four days will quickly *steep*⁷ themselves in nights,

Four nights will quickly dream away the time.

And then the *moon, like to a silver bow*⁹

*New-bent*¹⁰ in heaven, shall behold the night

Of our *solemnities*¹¹.

THESEUS Go, Philostrate,

Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments,

Awake the *pert*¹⁴ and nimble spirit of mirth,

Turn melancholy forth to funerals:

The *pale companion* is not for our *pomp*¹⁶.

[Exit Philostrate]

Hippolyta, I wooed thee *with my sword*¹⁷,

And won thy love doing thee *injuries*¹⁸.

But I will wed thee in another key,

With pomp, with *triumph*²⁰ and with revelling.

Enter Egeus and his daughter Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius

EGEUS Happy be Theseus, our renownèd 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. And my gracious duke,
This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child.—
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
And interchanged love-tokens with my child.
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,
With [feigning](#)³² voice verses of feigning love,
And [stol'n the impression of her fantasy](#)³³
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, [gauds](#), [conceits](#)³⁴,
[Knacks](#), [trifles](#), [nosegays](#), [sweetmeats](#)³⁵ — messengers
Of strong [prevailment](#) in [unhardened](#)³⁶ youth —
With cunning hast thou [filched](#)³⁷ my daughter's heart,
Turned her obedience, which is due to me,
To stubborn harshness.— And, my gracious duke,
[Be it so](#)⁴⁰ 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](#)⁴⁶ provided in that case.

THESEUS What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid,
To you your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted and within his power
To leave the figure or [disfigure](#)⁵² it.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA So is Lysander.

THESEUS In himself he is.

But in this [kind](#), [wanting](#) your father's [voice](#)⁵⁶,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA I [would](#)⁵⁸ my father looked but with my eyes.

THESEUS Rather your eyes must with his judgement look.

HERMIA I do entreat your grace to pardon me.

I know not by what power I am made bold,
Nor how it may [concern](#)⁶² my modesty
In such a [presence](#)⁶³ here to plead my thoughts:
But 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](#)⁶⁷ or to abjure
Forever the [society](#)⁶⁸ of men.

Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
[Know of](#) your youth, examine well your [blood](#)⁷⁰,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the [livery](#)⁷² of a nun,
For [aye](#) to be in shady cloister [mewed](#)⁷³,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
Thrice blessèd they that master so their blood,
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage.

But [earthlier happy](#) is the rose [distilled](#)⁷⁸
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn
Grows, lives and dies in [single blessedness](#)⁸⁰.

HERMIA So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
[Ere](#) I will yield my [virgin patent](#)⁸² up
Unto [his lordship](#)⁸³, whose unwishèd yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

THESEUS Take time to pause, and by the next new moon —

The [sealing day](#)⁸⁶ betwixt my love and me,
For everlasting bond of fellowship —
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he [would](#)⁹⁰,
Or on [Diana](#)'s altar to [protest](#)⁹¹
For [aye](#)⁹² austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS Relent, sweet Hermia.— And, Lysander, yield
Thy [crazèd title](#)⁹⁴ to my certain right.

LYSANDER You have her father's love, Demetrius:
Let me have Hermia's. [Do](#)⁹⁶ you marry him.

EGEUS Scornful Lysander! True, he hath my love;
And what is mine my love shall [render](#)⁹⁸ him.
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do [estate unto](#)¹⁰⁰ Demetrius.

LYSANDER I am, my lord, as well [derived](#)¹⁰¹ as he,
As well [possessed](#)¹⁰²: my love is more than his,
My fortunes every way as [fairly](#)¹⁰³ ranked,
If not [with vantage, as Demetrius'](#)¹⁰⁴,
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.

Why should not I then [prosecute](#)¹⁰⁷ my right?
Demetrius, I'll [avouch](#) it to his [head](#)¹⁰⁸,
[Made love to](#) Nedar's daughter, [Helena](#)¹⁰⁹,
And won her soul: and she, sweet lady, [dotes](#)¹¹⁰,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this [spotted](#)¹¹² and inconstant man.

THESEUS I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof,
But, being over-full of [self-affairs](#)¹¹⁵,
My mind did [lose](#)¹¹⁶ it. But, Demetrius, come,

And come, Egeus, you shall go with me.
I have some private [schooling](#)¹¹⁸ for you both.
For you, fair Hermia, [look](#) you [arm](#)¹¹⁹ yourself
To fit your [fancies](#)¹²⁰ to your father's will,
Or else the law of Athens yields you up —
Which by no means we may [extenuate](#)¹²² —
To death or to a vow of single life.—
Come, my Hippolyta. What cheer, my love?—
Demetrius and Egeus, [go](#)¹²⁵ along:
I must employ you in some business
[Against](#)¹²⁷ our nuptial and confer with you
Of something [nearly that](#)¹²⁸ concerns yourselves.
EGEUS With duty and desire we follow you.

Exeunt all but Lysander and Hermia

LYSANDER How now, my love! Why is your cheek so pale?
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

HERMIA [Belike](#)¹³² for want of rain, which I could well
[Beteem](#)¹³³ them from the tempest of mine eyes.

LYSANDER Ay me, for [aught](#)¹³⁴ that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.
But either it was different in [blood](#)¹³⁷—

HERMIA O [cross](#)¹³⁸! Too high to be enthralled to low.

LYSANDER Or else [misgraffèd](#)¹³⁹ in respect of years—

HERMIA O spite! Too old to be engaged to young.

LYSANDER Or else it [stood](#) upon the choice of [merit](#)¹⁴¹—

HERMIA O hell! To choose love by another's eyes.

LYSANDER Or if there were a [sympathy](#)¹⁴³ in choice,
War, death or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it [momentary](#)¹⁴⁵ as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream:

Brief as the lightning in the [collied](#)¹⁴⁷ night,
That in a [spleen unfolds](#)¹⁴⁸ both heaven and earth,
And [ere](#)¹⁴⁹ a man hath power to say 'Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So [quick](#) bright things come to [confusion](#)¹⁵¹.

HERMIA If then true lovers have been [ever crossed](#)¹⁵²,
It stands as an edict in destiny.
Then let us teach our [trial](#)¹⁵⁴ patience,
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor [fancy's](#)¹⁵⁷ followers.

LYSANDER A good [persuasion](#)¹⁵⁸. Therefore hear me, Hermia.
I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child.
From Athens is her house removed [seven leagues](#)¹⁶¹,
And she [respects](#)¹⁶² me as her only son.
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 tomorrow night,
And in the wood, a league [without](#)¹⁶⁷ the town,
Where I did meet thee once with Helena,
To [do observance to a morn of May](#)¹⁶⁹,
There will I [stay](#)¹⁷⁰ for thee.

HERMIA My good Lysander!
I swear to thee, by [Cupid's](#)¹⁷² strongest bow,
By his [best arrow with the golden head](#)¹⁷³,
By the [simplicity](#) of Venus' [doves](#)¹⁷⁴,
By that which [knitteth](#)¹⁷⁵ souls and prospers love,
And by that fire which burned the [Carthage queen](#)¹⁷⁶,
When the [false Trojan](#)¹⁷⁷ under sail was seen,
By all the vows that ever men have broke,

In number more than ever women spoke,
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

Enter Helena

HERMIA God speed fair¹⁸³ Helena, whither away?

HELENA Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.

Demetrius loves your fair: O happy¹⁸⁵ fair!

Your eyes are lodestars, and your tongue's sweet air¹⁸⁶

More tuneable¹⁸⁷ than lark to shepherd's ear

When wheat is green¹⁸⁸, when hawthorn buds appear.

Sickness is catching: O, were favour¹⁸⁹ so,

Your words I catch¹⁹⁰, fair Hermia, ere I go,

My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,

My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated¹⁹³,

The rest I'll give to be to you translated¹⁹⁴.

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 move²⁰⁰!

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 none²⁰³ 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 fly²⁰⁶ this place.

Before the time I did Lysander see,

Seemed Athens like a paradise to me.

O, then, what graces in my love do dwell,
That he hath turned a heaven into hell!

LYSANDER Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:

Tomorrow night, when [Phoebe](#)²¹² doth behold
Her silver visage in the wat'ry [glass](#)²¹³,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,
A time that lovers' flights doth [still](#)²¹⁵ conceal,
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

HERMIA And in the wood, where often you and I
Upon [faint](#) primrose beds were [wont](#)²¹⁸ to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their [counsel](#)²¹⁹ sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet,
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,
To seek new friends and [strange](#)²²² companions.
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.

Exit

LYSANDER I will, my Hermia.— Helena, adieu.
As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

Exit

HELENA How happy some [o'er other some](#)²²⁹ 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](#)²³² but he doth know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no [quantity](#)²³⁵,
Love can transpose to [form](#)²³⁶ and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted [blind](#)²³⁸.

Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste²³⁹,
Wings and no eyes figure²⁴⁰ unheedy haste.
And therefore is love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is often beguiled²⁴².
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear²⁴³,
So the boy love is perjured everywhere.
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne²⁴⁵,
He hailed 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 tomorrow night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence²⁵¹,
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense²⁵².
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

Exit

[Act 1 Scene 2]

running scene 2

Enter Quince the carpenter, Snug the joiner, Bottom the weaver, Flute the bellows-mender, Snout the tinker and Starveling the tailor

QUINCE Is all our company here?

BOTTOM You were best to call them generally², man by man, according to the scrip³.

QUINCE Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit through all Athens to play in our interlude⁵ before the duke and the duchess on his wedding day at night.

BOTTOM First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats⁷ on, then read the names of the actors, and so grow on to a point⁸.

QUINCE [Marry](#)¹⁰, 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](#)¹⁴.

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 gallantly for love.

BOTTOM That will [ask](#)²⁰ 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](#)²² in some measure. To the rest — yet my chief [humour](#) is for a tyrant: I could play [Ercles rarely](#)²³, or a part to [tear a cat in](#), to make all [split](#)²⁴.

The raging rocks
And [shivering](#)²⁶ shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates.
And [Phibbus’ car](#)²⁹
Shall shine from far
And make and [mar](#)³¹
The foolish [Fates](#)³².

This was [lofty](#)³³. Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles’ [vein](#)³⁴, a tyrant’s vein: a lover is more condoling.

QUINCE Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE You must take Thisbe on you.

FLUTE What is Thisbe? A [wand’ring](#)³⁸ knight?

QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

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

QUINCE That's all one⁴². You shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will⁴³.

BOTTOM An⁴⁴ 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 Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother.⁵² Tom Snout, the tinker.

SNOUT Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE You, Pyramus' father; myself, Thisbe's father; Snug the joiner, you, the lion's part: and I hope there is a play fitted⁵⁷.

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 extempore⁶⁰, 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 that you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion⁷⁰ but to hang us: but I will aggravate⁷¹ my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove. I will roar an 'twere⁷²

any nightingale.

QUINCE You can play no part but Pyramus, for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a [proper](#)⁷⁵ 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. What beard were I best to play it in?

QUINCE Why, what you will.

BOTTOM I will [discharge](#) it in either [your](#)⁸¹ straw-colour beard, your [orange-tawny](#) beard, your [purple-in-grain](#)⁸² beard, or your [French-crown-coloured](#)⁸³ beard, your perfect yellow.

QUINCE Some of your French [crowns](#)⁸⁴ have no hair at all, and then you will play bare-faced. But,

Passes out the parts

masters, here are your parts: and I am to entreat you, request you and desire you, to [con](#)⁸⁷ them by tomorrow 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, and our [devices](#)⁹⁰ known. In the meantime I will [draw](#) a [bill](#)⁹¹ of properties, such as our play wants. I pray you fail me not.

BOTTOM We will meet, and there we may rehearse more [obscenely](#) and [courageously](#). Take pains, be [perfect](#)⁹⁴. Adieu.

QUINCE At the duke's oak we meet.

BOTTOM Enough. [Hold or cut bow-strings.](#)⁹⁶

Exeunt

[Act 2 \[Scene 1\]](#)

running scene 3

Enter a Fairy at one door and Robin Goodfellow [[Puck](#)] at another

ROBIN How now, spirit, whither wander you?

FAIRY Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through brier,
Over [park](#), over [pale](#)⁴,
[Thorough](#)⁵ flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's [sphere](#)⁷;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her [orbs](#)⁹ upon the green.
The cowslips tall her [pensioners](#)¹⁰ be,
In their gold coats spots you see,
Those be rubies, fairy [favours](#)¹²,
In those freckles live their [savours](#)¹³.
I must go seek some dewdrops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou [lob](#)¹⁶ of spirits, I'll be gone:
Our queen and all her elves come here [anon](#)¹⁷.

ROBIN The king doth keep his revels here tonight:
Take heed the queen come not within his sight,
For Oberon is [passing fell](#) and [wrath](#)²⁰,
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stol'n from an Indian king.
She never had so sweet a [changeling](#)²³,
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to [trace](#)²⁵ the forests wild.
But she [perforce](#)²⁶ withholds the lovèd 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](#)²⁹,
But they do [square](#)³⁰, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

FAIRY Either I mistake your shape and [making](#) [quite](#)³²,
Or else you are that [shrewd](#)³³ and knavish sprite

Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery³⁵,
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern³⁶,
And bootless³⁷ make the breathless housewife churn,
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm³⁸,
Mislead³⁹ night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck,
You do their work and they shall have good luck.
Are not you he?

ROBIN Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed⁴⁶ horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly⁴⁷ foal,
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl⁴⁸,
In very likeness of a roasted crab⁴⁹,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her withered dewlap⁵¹ pour the ale.
The wisest aunt⁵², telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me,
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And 'tailor'⁵⁵ cries, and falls into a cough.
And then the whole quire⁵⁶ hold their hips and laugh,
And waxen in their mirth and neeze⁵⁷ and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted⁵⁸ there.
But, room, fairy! Here comes Oberon⁵⁹.

FAIRY And here my mistress. Would that he were gone!

Enter the King of Fairies [Oberon] at one door with his train, and the Queen [Titania] at another 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 lord⁶⁴?

TITANIA Then I must be thy lady⁶⁵: but I know

When thou hast stol'n away from fairy land,

And in the shape of Corin⁶⁷ sat all day,

Playing on pipes of corn and versing⁶⁸ love

To amorous Phillida⁶⁹. Why art thou here,

Come from the farthest step⁷⁰ of India?

But that, forsooth, the bouncing⁷¹ Amazon,

Your buskined⁷² 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 credit⁷⁶ with Hippolyta,

Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?

Didst not thou lead him through the glimmering⁷⁸ night

From Perigenia whom he ravishèd?

And make him with fair Aegles⁸⁰ break his faith,

With Ariadne and Antiopa⁸¹?

TITANIA These are the forgeries of jealousy,

And never since the middle summer's spring⁸³

Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead⁸⁴,

By pavèd fountain or by rushy⁸⁵ brook,

Or in the beachèd margent⁸⁶ of the sea,

To dance our ringlets⁸⁷ to the whistling wind,

But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport⁸⁸.

Therefore the winds, piping⁸⁹ to us in vain,

As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea

Contagious⁹¹ fogs, which falling in the land

Hath every petty river made so proud⁹²

That they have overborne their continents⁹³.

The ox hath therefore stretched⁹⁴ his yoke in vain,

The ploughman lost⁹⁵ his sweat, and the green corn

Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard⁹⁶.
The fold⁹⁷ stands empty in the drownèd field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion⁹⁸ flock,
The nine men's morris⁹⁹ is filled up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green¹⁰⁰
For lack of tread are undistinguishable.
The human mortals want their winter here¹⁰²:
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods¹⁰⁴,
Pale in her anger, washes¹⁰⁵ all the air,
That rheumatic diseases¹⁰⁶ do abound.
And through this distemperature¹⁰⁷ we see
The seasons alter; hoary-headed¹⁰⁸ frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems'¹¹⁰ thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet¹¹¹ of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The childing¹¹³ autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazèd¹¹⁴ world
By their increase¹¹⁵ now knows not which is which;
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension¹¹⁷:
We are their parents and original¹¹⁸.

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 henchman¹²².

TITANIA Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votress¹²⁵ of my order,
And in the spicèd Indian air by night
Full¹²⁷ often hath she gossiped by my side,

And sat with me on Neptune's¹²⁸ yellow sands,
Marking th'embarked traders on the flood¹²⁹,
When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton¹³¹ wind,
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait¹³²
Following — her womb then rich with my young squire —
Would imitate, and sail upon the land,
To fetch me trifles, and return again
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy¹³⁷ 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 Perchance¹⁴¹ till after Theseus' wedding day.

If you will patiently dance in our round¹⁴²

And see our moonlight revels, go with us;

If not, shun me, and I will spare¹⁴⁴ your haunts.

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

TITANIA Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away.

We shall chide downright¹⁴⁷, if I longer stay.

Exeunt [Titania and her train]

OBERON Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from¹⁴⁸ this grove

Till I torment thee for this injury.

My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rest

Since once I sat upon a promontory¹⁵¹,

And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back

Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath¹⁵³

That the rude¹⁵⁴ sea grew civil at her song,

And certain¹⁵⁵ stars shot madly from their spheres

To hear the sea-maid's music.

ROBIN I remember.

OBERON That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid **all** armed; a **certain**¹⁶⁰ aim he took
At a fair **vestal**¹⁶¹ thronèd by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As¹⁶³ it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
But I **might**¹⁶⁴ see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon;
And the imperial votress passèd on,
In maiden meditation, **fancy-free**¹⁶⁷.
Yet marked I where the **bolt**¹⁶⁸ of Cupid fell.
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now **purple**¹⁷⁰ with love's wound,
And maidens call it **love-in-idleness**¹⁷¹.
Fetch me that flower; the herb I showed thee once:
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make **or**¹⁷⁴ 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**¹⁷⁷ can swim a league.
ROBIN I'll put a **girdle**¹⁷⁸ round about the earth
In forty minutes.

[Exit]

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 when 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 off from 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.

He stands aside

Enter Demetrius, Helena following him

DEMETRIUS I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?

*The one I'll stay, the other stayeth*¹⁹⁴ me.

Thou told'st me they were stolen into this wood;
And here am I, and *wood*¹⁹⁶ within this wood,
Because I cannot meet my Hermia.

Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

HELENA You *draw* me, you hard-hearted *adamant*¹⁹⁹;
But yet you draw not iron, for my heart
Is true as steel. *Leave you*²⁰¹ your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.

DEMETRIUS Do I entice you? Do I speak *you fair*²⁰³?
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 thee the more.
I am your spaniel, and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.

Use me *but*²⁰⁹ as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me *leave*²¹⁰,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.

What worser place can I beg in your love —
And yet a place of high respect with me —
Than to be used as you do use your dog?

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](#)²¹⁸ 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](#)²²² place
With the rich worth of your virginity.

HELENA Your virtue is my [privilege: for that](#)²²⁴
It is not night when I do see your face,
Therefore I think I am not in the night.
Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
For you in my respect are all the world.

Then how can it be said I am alone,
When all the world is here to look on me?

DEMETRIUS I'll run from thee and hide me in the [brakes](#)²³¹,
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](#)²³⁵;
The dove pursues the [griffin](#), the mild [hind](#)²³⁶
Makes speed to catch the tiger. [Bootless](#)²³⁷ speed,
When cowardice pursues and valour flies.

DEMETRIUS I will not [stay](#)²³⁹ thy questions, let me go;
Or if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

[↓*Exit Demetrius*↓]

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](#)²⁴⁴:
We cannot fight for love, as men may do;
We should be wooed and were not made to woo.
I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell,

To die upon²⁴⁸ the hand I love so well.

Exit

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

Enter [Robin] Puck

Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

ROBIN Ay, there it is.

Shows the flower

OBERON I pray thee give it me.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows²⁵⁴,
Where oxlips²⁵⁵ and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine²⁵⁶,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine²⁵⁷:
There sleeps Titania sometime²⁵⁸ of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight:
And there the snake throws²⁶⁰ her enamelled skin,
Weed²⁶¹ wide enough to wrap a fairy in.

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;

Gives him some juice

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 on²⁷¹ her than she upon her love;
And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

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

Exeunt

[Act 2 Scene 2]

running scene 4

Enter Queen of Fairies [Titania] with her train

TITANIA Come, now a [roundel](#)¹ and a fairy song;
Then, for the third part of a minute, hence:
Some to kill [cankers](#)³ in the musk-rose buds,
Some war with [reremice](#) for their [leathern](#)⁴ wings,
To make my small elves coats, and some keep back
The clamorous owl that nightly hoots and wonders
At our [quaint](#)⁷ spirits. Sing me now asleep,
Then to your [offices](#)⁸ and let me rest.

She lies down on a bank

Fairies sing

FIRST FAIRY You spotted snakes with [double](#)⁹ tongue,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen.
Newts and [blind-worms](#)¹¹, do no wrong,
Come not near our fairy queen.

CHORUS [Philomel](#)¹³, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby,
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby.
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady [nigh](#)¹⁸;
So, good night, with lullaby.

SECOND FAIRY Weaving spiders, come not here.
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence!
Beetles black, approach not near;
Worm nor snail, do no offence.

CHORUS Philomel, with melody, [etc](#)²⁴.

FIRST FAIRY Hence, away! Now all is well;
One [aloof](#) stand [sentinel](#)²⁶.

She [Titania] sleeps. [Exeunt Fairies]

Enter Oberon

OBERON What thou see'st when thou dost wake,

Squeezes juice on Titania's eyes

Do it for thy true-love take,
Love and languish for his sake.
Be it ounce³⁰ or cat or bear,
Pard³¹, 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]

Enter Lysander and Hermia

LYSANDER Fair love, you faint with wand'ring in the wood,
And to speak troth³⁶, I have forgot our way:
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day³⁸.

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 troth⁴².

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

LYSANDER O, take the sense⁴⁵, sweet, of my innocence!
Love takes the meaning in love's conference⁴⁶.

I mean that my heart unto yours is knit
So that but one heart we can make of it.
Two bosoms interchainèd with an oath,
So then two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny,
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie⁵².

HERMIA Lysander riddles very prettily⁵³.
Now much beshrew⁵⁴ my manners and my pride,
If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied.
But, gentle friend⁵⁶, for love and courtesy
Lie further off, in human⁵⁷ modesty:
Such separation as may well be said
Becomes⁵⁹ 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 pressed⁶⁵!

They sleep

Enter [Robin] Puck

ROBIN Through the forest have I gone,
But Athenian found I none
On whose eyes I might approve⁶⁸
This flower's force in stirring love.
Night and silence — who is here?

Sees Lysander

Weeds of Athens he doth wear:
This is he, my master said,
Despisèd 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.
Churl⁷⁸, upon thy eyes I throw

Puts juice on Lysander's eyes

All the power this charm doth owe⁷⁹.
When thou wak'st, let love forbid⁸⁰

Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.
So awake when I am gone,
For I must now to Oberon.

Exit

Enter Demetrius and Helena, running

HELENA Stay, though thou kill me, sweet Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS I **charge** thee, hence, and do not **haunt**⁸⁵ me thus.

HELENA O, wilt thou **darkling**⁸⁶ leave me? Do not so.

DEMETRIUS Stay, on thy peril: I alone will go.

Exit

HELENA O, I am out of breath in this **fond**⁸⁸ chase!

The more my prayer, the lesser is my **grace**⁸⁹.

Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she **lies**⁹⁰;

For she hath blessèd and attractive eyes.

How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears:

If so, my eyes are oftener washed than hers.

No, no, I am as ugly as a bear;

For beasts that meet me run away for fear:

Therefore no **marvel**⁹⁶ though Demetrius

Do, **as**⁹⁷ a monster, fly my presence thus.

What wicked and dissembling **glass**⁹⁸ of mine

Made me compare with Hermia's **sphery eyne**⁹⁹?

But who is here? Lysander, on the ground;

Sees Lysander

Dead, or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.

Lysander if you live, good sir, awake.

LYSANDER And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake.

Wakes

Transparent Helena, nature shows her **art**¹⁰⁴

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 though¹⁰⁹ 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 now I love;

Who will not change a raven for a dove?

The will¹¹⁵ of man is by his reason swayed,

And reason says you are the worthier maid.

Things growing are not ripe until their season;

So I, being young, till now ripe not¹¹⁸ to reason.

And touching now the point of human skill¹¹⁹,

Reason becomes the marshal¹²⁰ to my will

And leads me to your eyes, where I o'erlook¹²¹

Love's stories¹²² written in love's richest book.

HELENA Wherefore¹²³ 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?

Good troth you do me wrong, good sooth¹²⁹, you do,

In such disdainful manner me to woo.

But fare you well; perforce I must confess

I thought you lord of more true gentleness¹³².

O, that a lady of one man refused

Should of another therefore be abused¹³⁴!

Exit

LYSANDER She sees not Hermia. Hermia, sleep thou there,

And never mayst thou come Lysander near;

For as a surfeit¹³⁷ of the sweetest things

The deepest loathing to the stomach brings,
Or as the heresies that men do [leave](#)¹³⁹
Are hated most of [those they did deceive](#)¹⁴⁰,
So thou, my surfeit and my heresy,
[Of](#)¹⁴² all be hated, but the most of me.
And all my powers [address](#)¹⁴³ your love and might
To honour Helen and to be her knight!

Exit

HERMIA Help me, Lysander, help me; do thy best

Wakes

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](#)¹⁵⁰.
Lysander! What, [removed](#)¹⁵¹? Lysander! Lord!
What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?
Alack, where are you? Speak, [an if](#)¹⁵³ you hear:
Speak, [of all loves](#)¹⁵⁴! I swoon almost with fear.
No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately.

Titania remains asleep

Exit

Act 3 [Scene 1]

running scene 4 continues

Enter the Clowns [Bottom, Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout and Starveling]

BOTTOM Are we all met?

QUINCE Pat², pat, and here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring-house⁴, and we will do it in action as we will do it before the duke.

BOTTOM Peter Quince?

QUINCE What sayest thou, bully⁷ 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 By'r lakin, a parlous¹² fear.

STARVELING I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done¹⁴.

BOTTOM Not a whit: I have a device to make all well. Write¹⁵ 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, and it shall be written in eight and six²².

BOTTOM No, make it two more: let it be written in eight and eight.

SNOUT Will not the ladies be afeard²⁵ of the lion?

STARVELING I fear it²⁶, I promise you.

BOTTOM Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves, to bring in — God shield us! — a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing. For there is not a more [fearful wild-fowl](#)²⁹ than your lion living. And we ought to look to it.

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](#)³⁵: '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](#)³⁷ yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were [pity of my](#)³⁸ 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](#)⁴¹ 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.

SNOUT Doth the moon shine that night we play our play?

BOTTOM A calendar, a calendar! Look in the [almanac](#)⁴⁶. Find out moonshine, find out moonshine.

They consult an almanac

[Robin may] enter

QUINCE Yes, it doth shine that night.

BOTTOM Why, then may you leave a [casement](#)⁴⁹ 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](#)⁵² and a lantern, and say he comes to [disfigure](#), or to [present](#)⁵³, 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.

SNOUT 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 rough-cast⁶⁰ about
him, to signify wall; or let him hold his fingers thus; and
through that cranny shall

Hand gesture suggesting a hole in a wall

Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.

QUINCE If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down,
every mother's son, and rehearse⁶⁵ your parts. Pyramus, you
begin: when you have spoken your speech, enter into that
brake, and so every one according to his cue.

Robin [may] enter

ROBIN What hempen home-spuns have we swagg'ring⁶⁸ here,

Aside

So near the cradle⁶⁹ of the fairy queen?

What, a play toward⁷⁰? I'll be an auditor,
An actor too perhaps, if I see cause.

QUINCE Speak, Pyramus.— Thisbe, stand forth.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet—

QUINCE Odours, odours.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] —odours savours sweet,

So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.

But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile,

And by and by⁷⁸ I will to thee appear.

Exit

ROBIN A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here.

[Exit]

THISBE [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.

THISBE [FLUTE] Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
Of colour like the red rose on triumphant brier,
Most [brisky juvenal](#) and [eke](#) most lovely [Jew](#)⁸⁵,
As true as truest horse that yet would never tire,
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

QUINCE 'Ninus⁸⁸' tomb', man! Why, you must not speak that
yet; that you answer to Pyramus. You speak all your [part](#)⁸⁹ at
once, cues and all. Pyramus, enter: your cue is past; it is,
'never tire'.

THISBE [FLUTE] O —

As true as truest horse that yet would never tire.

Enter [Robin and] Pyramus [Bottom] with the ass head

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] If I [were fair](#)⁹³, Thisbe, I were only thine.

QUINCE O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray,
masters! Fly, masters! Help!

The Clowns all exit

ROBIN I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a [round](#)⁹⁶,
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a [fire](#)⁹⁹,
And neigh and bark and grunt and roar and burn,
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.

Exit

If Bottom exited with the other clowns, he re-enters here

BOTTOM Why do they run away? This is a [knavery](#)¹⁰²
of them to make me afeard.

Enter Snout

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

BOTTOM What do you see? You see an asshead of your own,

do you?

[Exit Snout]

Enter Quince

QUINCE Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art
translated¹⁰⁹.

Exit

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.

The ousel cock¹¹⁴ so black of hue,

Sings

With orange-tawny bill,

The throstle¹¹⁶ with his note so true,

The wren with little quill¹¹⁷—

TITANIA What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?

Wakes

BOTTOM The finch, the sparrow and the lark,

Sings

The plain-song¹²⁰ cuckoo grey,

Whose note full many a man doth mark,

And dares not answer nay¹²² —

For, indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a bird¹²³? Who
would give a bird the lie, though he cry 'cuckoo¹²⁴' never so?

TITANIA I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:

Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note;

So is mine eye enthralled¹²⁷ to thy shape:

And thy fair virtue's force perforce¹²⁸ 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; the more the pity that some honest neighbours will not make them friends. Nay, I can [gleek](#)¹³⁴ upon occasion.

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](#)¹³⁷.

TITANIA Out of this wood do not desire to go:

Thou shalt remain here, whether thou [wilt](#)¹³⁹ or no.

I am a spirit of no common [rate](#)¹⁴⁰.

The summer [still](#) doth [tend upon](#) my [state](#)¹⁴¹,

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](#)¹⁴⁴,

And sing while thou on pressèd flowers dost sleep.

And I will purge thy mortal [grossness](#)¹⁴⁶ so

That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.

[Peaseblossom](#), Cobweb, [Moth](#)¹⁴⁸, Mustardseed!

Enter four Fairies

PEASEBLOSSOM Ready.

COBWEB And I.

MOTH 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](#)¹⁵⁵,

Feed him with [apricocks](#) and [dewberries](#)¹⁵⁶,

With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries.

The honey-bags steal from the [humble-bees](#)¹⁵⁸,

And for [night-tapers](#)¹⁵⁹ crop their waxen thighs

And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,

To have my love to bed and to [arise](#)¹⁶¹.

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!

MOTH Hail!

MUSTARDSEED Hail!

BOTTOM I cry your worship's mercy¹⁶⁹, heartily;

To Cobweb

I beseech your worship's name.

COBWEB Cobweb.

BOTTOM I shall desire you of more acquaintance¹⁷², good
Master Cobweb: if I cut my finger, I shall make bold with¹⁷³
you.— Your name, honest gentleman?

PEASEBLOSSOM Peaseblossom.

BOTTOM I pray you commend me to Mistress Squash¹⁷⁶, your
mother, and to Master Peascod¹⁷⁷, your father. Good Master
Peaseblossom, I shall desire you of more acquaintance
too.— Your name, I beseech you, sir?

MUSTARDSEED Mustardseed.

BOTTOM Good Master Mustardseed, I know your patience¹⁸¹
well: that same cowardly, giant-like ox-beef hath devoured
many a gentleman of your house. I promise you, your
kindred hath made my eyes water¹⁸⁴ ere now. I desire you of
more acquaintance, good Master Mustardseed.

TITANIA Come, wait upon him, lead him to my bower.

The moon methinks looks with a wat'ry eye,
And when she weeps¹⁸⁸, weeps every little flower,
Lamenting some enforcèd¹⁸⁹ chastity.

Tie up my lover's tongue¹⁹⁰, bring him silently.

Exeunt

[Act 3 Scene 2]

running scene 5

Enter King of Fairies [Oberon] alone

OBERON I wonder if Titania be awaked;
Then what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on [in extremity](#)³.

Enter [Robin] Puck

Here comes my messenger.— How now, mad spirit?
What [night-rule](#) now about this [haunted](#)⁵ grove?

ROBIN My mistress with a monster is in love.
Near to her [close](#)⁷ and consecrated bower,
While she was in her [dull](#)⁸ and sleeping hour,
A crew of [patches](#), [rude mechanicals](#)⁹,
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,
Were met together to rehearse a play
Intended for great Theseus' nuptial-day.
The shallowest thick-skin of that [barren sort](#)¹³,
Who Pyramus presented in their sport,
[Forsook](#) his [scene](#)¹⁵ and entered in a brake,
When I did him at this advantage take:
An ass's [noll](#)¹⁷ I fixèd on his head.
Anon his Thisbe must be answerèd,
And forth my [mimic](#)¹⁹ comes. When they him spy,
As wild geese that the creeping [fowler](#)²⁰ eye,
Or [russet-pated choughs](#), [many in sort](#)²¹,
Rising and cawing at the gun's [report](#)²²,
[Sever](#) themselves and madly [sweep](#)²³ the sky,
So, at his sight, away his fellows fly.
And at our stamp here o'er and o'er one falls;
He 'murder' cries and help from Athens calls.
Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,

Made senseless things begin to do them wrong.
For briars and thorns at their apparel snatch,
Some sleeves, some hats, from [yielders](#)³⁰ all things catch.
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 straightway loved an ass.

OBERON This falls out better than I could devise.

But hast thou yet [latched](#)³⁶ the Athenian's eyes
With the love juice, as I did bid thee do?

ROBIN I took him sleeping — that is finished too —
And the Athenian woman by his side,
That, when he waked, [of force](#)⁴⁰ she must be eyed.

Enter Demetrius and Hermia

OBERON Stand [close](#)⁴¹. This is the same Athenian.

They stand aside

ROBIN 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 Now I but [chide](#), but I should [use](#)⁴⁵ thee worse,
For thou, I fear, hast given me cause to curse,
If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
[Being o'er shoes](#)⁴⁸ in blood, plunge in the deep,
And kill me too.

The sun was not so [true](#)⁵⁰ unto the day
As he to me. Would he have stol'n away
From sleeping Hermia? I'll believe as soon
This [whole](#) earth may be [bored](#)⁵³ and that the moon
May through the [centre](#)⁵⁴ creep, and so displease
[Her brother's](#) noontide with [th'Antipodes](#)⁵⁵.
It cannot be but thou hast murdered him,

So should a murderer look, so [dead](#)⁵⁷, so grim.

DEMETRIUS So should the murdered look, and so should I,

Pierced through the heart with your stern cruelty:

Yet you, the murderer, looks as bright, as clear,

As yonder [Venus](#) in her glimm'ring [sphere](#)⁶¹.

HERMIA What's this [to](#)⁶² my Lysander? Where is he?

Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?

DEMETRIUS I'd rather give his carcass to my hounds.

HERMIA Out, dog! Out, [cur](#)⁶⁵! Thou driv'st me past the bounds

Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him, then?

Henceforth be never [numbered](#)⁶⁷ among men.

O, [once](#)⁶⁸ tell true, tell true even for my sake!

[Durst](#) thou [a](#)⁶⁹ looked upon him being awake?

And hast thou killed him sleeping? O [brave touch](#)⁷⁰!

Could not a [worm](#)⁷¹, an adder, do so much?

An adder did it, for with [doubler](#)⁷² tongue

Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung.

DEMETRIUS You [spend](#) your [passion](#) on a [misprised mood](#)⁷⁴.

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 An if I could, what should I get [therefor](#)⁷⁸?

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

DEMETRIUS There is no following her in this fierce [vein](#)⁸²:

Here therefore for a while I will remain.

[So sorrow's heaviness doth heavier](#)⁸⁴ grow

[For](#)⁸⁵ debt that bankrupt sleep doth sorrow owe,

Which now in some slight measure it will pay,

If for his tender here I make some stay⁸⁷.

[Demetrius] lies down [and sleeps]

OBERON What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite⁸⁸

And laid the love juice on some true love's sight:

Of thy misprision⁹⁰ must perforce ensue

Some true love turned, and not a false turned true.

ROBIN Then fate o'errules, that, one man holding troth⁹²,

A million fail, confounding oath on⁹³ oath.

OBERON About the wood go swifter than the wind,

And Helena of Athens look⁹⁵ thou find.

All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer⁹⁶,

With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear⁹⁷.

By some illusion⁹⁸ see thou bring her here.

I'll charm his eyes against⁹⁹ she doth appear.

ROBIN I go, I go, look how I go,

Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow¹⁰¹.

Exit

OBERON Flower of this purple dye,

Squeezes juice on Demetrius' eyes

Hit with Cupid's archery,

Sink in apple¹⁰⁴ of his eye.

When his love he doth espy,

Let her shine as glor'ously

As the Venus of the sky.

When thou wak'st, if she be by,

Beg of her for remedy¹⁰⁹.

Enter [Robin] Puck

ROBIN Captain of our fairy band,

Helena is here at hand,

And the youth, mistook by me,

Pleading for a lover's fee¹¹³.

Shall we their **fond pageant**¹¹⁴ see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!
OBERON Stand aside: the noise they make
Will cause Demetrius to awake.

They stand aside

ROBIN Then will two at once woo one,
That must needs be sport **alone**¹¹⁹.
And those things do best please me
That befall **preposterously**¹²¹.

Enter Lysander [following] Helena

LYSANDER Why should you think that I should woo in scorn?
Scorn and derision never come in tears:
Look when¹²⁴ I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
In their **nativity**¹²⁵ all truth appears.

How can these things in me seem scorn to you,
Bearing the **badge**¹²⁷ of faith to prove them true?

HELENA You do **advance**¹²⁸ your cunning more and more.
When **truth kills truth**, O **devilish-holy fray**¹²⁹!
These vows are Hermia's. Will you give her **o'er**¹³⁰?
Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh.
Your vows to her and me, put in two scales,
Will even weigh, and both as **light as tales**¹³³.

LYSANDER I had no judgement when to her I swore.

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

LYSANDER **Demetrius loves her, and he you**¹³⁶.

DEMETRIUS O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!

Awakes

To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
Crystal is muddy. O, how **ripe in show**¹³⁹
Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!
That **pure congealèd white**, high **Taurus**¹⁴¹ snow,

Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow¹⁴²

When thou hold'st up thy hand. O, let me kiss

This princess of pure white, this seal¹⁴⁴ of bliss!

HELENA O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent¹⁴⁵

To set against¹⁴⁶ me for your merriment:

If you were civil and knew courtesy,

You would not do me thus much injury¹⁴⁸.

Can you not hate me, as I know you do,

But you must join in souls¹⁵⁰ to mock me too?

If you were men, as men you are in show,

You would not use a gentle¹⁵² lady so;

To vow, and swear, and superpraise my parts¹⁵³,

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 trim¹⁵⁷ exploit, a manly enterprise,

To conjure tears up in a poor maid's eyes

With your derision; none of noble sort

Would so offend a virgin and extort¹⁶⁰

A poor soul's patience, all to make you sport.

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 none¹⁶⁹:

If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.

My heart to her but as guestwise sojourned¹⁷¹,

And now to Helen is it home returned,

There to remain.

LYSANDER Helen, it is not so.

DEMETRIUS Disparage not the faith thou dost not know,
Lest to thy peril thou [abide](#) it [dear](#)¹⁷⁶.

Look where thy love comes, yonder is thy dear.

Enter Hermia

HERMIA Dark night, that from the eye [his](#)¹⁷⁸ function takes,
The ear more quick of [apprehension](#)¹⁷⁹ makes,
Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,
It pays the hearing double recompense.

Thou art not by mine eye, Lysander, found,
Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound.
But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?

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

HERMIA What love could [press](#)¹⁸⁶ Lysander from my side?

LYSANDER Lysander's love, that would not let him [bide](#)¹⁸⁷ —
Fair Helena, who more [engilds](#)¹⁸⁸ the night
Than all [yon](#) fiery [oes](#)¹⁸⁹ and eyes of light.—
Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know,

To Hermia

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 [confed'racy](#)¹⁹³!

Now I perceive they have conjoined all three

To [fashion](#) this false sport [in spite](#)¹⁹⁵ of me.

[Injurious](#)¹⁹⁶ Hermia, most ungrateful maid,

Have you conspired, have you with these contrived

To [bait](#)¹⁹⁸ me with this foul derision?

Is all the [counsel](#)¹⁹⁹ that we two have shared,

The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,

When we have [chid](#)²⁰¹ the hasty-footed time

For parting us — O, is all forgot?

All schooldays' friendship, childhood innocence?
We, Hermia, like two [artificial](#)²⁰⁴ gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in [one key](#)²⁰⁷,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,
Had been [incorporate](#)²⁰⁹. So we grew together
[Like](#)²¹⁰ to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet a union in partition,
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem,
So with two seeming bodies but one [heart](#)²¹³,
Two of the [first](#), like [coats](#)²¹⁴ in heraldry,
[Due but to one and crownèd with one](#)²¹⁵ crest.
And will you [rent](#) our [ancient](#) love [asunder](#)²¹⁶,
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 amazèd 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](#)²²⁷,
Precious, celestial? Wherefore speaks he this
To her he hates? And wherefore doth Lysander
Deny your love, so rich within his soul,
And [tender](#)²³¹ me, forsooth, affection,
But by your setting on, by your consent?
What though I be not so in [grace](#)²³³ as you,
So hung upon with love, so fortunate,

But miserable most, to love unloved?

This you should pity rather than despise.

HERMIA I understand not what you mean by this.

HELENA Ay, do. [Persever](#), counterfeit [sad](#)²³⁸ looks,

Make [mouths](#)²³⁹ upon me when I turn my back,

Wink each at other, [hold the sweet jest up](#)²⁴⁰:

This sport well [carried](#)²⁴¹ shall be chronicled.

If you have any pity, grace, or manners,

You would not make me such an [argument](#)²⁴³.

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.

To Lysander

DEMETRIUS If she cannot entreat, I can compel.

To Lysander

LYSANDER Thou canst compel no more than she entreat.

Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers.

Helen, 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.

To Helena

LYSANDER If thou say so, [withdraw](#)²⁵⁷, and prove it too.

DEMETRIUS Quick, come!

HERMIA Lysander, [whereto](#)²⁵⁹ tends all this?

She hangs on Lysander

LYSANDER Away, you [Ethiope](#)²⁶⁰!

DEMETRIUS No, no, sir,

Seem to break loose; [take on as](#)²⁶² you would follow,
But yet come not: you are a tame man, go!

LYSANDER [Hang off](#), thou cat, thou [burr](#)! Vile thing, [let loose](#)²⁶⁴,
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!

HERMIA Why are you grown so [rude](#)²⁶⁶?
What change is this, sweet love?

LYSANDER Thy love? [Out](#), [tawny Tartar](#)²⁶⁸, out!
Out, loathèd [medicine](#)²⁶⁹! O hated potion, hence!

HERMIA Do you not jest?

HELENA Yes, [sooth](#)²⁷¹, 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](#)²⁷⁴ 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](#)²⁸⁰.

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](#)²⁸⁶ 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](#)²⁸⁹,

To Helena

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](#)²⁹⁵ answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie! You counterfeit, you [puppet](#)²⁹⁶, you!

HERMIA Puppet? Why so? Ay, that way goes the game.

Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures, she hath [urged](#)²⁹⁹ her height,
And with her [personage](#)³⁰⁰, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed 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](#)³⁰⁴? Speak!
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

Attacks her

HELENA I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me; I was never [curst](#)³⁰⁸,
I have no gift at all in [shrewishness](#)³⁰⁹;
I am a [right](#)³¹⁰ maid for my cowardice;
Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,
Because she is [something lower](#)³¹² than myself,
That I can match her.

HERMIA Lower? Hark, again.

HELENA Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
I [evermore](#)³¹⁶ did love you, Hermia,
Did ever keep your counsels, never wronged you,
Save that, in love unto Demetrius,
I told him of your [stealth](#)³¹⁹ unto this wood.
He followed you. For love I followed him.
But he hath [chid me hence](#)³²¹ and threatened me

To strike me, spurn me, nay, to kill me too;
And now, [so](#)³²³ 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](#)³²⁶ 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](#)³³².

HELENA O, when she's angry, she is [keen](#) and [shrewd](#)³³³.

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](#)³³⁷ her to flout me thus?

Let me come to her.

LYSANDER Get you gone, you dwarf,

You [minimus](#), of hind'ring [knot-grass](#)³⁴⁰ made!

You bead, you acorn.

DEMETRIUS You are too officious

In her behalf that scorns your services.

Let her alone. Speak not of Helena,

Take not her part. For if thou dost intend

Never so little show of love to her,

Thou shalt [abide](#)³⁴⁷ it.

LYSANDER Now she holds me not.

Now follow, if thou dar'st, to try whose right,

Of thine or mine, is most in Helena.

DEMETRIUS Follow? Nay, I'll go with thee, [cheek by jowl](#)³⁵¹.

Exeunt Lysander and Demetrius

HERMIA You, mistress, all this coil is 'long³⁵² of 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, running, followed by Hermia]

Enter Oberon and [Robin] Puck [coming forward]

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

ROBIN Believe me, king of shadows, I mistook.
Did not you tell me I should know the man
By the Athenian garments he hath on?
And so far blameless proves my enterprise,
That I have 'nointed an Athenian's eyes,
And so far am I glad it so did sort³⁶⁵,
As this their jangling³⁶⁶ I esteem a sport.

OBERON Thou see'st these lovers seek a place to fight:
Hie³⁶⁸ therefore, Robin, overcast the night,
The starry welkin³⁶⁹ cover thou anon
With drooping fog as black as Acheron³⁷⁰,
And lead these testy³⁷¹ rivals so astray
As³⁷² one come not within another's way.
Like to Lysander sometime frame thy tongue³⁷³,
Then stir Demetrius up with bitter wrong³⁷⁴;
And sometime rail³⁷⁵ thou like Demetrius;
And from each other look thou lead them thus,
Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep
With leaden legs and batty³⁷⁸ wings doth creep;
Then crush this herb³⁷⁹ into Lysander's eye,

Gives herb

Whose liquor hath this virtuous³⁸⁰ property,
To take from thence all error with his³⁸¹ might,
And make his eyeballs roll with wonted³⁸² sight.
When they next wake, all this derision³⁸³
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,
And back to Athens shall the lovers wend³⁸⁵
With league whose date³⁸⁶ till death shall never end.
Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy;
And then I will her charmèd eye release
From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.
ROBIN My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
For night-swift dragons cut³⁹² the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger³⁹³,
At whose approach, ghosts, wand'ring here and there,
Troop home to churchyards; damnèd spirits all,
That in crossways and floods³⁹⁶ have burial,
Already to their wormy beds are gone;
For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
They wilfully themselves exile from light
And must for aye consort⁴⁰⁰ with black-browed night.
OBERON But we are spirits of another sort:
I with the morning's love have oft made sport⁴⁰²,
And, like a forester⁴⁰³, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery red,
Opening on Neptune⁴⁰⁵ with fair blessèd beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.
But notwithstanding, haste, make no delay:
We may effect this business yet ere day.

Exit

ROBIN Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down.

I am feared in field and town.

Goblin⁴¹², lead them up and down.

Here comes one.

Enter Lysander

LYSANDER Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now.

ROBIN Here, villain, **drawn**⁴¹⁵ and ready.

Imitating Demetrius

Where art thou?

LYSANDER I will be with thee **straight**⁴¹⁷.

ROBIN Follow me, then, to **plainer**⁴¹⁸ ground.

*Exit Lysander,
following the voice*

Enter Demetrius

DEMETRIUS Lysander, speak again;

Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled?

Speak! In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

ROBIN Thou coward, art thou bragging to the stars,

Imitating Lysander

Telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars,

And wilt not come? Come, **recreant**⁴²⁴, come, thou child.

I'll whip thee with a rod. He is defiled

That draws a sword on thee.

DEMETRIUS Yea, art thou there?

ROBIN Follow my voice. We'll **try**⁴²⁸ no manhood here.

Exeunt

Enter Lysander

LYSANDER He goes before me and still dares me on.

When I come where he calls, then he's gone.

The villain is much lighter-heeled than I:

I followed fast, but faster he did fly;

That fallen am I in dark uneven way,

And here will rest me. Come, thou gentle day!

Lie down

For if but once thou show me thy grey light,
I'll find Demetrius and revenge this spite⁴³⁶.

He sleeps

Enter Robin and Demetrius, shifting places

ROBIN Ho, ho, ho! Coward, why com'st thou not?

DEMETRIUS Abide me, if thou dar'st, for well I wot⁴³⁸

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

ROBIN Come hither. I am here.

DEMETRIUS Nay then, thou mock'st me. Thou shalt buy⁴⁴³ this dear
If ever I thy face by daylight see.

Now, go thy way: faintness constraineth⁴⁴⁵ me
To measure out my length on this cold bed.
By day's approach look to be visited.

Lies down and sleeps

Enter Helena

HELENA O weary night, O long and tedious night,
Abate⁴⁴⁹ thy hours! Shine comforts from the east,
That I may back to Athens by daylight,
From these that my poor company detest;
And sleep, that sometime shuts up sorrow's eye,
Steal me awhile from mine own company.

Sleep

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

Enter Hermia

Thus to make poor females mad.

HERMIA Never so weary, never so in woe,
Bedabbled with the dew and torn with briers,
I can no further crawl, no further go;
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

ROBIN On the ground

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

Squeezes 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,
That every man should take his own,
In your waking shall be shown.

Jack⁴⁷⁸ shall have Jill,
Nought⁴⁷⁹ shall go ill,
The man shall have his mare⁴⁸⁰ again, and all shall be well.

Exit

They [Lysander, Demetrius, Helena and Hermia] sleep all the act

Act 4 [Scene 1]

running scene 5 continues

Enter Queen of Fairies [Titania] and Clown [Bottom, with ass head,

wearing a coronet of flowers] and Fairies [Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustardseed] and the King [Oberon] behind them

TITANIA Come, sit thee down upon this flow'ry bed,
While I thy [amiable](#) cheeks do [coy](#)²,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

↓She fondles him↓

BOTTOM Where's Peaseblossom?

PEASEBLOSSOM Ready.

BOTTOM Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Monsieur Cobweb?

COBWEB Ready.

BOTTOM Monsieur Cobweb, good monsieur, get you your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and, good monsieur, bring me the honey-bag. Do not fret yourself too much in the action, monsieur; and, good monsieur, have a care the honey-bag break not. I would be loath to have you [overflown](#)¹⁵ with a honey-bag, signior. Where's Monsieur Mustardseed?

Cobweb may exit

MUSTARDSEED Ready.

BOTTOM Give me your [neaf](#)¹⁸, Monsieur Mustardseed. Pray you [leave your courtesy](#)¹⁹, good monsieur.

MUSTARDSEED What's your will?

BOTTOM Nothing, good monsieur, but to help [Cavalery](#)²¹ [Cobweb](#)²² to scratch. I must to the barber's, monsieur, for methinks I am [marvellous](#)²³ hairy about the face. And I am such a tender ass, if my hair do but tickle me, I must scratch.

TITANIA What, wilt thou hear some music, my sweet love?

BOTTOM I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let us have the [tongs](#) and the [bones](#)²⁷.

Music: tongs, rural music

TITANIA Or say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat.

BOTTOM Truly, a [peck](#)²⁹ of provender; I could munch your good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a [bottle](#)³⁰ of hay: good hay, sweet hay, hath no [fellow](#)³¹.

TITANIA I have a [vent'rous](#)³² fairy that shall seek
The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee new nuts.

BOTTOM I had rather have a handful or two of dried peas.
But, I pray you let none of your people [stir](#)³⁵ me. I have an [exposition of](#)³⁶ sleep come upon me.

TITANIA Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.
Fairies, begone, and be [all ways away](#)³⁸.

[Exeunt fairies]

So doth the [woodbine](#)³⁹ the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
[Enrings](#)⁴¹ the barky fingers of the elm.
O, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!

They sleep

Enter Robin Goodfellow and Oberon [who comes forward]

OBERON Welcome, good Robin.

See'st thou this sweet sight?

Her [dotage](#)⁴⁵ now I do begin to pity.

For, meeting her of late behind the wood,
Seeking sweet [favours](#)⁴⁷ for this hateful fool,
I did upbraid her and fall out with her.

For she his hairy temples then had rounded
With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers.
And that same dew, which [sometime](#)⁵¹ on the buds
Was wont to swell like round and [orient](#)⁵² pearls,
Stood now within the pretty [flowerets](#)⁵³ eyes
Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.
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 me, and her fairy sent
To bear him to my bower in fairy land.
And now I have the boy, I will undo
This hateful imperfection of her eyes.
And, gentle Puck, take this transformèd scalp
From off the head of this Athenian [swain](#)⁶³;
That, he awaking when the [other](#)⁶⁴ do,
May all to Athens back again [repair](#)⁶⁵,
And think no more of this night's [accidents](#)⁶⁶
But as the fierce vexation of a dream.
But first I will release the fairy queen.
Be thou as thou wast wont to be;

Squeezes the herb on her eyes

See as thou wast wont to see.
[Dian's bud](#)⁷¹ o'er Cupid's flower
Hath such force and blessèd power.
Now, my Titania, wake you, my sweet queen.
TITANIA My Oberon! What visions have I seen!
Methought I was enamoured of an ass.
OBERON There lies your love.
TITANIA How came these things to pass?
O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!
OBERON Silence awhile.— Robin, take off this head.—
Titania, music call, and strike more dead
Than common sleep of all [these five](#)⁸¹ the sense.

Music, still

TITANIA [Music](#), ho! Music, such as [charmeth](#)⁸² sleep!
ROBIN Now, when thou wak'st, with thine own fool's eyes peep.
OBERON Sound, music! Come, my queen, take hands with me,

Oberon and Titania may dance

And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be.

Now thou and I are new in amity,

And will tomorrow midnight [solemnly](#)⁸⁷

Dance in Duke Theseus' house [triumphantly](#)⁸⁸,

And bless it to all fair prosperity.

There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be

Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity.

ROBIN Fairy king, [attend](#)⁹², and mark:

I do hear the morning lark.

OBERON Then, my queen, in silence [sad](#)⁹⁴,

[Trip](#)⁹⁵ we after the night's shade;

We the globe can compass soon,

Swifter than the wand'ring moon.

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.

Exeunt. Sleepers lie still

Wind horns. Enter Theseus, Egeus, Hippolyta, and all [his](#) train

THESEUS Go, one of you, find out the forester,

For now our [observation](#)¹⁰³ is performed;

And since we have the [vaward](#)¹⁰⁴ of the day,

My love shall hear the music of my hounds.

[Uncouple](#)¹⁰⁶ in the western valley, let them go;

Dispatch, I say, and find the forester.

[Exit an Attendant]

We will, fair queen, up to the mountain's top

And mark the musical confusion

Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

HIPPOLYTA I was with Hercules and [Cadmus](#)¹¹¹ once,

When in a wood of Crete they [bayed](#)¹¹² the bear

With hounds of Sparta¹¹³; never did I hear
Such gallant chiding¹¹⁴, for besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seemed all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

THESEUS My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind¹¹⁸,
So flewed, so sanded¹¹⁹, and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
Crook-kneed and dewlapped like Thessalian¹²¹ bulls,
Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth¹²² like bells,
Each under each. A cry more tuneable¹²³
Was never hallowed to, nor cheered¹²⁴ with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly;
Judge when you hear. But, soft¹²⁶! What nymphs are these?

EGEUS My lord, this is my daughter here asleep,
And this, Lysander, this Demetrius is,
This Helena, old Nedar's Helena.
I wonder of¹³⁰ their being here together.

THESEUS No doubt they rose up early to observe
The rite of May, and hearing our intent,
Came here in grace of our solemnity¹³³.
But speak, Egeus; is not this the day
That Hermia should give answer of her choice?

EGEUS It is, my lord.

THESEUS Go, bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns.

Horns and they wake. Shout within, they all start up.

Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine¹³⁸ is past.
Begin these woodbirds but to couple¹³⁹ now?
LYSANDER Pardon, my lord.

They kneel

THESEUS I pray you all stand up.

I know you two are rival enemies.
How comes this gentle concord in the world,
That hatred is so far from [jealousy](#)¹⁴⁴,
To sleep by hate and fear no enmity?

LYSANDER My lord, I shall reply amazedly,
Half sleep, half waking. But as yet, I swear,
I cannot truly say how I came here.
But, as I think — for truly would I speak,
And now I do bethink me, so it is —
I came with Hermia hither. Our intent
Was to be gone from Athens, where we might be
Without the peril of the Athenian law.

EGEUS Enough, enough, my lord. You have enough;
I beg the law, the law, upon his head.—
They would have stolen away, they would, Demetrius,
Thereby to have [defeated](#)¹⁵⁷ you and me:
You of your wife and me of my consent,
Of my consent that she should be your wife.

DEMETRIUS My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,
Of this their purpose hither to this wood,
And I in fury hither followed them;
Fair Helena in [fancy](#)¹⁶³ followed 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, seems to me now
As the remembrance of an [idle gaud](#)¹⁶⁷
Which in my childhood I did dote upon.
And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helena. To her, my lord,
Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia:

But like a sickness did I loathe this food.
But, as in health, come to my natural taste,
Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,
And will for evermore be true to it.
THESEUS Fair lovers, you are fortunately met:
Of this discourse we shall hear more anon.
Egeus, I will [overbear](#)¹⁷⁹ your will;
For in the temple, [by and by](#)¹⁸⁰ with us,
These couples shall eternally be knit.
And, [for](#) the morning now is [something worn](#)¹⁸²,
Our [purposed](#)¹⁸³ hunting shall be set aside.
Away with us to Athens; three and three,
We'll hold a feast [in](#) great [solemnity](#)¹⁸⁵.—
Come, Hippolyta.

Exeunt Duke and lords [and Hippolyta]

DEMETRIUS These things seem small and [undistinguishable](#)¹⁸⁷,
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

HERMIA Methinks I see these things with [parted](#)¹⁸⁹ eye,
When everything seems double.

HELENA So methinks:
And I have found Demetrius like a jewel,
[Mine own and not mine own](#)¹⁹³.

DEMETRIUS 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 bid us follow to the temple.

Bottom wakes

DEMETRIUS Why, then, we are awake; let's follow him
And [by](#)²⁰¹ the way let us recount our dreams.

Exeunt lovers

BOTTOM When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer. My next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.' Hey-ho! Peter Quince? Flute, the bellows-mender? Snout, the tinker? Starveling? God's²⁰⁴ my life, stolen hence and left me asleep! I have had a most rare²⁰⁵ vision. I had a dream, past the wit²⁰⁶ of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about²⁰⁷ 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 patched²¹⁰ fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not²¹¹ 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's²¹⁵ Dream', because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the duke. Peradventure²¹⁶, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her²¹⁷ death.

Exit

[Act 4 Scene 2]

running scene 6

Enter Quince, Flute, Snout and Starveling

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

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

FLUTE If he come not, then the play is marred. It goes not forward⁵, doth it?

QUINCE It is not possible: you have not a man in all Athens able to discharge⁷ Pyramus but he.

FLUTE No, he hath simply the best wit⁸ of any handicraft man in Athens.

QUINCE Yea, and the best [person](#)¹⁰ too, and he is a very [paramour](#)¹¹ for a sweet voice.

FLUTE You must say 'paragon'. A paramour is, God bless us, a thing of [naught](#)¹³.

Enter Snug the joiner

SNUG Masters, the duke is coming from the temple, and there is two or three lords and ladies more married. If our sport had gone forward, [we had all been made men](#)¹⁶.

FLUTE O sweet bully Bottom! Thus hath he lost [sixpence a](#)¹⁷ day during his life; he could not have [scaped](#)¹⁸ sixpence a day. [An](#)¹⁹ the duke had not given him sixpence a day for playing Pyramus, I'll be hanged. He would have deserved it. Sixpence a day in Pyramus, or nothing.

Enter Bottom

BOTTOM Where are these lads? Where are these [hearts](#)²²?

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. I will tell you everything as it [fell out](#)²⁷.

QUINCE Let us hear, sweet Bottom.

BOTTOM Not a word [of](#)²⁹ me. All that I will tell you is that the duke hath dined. Get your apparel together, good [strings](#)³⁰ to your beards, new ribbons to your [pumps](#). Meet [presently](#)³¹ at the palace, every man look o'er his part, for the short and the long is, our play is [preferred](#)³³. In any case, let Thisbe have clean linen, and let not him that plays the lion [pare](#)³⁴ his nails, for they shall hang out for the lion's claws. And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath, and I do not doubt but to hear them say, it is a sweet comedy. No more words: away! Go, away!

Act 5 Scene 1

running scene 7

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and his lords

HIPPOLYTA 'Tis strange, my Theseus, [that](#)¹ these lovers speak of.

THESEUS More strange than true. I never may believe

These [antic](#) fables, nor these [fairy toys](#)³.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

Such [shaping](#) fantasies that [apprehend](#)⁵

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover and the poet

Are of imagination all [compact](#)⁸.

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;

That is the madman. The lover, all as [frantic](#)¹⁰,

Sees [Helen's](#) beauty in a [brow of Egypt](#)¹¹.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,

And as imagination [bodies forth](#)¹⁴

The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen

Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing

A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination,

That if it would but [apprehend](#)¹⁹ some joy,

It [comprehends](#)²⁰ some bringer of that joy.

Or in the night, imagining some fear,

How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

HIPPOLYTA But all the story of the night told over,

And all their minds [transfigured](#)²⁴ so together,

[More witnesseth](#)²⁵ than fancy's images

And grows to something of great [constancy](#)²⁶;

But howsoever, strange and [admirable](#)²⁷.

Enter lovers: Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, Helena

THESEUS Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.

Joy, gentle friends! Joy and fresh days of love

Accompany your hearts!

LYSANDER More than to us

Wait in your royal walks, your [board](#)³², your bed!

THESEUS Come now, what [masques](#)³³, what dances shall we have,

To wear away this long age of three hours

Between our [after-supper](#)³⁵ and bedtime?

Where is our usual manager of mirth?

What revels are in hand? Is there no play

To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?

Call Egeus.

EGEUS Here, mighty Theseus.

THESEUS Say, what [abridgement](#)⁴¹ have you for this evening?

What masque? What music? How shall we beguile

The lazy time, if not with some delight?

EGEUS There is a [brief](#) how many sports are [ripe](#)⁴⁴:

Egeus gives a paper to Lysander

Make choice of which your highness will see first.

LYSANDER 'The [battle with the Centaurs](#)⁴⁶, to be sung

By an Athenian eunuch to the harp.'

Reads

THESEUS We'll none of that. That have I told my love,

In glory of my kinsman Hercules.

LYSANDER 'The [riot of the tipsy Bacchanals](#),⁵⁰

Reads

Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage.'

THESEUS That is an old [device](#)⁵², and it was played

When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.

LYSANDER 'The thrice three Muses mourning for the death⁵⁴

Reads

Of learning, late deceased in beggary.'

THESEUS That is some satire, keen and critical⁵⁶,

Not sorting with⁵⁷ a nuptial ceremony.

LYSANDER 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

Reads

And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth.'

THESEUS Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?

That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow⁶¹.

How shall we find the concord⁶² of this discord?

EGEUS 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,

Which makes it tedious. For in all the play

There is not one word apt, one player fitted⁶⁷.

And tragical, my noble lord, it is,

For Pyramus therein doth kill himself.

Which, when I saw rehearsed, I must confess,

Made mine eyes water, but more merry tears

The passion of loud laughter never shed.

THESEUS What are they that do play it?

EGEUS Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,

Which never laboured in their minds till now;

And now have toiled their unbreathed⁷⁶ memories

With this same play, against⁷⁷ your nuptial.

THESEUS And we will hear it.

EGEUS No, my noble lord,

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

And it is nothing, nothing in the world;

Unless you can find sport in their intents,

Extremely stretched and [conned](#)⁸³ with cruel pain,
To do you service.

THESEUS I will hear that play.

For never anything can be amiss,
When [simpleness](#)⁸⁷ and duty tender it.

Go, bring them in.— And take your places, ladies.

[Exit Egeus]

HIPPOLYTA I love not to see [wretchedness o'er-charged](#)⁸⁹
And duty in [his service](#)⁹⁰ perishing.

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

HIPPOLYTA He says they can do nothing in this [kind](#)⁹².

THESEUS The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
Our sport shall be to [take](#)⁹⁴ what they mistake;
And what poor duty cannot do, [noble respect](#)⁹⁵
Takes it [in might, not merit](#)⁹⁶.

Where I have come, great [clerks](#)⁹⁷ have purposed
To greet me with premeditated welcomes;
Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,
[Make periods](#)¹⁰⁰ in the midst of sentences,
Throttle their practised [accent](#)¹⁰¹ in their fears,
And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,
Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
Out of this silence yet I [picked](#)¹⁰⁴ a welcome.
And in the [modesty](#) of [fearful](#)¹⁰⁵ 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](#)¹⁰⁹.

[Enter Egeus]

EGEUS So please your grace, the Prologue is [addressed](#)¹¹⁰.

THESEUS Let him approach.

Flourish [of] trumpets

Enter the Prologue: Quince

PROLOGUE [QUINCE] If we offend, it is with our good *will*¹¹².

That you should think, we come not to offend,
But with good *will*¹¹⁴. To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our *end*¹¹⁵.

Consider then, we come but in *despite*¹¹⁶.

*We do not come as minding to content you*¹¹⁷,

Our true intent *is*. *All* for your *delight*¹¹⁸

We are not *here*¹¹⁹. That you should here repent you,

The actors are at hand; and by their *show*¹²⁰,

You shall know all that you are *like*¹²¹ to know.

THESEUS This fellow doth not *stand upon points*¹²².

LYSANDER He hath *rid* his prologue like a *rough*¹²³ colt: he knows
not the *stop*¹²⁴. A good moral, my lord. It is not enough to
speak, but to speak true.

HIPPOLYTA Indeed he hath played on his prologue like a child
on a recorder: a sound, but not in *government*¹²⁷.

THESEUS His speech was like a tangled chain: *nothing*¹²⁸
impaired, but all disordered. Who is next?

Enter, with a trumpet[er] before them, Pyramus [Bottom] and Thisbe [Flute], Wall [Snout], Moonshine [Starveling], and Lion [Snug]

PROLOGUE [QUINCE] 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 rough-cast doth present

Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers *sunder*¹³⁵.

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. For, if you will know,

By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn¹⁴⁰
To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.
This grisly beast, which Lion hight¹⁴² by name,
The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,
Did scare away, or rather did affright.
And as she fled, her mantle she did fall¹⁴⁵,
Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall¹⁴⁷,
And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain;
Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broached¹⁵⁰ 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 twain¹⁵³
At large discourse, while here they do remain.

Exeunt all but Wall

THESEUS I wonder if the lion be to speak.

DEMETRIUS No wonder, my lord: one lion may, when many asses
do.

WALL [SNOUT] In this same interlude¹⁵⁸ 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.
This loam, this rough-cast and this stone doth show
That I am that same wall; the truth is so.
And this the cranny is, right and sinister¹⁶⁶,

Gestures to gap between his legs

Through which the fearful¹⁶⁷ lovers are to whisper.

THESEUS Would you desire lime and hair to speak
better?

DEMETRIUS It is the wittiest [partition](#)¹⁷⁰ that ever I heard
discourse, my lord.

THESEUS Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence!

Enter Pyramus

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] O [grim-looking](#)¹⁷³ 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, thou sweet and lovely wall

That stands between her father's ground and mine!

Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,

Show me thy [chink](#)¹⁸⁰, to blink through with mine eyne!

Wall opens his legs

Thanks, courteous wall. [Jove](#)¹⁸¹ shield thee well for this.

Pyramus peers between Wall's legs

But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.

O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss!

Cursed be thy [stones](#)¹⁸⁴ for thus deceiving me!

THESEUS The wall, methinks, being [sensible](#), should curse
[again](#).¹⁸⁵

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] No, in truth, sir, he should not. 'Deceiving
me' is Thisbe's cue; she is to enter and I am to spy her
through the wall. You shall see, it will fall [pat](#)¹⁸⁹ as I told you.
Yonder she comes.

Enter Thisbe

THISBE [FLUTE] O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me.
My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones,
Thy stones with [lime](#) and [hair](#)¹⁹⁴ knit up in thee.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] I see a voice; now will I to the chink,
To spy [an](#)¹⁹⁶ I can hear my Thisbe's face. Thisbe?

THISBE [FLUTE] My love [thou art, my love](#)¹⁹⁷ I think.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] Think what thou wilt, I am thy [lover's grace](#)¹⁹⁸

And like [Limander](#)¹⁹⁹ am I trusty still.

THISBE [FLUTE] And I like [Helen](#)²⁰⁰, till the Fates me kill.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] Not [Shafalus to Procrus](#)²⁰¹ was so true.

THISBE [FLUTE] As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] O, kiss me through the [hole](#)²⁰⁴ of this vile wall!

THISBE [FLUTE] I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?

THISBE [FLUTE] ['Tide](#)²⁰⁶ life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

[Exeunt Pyramus and Thisbe]

WALL [SNOUT] Thus have I, Wall, my part dischargèd so;

And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

Exit

THESEUS Now is the [mural](#)²⁰⁹ down between the two neighbours.

DEMETRIUS No remedy, my lord, when [walls are so wilful](#)²¹¹ to hear without warning.

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

THESEUS The best [in this kind](#) are but [shadows](#)²¹⁴, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

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

THESEUS If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men. Here come two noble beasts in, a man and a lion.

Enter Lion and Moonshine [with a lantern, thorn-bush and dog]

LION [SNUG] You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear

The smallest [monstrous](#)²²² mouse that creeps on floor,

May now perchance both quake and tremble here,

When lion [rough](#)²²⁴ in wildest rage doth roar.

Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am
A lion [fell](#), nor else no lion's [dam](#)²²⁶,
For if I should as lion come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.

THESEUS A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience.

DEMETRIUS The very best [at](#) a [beast](#)²³⁰, my lord, that e'er I saw.

LYSANDER This lion is [a very fox for](#)²³¹ his valour.

THESEUS True, and a [goose for his discretion](#)²³².

DEMETRIUS Not so, my lord, for his valour cannot carry his
discretion, and the fox [carries](#)²³⁴ the goose.

THESEUS His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valour,
for the goose carries not the fox. It is well. Leave it to his
discretion, and let us hearken to the moon.

MOONSHINE [STARVELING] This lantern doth the [hornèd](#)²³⁸ moon
present—

DEMETRIUS He should have worn the [horns on his head](#)²³⁹.

THESEUS He is [no crescent](#)²⁴⁰, and his horns are invisible within
the circumference.

MOONSHINE [STARVELING] This lantern doth the hornèd moon present:
Myself the man i'th'moon doth seem to be.

THESEUS This is the greatest error of all the rest; the man
should be put into the lantern. How is it else the man
i'th'moon?

DEMETRIUS He dares not come there for the candle. For you see
it is already [in snuff](#)²⁴⁸.

HIPPOLYTA I am aweary of this moon; would he would change!

THESEUS It appears, by his small light of discretion, that he is
[in the wane](#). But yet, in courtesy, in all [reason](#), we must [stay](#)²⁵¹
the time.

LYSANDER Proceed, Moon.

MOONSHINE [STARVELING] 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.

DEMETRIUS Why, all these should be in the lantern, for they are in the moon. But silence — here comes Thisbe.

Enter Thisbe

THISBE [FLUTE] This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?

LION [SNUG] O!

The lion roars. Thisbe runs off [dropping her mantle]

DEMETRIUS Well roared, Lion.

THESEUS Well run, Thisbe.

[Lion shakes Thisbe's mantle, and exits]

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

THESEUS Well moused²⁶⁵, Lion.

DEMETRIUS And then came Pyramus.

LYSANDER And so the lion vanished.

Enter Pyramus

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] 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 taste of truest Thisbe sight.

But stay, O spite!

But mark, poor knight,

What dreadful dole²⁷⁴ is here?

Eyes, do you see?

How can it be?

O dainty duck! O dear!

Thy mantle good,

What, stained with blood!

Approach, you Furies fell²⁸⁰!

O Fates²⁸¹, come, come,

Cut thread and [thrum](#)²⁸²,
[Quail](#), crush, conclude, and [quell](#)²⁸³!

THESEUS This [passion](#), and the death of a dear [friend](#)²⁸⁴, would
[go near to](#)²⁸⁵ make a man look sad.

HIPPOLYTA [Beshrew](#)²⁸⁶ my heart, but I pity the man.

PYRAMUS [BOTTOM] O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions [frame](#)²⁸⁷?

Since lion vile hath here [deflowered](#)²⁸⁸ my dear:
Which is — no, no — which was the fairest dame
That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with [cheer](#)²⁹⁰.
Come, tears, confound:
Out, sword, and wound
The [pap](#)²⁹³ of Pyramus,
Ay, that left pap,
Where heart doth hop:
Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.

Stabs himself

Now am I dead,
Now am I fled,
My soul is in the sky.
[Tongue](#)³⁰⁰, lose thy light,
Moon take thy flight,

[Exit Moonshine]

Now die, die, die, die, die.

Dies

DEMETRIUS No [die](#), but an [ace](#)³⁰³ for him; for he is but one.

LYSANDER Less than an ace, man: for he is dead, he is
nothing.

THESEUS With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover,
and prove an [ass](#)³⁰⁷.

HIPPOLYTA How chance Moonshine is gone before Thisbe
comes back and finds her lover?

Enter Thisbe

THESEUS She will find him by starlight. Here she comes, and her [passion](#)³¹¹ ends the play.

HIPPOLYTA Methinks she should not use a [long one](#)³¹² for such a Pyramus: I hope she will be brief.

DEMETRIUS A [mote](#)³¹⁴ will turn the balance, which Pyramus, which Thisbe, is the better.

LYSANDER She hath spied him already with those sweet eyes.

DEMETRIUS And thus she [means](#), *videlicet*³¹⁸—

THISBE [FLUTE] Asleep, my love?

What, dead, my dove?

O Pyramus, arise!

Speak, speak. Quite dumb?

Dead, dead? A tomb

Must cover thy sweet eyes.

These lily lips,

This cherry nose,

These yellow cowslip cheeks,

Are gone, are gone!

Lovers, make moan:

His eyes were green as leeks.

O [Sisters Three](#)³³¹,

Come, come to me,

With hands as pale as milk.

Lay them in gore,

Since you have [shore](#)³³⁵

With shears his [thread of silk](#)³³⁶.

Tongue, not a word.

Come, trusty sword,

Come, blade, my breast [imbrue](#)³³⁹.

Stabs herself

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

Dies

THESEUS Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

DEMETRIUS Ay, and Wall too.

BOTTOM No, I assure you, the wall is down that

Gets up

parted their fathers. Will it please you to see the epilogue, or
to hear a [Bergomask dance between](#)³⁴⁷ two of our company?

THESEUS No epilogue, I pray you, for your play needs no
excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all dead, there
need none to be blamed. Marry, if he that writ it had played
Pyramus and hung himself in Thisbe's garter, it would have
been a fine tragedy: and so it is, truly, and very notably
discharged. But come, your Bergomask; let your epilogue
alone.

A dance

The [iron tongue](#) of midnight hath [told](#)³⁵⁵ twelve.
Lovers, to bed, 'tis almost fairy time.
I fear we shall out-sleep the coming morn
As much as we this night have [overwatched](#)³⁵⁸.
This [palpable-gross](#) play hath well [beguiled](#)³⁵⁹
The [heavy gait](#)³⁶⁰ of night. Sweet friends, to bed.
A fortnight hold we this [solemnity](#)³⁶¹,
In nightly revels and new jollity.

Exeunt

Enter [Robin] Puck

With a broom

ROBIN Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf beholds the moon.

Whilst the [heavy](#)³⁶⁵ ploughman snores,
 All with weary task [fordone](#)³⁶⁶.
 Now the [wasted brands](#)³⁶⁷ do glow,
 Whilst the [screech-owl](#)³⁶⁸, screeching loud,
 Puts the wretch that lies in woe
 In remembrance of a shroud.
 Now it is the time of night
 That the graves all gaping wide,
 Every one lets forth his [sprite](#)³⁷³,
 In the church-way paths to glide.
 And we fairies that do run
 By the [triple Hecate's team](#)³⁷⁶,
 From the presence of the sun,
 Following darkness like a dream,
 Now are [frolic](#)³⁷⁹; not a mouse
 Shall disturb this [hallowed](#)³⁸¹ house.
 I am sent with broom before,
 To sweep the dust [behind](#)³⁸² the door.
Enter King and Queen of Fairies [Oberon and Titania] with their train
 OBERON Through the house [give glimmering light](#)³⁸³,
 By the dead and drowsy fire,
 Every elf and fairy sprite
 Hop as light as bird from briar,
 And this ditty, after me,
 Sing, and dance it [trippingly](#)³⁸⁸.
 TITANIA First, [rehearse](#) this song by [rote](#)³⁸⁹,
 To each word a warbling note.
 Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
 Will we sing and bless this place.
 [FAIRIES *sing*] *The Song*

Fairies dance

Now until the break of day

Through this house each fairy stray.
To the [best bride-bed](#)³⁹⁵ will we,
Which by us shall blessèd be.
And the [issue](#) there [create](#)³⁹⁷
Ever shall be fortunate.
So shall all the couples three
Ever true in loving be.
And the blots of Nature's hand
Shall not in their issue stand.
Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar,
Nor mark [prodigious](#)⁴⁰⁴, such as are
Despisèd in nativity,
Shall upon their children be.
With this field-dew [consecrate](#)⁴⁰⁷,
Every fairy take his [gait](#)⁴⁰⁸,
And each [several](#)⁴⁰⁹ chamber bless,
Through this palace, with sweet peace.
Ever shall in safety rest,
And the owner of it blest.
Trip away, make no [stay](#)⁴¹³;
Meet me all by break of day.

[Exeunt all but Robin]

ROBIN If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this [weak](#) and [idle](#)⁴¹⁹ theme,
No more [yielding but](#)⁴²⁰ a dream,
[Gentles](#), do not [reprehend](#)⁴²¹.
If you pardon, we will [mend](#)⁴²².
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearnèd luck

Now to scape the [serpent's tongue](#)⁴²⁵,
We will make amends ere long:
Else the Puck a liar call.
So, goodnight unto you all.
[Give me your hands](#)⁴²⁹, if we be friends,
And Robin shall [restore amends](#)⁴³⁰.

TEXTUAL NOTES

Q = First Quarto text of 1600

F = First Folio text of 1623

F2 = a correction introduced in the Second Folio text of 1632

F4 = a correction introduced in the Fourth Folio text of 1685

Ed = a correction introduced by a later editor

SD = stage direction

SH = speech heading (i.e. speaker's name)

List of parts = Ed

1.1.7 **nights** = F. Q = night **10 New-bent** = Ed. F = Now bent **25 Stand forth, Demetrius** = Ed. *Set in italic as a stage direction in F* **27 Stand forth, Lysander** = Ed. *Set in italic as a stage direction in F* **134 Ay me, for** = Q. F = For **I could ever** = Q. F = ever I could **138 low** = Ed. F = loue **142 eyes** = Q. F = eie **145 momentary** = F's *modernization of Q's momentany* **161 removed** = F. Q = remote **169 to** = Q. F = for

175 love = F. Q = loves **185 your** = Q. F = you **203 none** = F. Q = no fault **208 like** = F. Q = as **210 into** = F. Q = unto a **219 sweet** = Ed. F = sweld **228 dote** = Q. F = dotes **242 often** = F. Q = so oft **251 this** = Q. F = his

1.2.8 **grow on to** = F. Q = grow to **37 You must** = F. Q = Flute, you must **58 if it be** = Q. F = if be **72 roar** = F. Q = roare you **89 will we** = Q. F = we will

2.1.1 SH ROBIN = Ed. F = *Rob. Sometimes* Pucke **5 Thorough flood, thorough** = Q. F = through flood, through **33 sprite** = Q. F = spirit **34 not you he** = Q. F = you not hee **47 filly** = Q. F = silly **62 SH TITANIA** = Ed. F = *Qu. Fairies* = Ed. F = Fairy **66 hast** = Q. F = wast **70 step** = Q. F = steepe **78 not thou** = Q. F = thou not **80 Aegles** = Ed. F = Eagles **81 Antiopa** = Q. F = *Atiopa* **92 petty** = F. Q = pelting **108 hoary-headed** = Q1. F = hoared headed **110 thin** = Ed. F = chin **138 do I** = Q. F = I doe **158 saw** = Q. F = say **178 round about** = Q. F = about **214 do use** = Q. F = doe **242 the field** = Q. F = and Field **247 I'll** = Q. F = I

2.2.9 SH FIRST FAIRY = Ed. *Not in F* **13, 24 SH CHORUS** = Ed. *Not in F* **14 our** = Q. F = your **35 wood** = Q. F = woods **48 we can** = Q. F = can you **49 interchainèd** = Q. F = interchanged **67 found** = Q. F = finde

68 On = Q. F = One **104 shows her art** = Ed. F = her shewes art. Q = shewes art. **113 Helena now I** = F. Q = Helena I **140 they** = Q. F = that **149 ate** = Ed. *Spelled eate in F* **150 you** = Q. F = yet

3.1.27 yourselves = F. Q = your selfe **40 them** = Q. F = him **45 SH SNOUT** = Ed. Q/F = Sn., *which could be SNOUT or SNUG. F2 = SNUG* **48 SD [Robin may] enter** = Ed. F = *Enter Pucke. Not in Q* **68 SD Robin [may] enter** = Ed. Q/F = *Enter Robin* **73 SH PYRAMUS [BOTTOM]** = Ed. F = *Pir.* **80 SH THISBE [FLUTE]** = Ed. F = *This.* **93 SD Enter … head** placed ten lines later in F at a possible re-entry point for Bottom **116 with** = Q. F = and **129 On … thee** = Q. F prints before the two preceding lines **148 Peaseblossom … Mustardseed! set as SD in F** **149 SH PEASEBLOSSOM** = Ed. F = *Fai.* **150 SH COBWEB** = Ed. *Not in F* **151 SH MOTH** = Ed. *Not in F* **152 SH MUSTARDSEED** = Ed. *Not in F* **153 SH ALL** = Ed. *Not in F* **165 SH PEASEBLOSSOM** = Ed. F = 1. *Fai.* **166 SH COBWEB** = Ed. *Not in F.* **167 SH MOTH** = Ed. F = 2. *Fai.* **168 SH MUSTARDSEED** = Ed. F = 3. *Fai.* **178 you of** = Q. F = of you **180 Mustardseed.** F here accidentally repeats "Peas. Pease-blossome." **184 you of** = Ed. F = you **188 weeps, weeps** = Q. F = weepes, weepe

3.2.5 haunted = Q. F = gaunted **58 murdered** = Q. F = murderer **68 tell true** = Q. F omits repetition **80 I so** = Ed. F = I **85 sleep** = Ed. F = slip **121 SD [following]** = Ed. F = and **123 come** = Q. F = comes **145 all are** = Q. F = are all **151 were men** = Q. F = are men **167 till** = Q. F = to **172 is it** = Q. F = it is **174 Helen, it** = Q. F = It **176 abide** = F's modernization of Q's aby **183 thy sound** = Q. F = that sound **214 like** = Ed. F = life **221 passionate** = F. *Not in Q* **244 my** = Q. F = mine **252 prayers** = Ed. F = praise **261 sir** = F. Q = heele. *Some eds emend to yield* **269 potion** = Q. F = poison **286 of doubt** = F. *Some eds omit of* **347 abide** = F's modernization of Q's aby **359 wilfully** = Q. F = willingly **362 hath** = F. Q = had **387 employ** = Q. F = imply **392 night-swift** = F. Q = nights swift **399 exile** = Q. F = dxile **411 feared** = Ed. F = sear'd **436 SD shifting places** placed five lines

earlier in F 441 **now** = Q. Not in F 452 **sometime** = F. Q = sometimes 468 **To your** = Ed. F = your

4.1.5 **SH BOTTOM** = Ed. F = *Clow*. 10 **you your** = Q. F = your 47 **favours** = Q. F = savors 71 **o'er** = Ed. F = or 78 **do loathe his** = Q. F = doth loath this 79 **this head** = Q. F = his head 81 **five** = Ed. F = fine 83 **Now, when** = Q. F = When 89 **prosperity** = Q. F = posterity 92 **Fairy** = Q. F = *Faire* 116 **Seemed** = F2. F = Seeme 130 **their** = Q. F = this 144 **is** = Q. F = is is 152 **might be** = F. Q = might 163 **followed** = F. Q = following 172 **saw** = Ed. F = see 173 **I do** = Q. F = doe I 178 **shall hear more** = F. Q = more will here 190 **everything** = Q. F = euery things 194 **It seems** = F. Q *precedes with* Are you sure / That we are awake? 199 **bid** = F. Q = did bid 214 **ballad** = Ed (F4). F = ballet

4.2.0 **SD Flute** = Ed. F = *Flute, Thisbie* 4 **SH FLUTE** = Ed. F = *This*. 13 **naught** = F2. F = nought 26 **no true** = F. Q = not true 27 **everything as** = F. Q = every thing right as

5.1.16 **airy** = Ed. F = *aire* 39 **Egeus** = F. Q = Philostrate 40 **SH EGEUS** = F, *replacing Q's PHILOSTRATE throughout this scene* 44 **ripe** = Q. F = rife 46 **SH LYSANDER** = F. Q *assigns these comments to THESEUS* 79 **SH EGEUS** = Ed. F = *Phi.*, a vestige from the Q version of the scene, in which Philostrate serves as the "manager of mirth" 111 **SH THESEUS** = Q. F = *Duke or Du.* throughout scene 126 **his** = F. Q = this 129 **SD with … them** = Ed. F = *Tawyer with a Trumpet before them (William Tawyer was an actor in Shakespeare's company)* 148 **trusty Thisbe's** = Q. F = *Thisbies* 154 **SD Exeunt … Wall** F provides a redundant SD three lines later: "*Exit Lyon, Thisbie, and Moonshine*" 187 **enter** = F. Q = enter now 194 **up in thee** = F. Q = now againe 200 **And I** = Q. F = And 209 **mural** = Ed. F = *morall*. Q = Moon used 213 **SH HIPPOLYTA** = Q. F = *Dut. (for Dutchess) throughout* 228 **on** = Q. F = of 237 **hearken** = F. Q = listen 257 **they are** = F. Q = all these are 270 **gleams** = Ed. F = *beames* 271 **taste** = F. Q = take 307 **prove** = F. Q = yet proove 315 **is the better.** = F. Q *continues* better: hee for a man, God warnd us; she for a woman, God blesse us. 345 **SH BOTTOM** = F. Q = LYON 363 **lion** = Ed. F = Lyons 392 **this** = F. Q = your 393 **SD The Song** = F. *Assigned to Oberon in Q.*

SCENE-BY-SCENE ANALYSIS

ACT 1 SCENE 1

Lines 1–129: Theseus and Hippolyta discuss their wedding, measuring the time they must wait by the moon—a key motif in the play. Theseus has defeated Hippolyta in battle, but promises to wed her “in another key.” Egeus interrupts, bringing his daughter and her two suitors. In formal language, reflecting the court setting, he complains that Demetrius has his permission to marry Hermia, but that she loves Lysander, who has “bewitched” her, raising the themes of love and magic. Egeus asks for the “ancient privilege of Athens,” whereby Hermia must obey him or be executed. Hermia, subject to patriarchal rule, is reduced to a commodity by Egeus’ claim that “As she is mine, I may dispose of her.” As Hermia argues that Lysander is as “worthy” as Demetrius, she raises another key motif in the play: the idea that perceptions of “worth” are often created solely by the desire of others. Theseus rules that Hermia has until his wedding to decide whether to marry Demetrius, “die the death,” or “endure the livery of a nun” (a futile and “barren” existence). Hermia shows strength, claiming she will live and die a virgin as she “consents not to give sovereignty” to Demetrius. Egeus, Lysander, and Demetrius argue over Hermia, with Lysander insisting that he is “As well possessed” as Demetrius, and furthermore that, until recently, “inconstant” Demetrius courted Helena, who “dotes” on him. Theseus decrees, however, that he may not “extenuate” Athens’ law.

Lines 130–182: Hermia and Lysander discuss their circumstances. Lysander says that all the evidence of his reading from “tale or history” shows that “The course of true love never did run smooth.” He lists various examples of thwarted love, perhaps implicitly drawing attention to the varied source materials for the play and acknowledging the familiar narrative theme of forbidden love. Hermia agrees to meet Lysander in the woods the next night and run away to his aunt’s house where they can marry, safe from “sharp Athenian law.”

Lines 183–254: Helena wishes she looked like Hermia so that Demetrius would love her. Hermia protests that she does not ask for Demetrius' love, which he gives her even though she curses him, but Helena blames her nonetheless. Hermia and Lysander tell Helena of their planned flight and wish her luck. Once alone, Helena dwells on how she is considered as “fair” as Hermia throughout Athens, but this does not matter, as Demetrius does not think so. She observes how “Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity”: desire can give something or someone worth. She resolves to tell Demetrius about Hermia and Lysander's intended escape.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

The second group of characters is introduced—the artisans who are to perform as part of the wedding entertainment. Their preparation and performance of the play-within-the-play creates comedy and a clear sense of theatrical self-awareness, as the limitations of their stagecraft highlight the sophistication of the wider play. The position of this scene between one involving the mortals and one involving the fairies perhaps emphasizes the role of the theater in the movement between reality and illusion.

Quince allocates parts in “The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe,” a humorous muddling of the genres of comedy and tragedy, but a reminder that there is often a fine line between the two. Comedy is created through Bottom's interruptions as he asks to be allowed to play all the parts and demonstrates how good he would be at each. Humor is also created through language—punning, bawdy, and Bottom's malapropisms. The practicalities and politics of staging are touched upon, as they discuss costumes, the fact that Flute does not wish to play a woman since he has “a beard coming,” and how they must not incur the displeasure of their noble audience by frightening the ladies as “that were enough to hang us all.” They agree to meet the next night in the wood to rehearse “by moonlight,” so as to be private.

ACT 2 SCENE 1

The final group of characters, the fairies, are introduced, and their world is evoked through both natural imagery, suggesting the nighttime and woodland, and mythical and expansive language,

suggesting a world not subject to the same limitations as the mortal one. Despite the beauty and enchantment they conjure, there is also a potentially chaotic, darker element to their world, contrasting with the restrained and ordered court.

Lines 1–60: Robin Goodfellow (the Puck) and the Fairy establish their roles in the mortal world—either creating the natural environment by tasks such as placing dew as “a pearl in every cowslip’s ear,” or mischievously interfering with domestic life—“knavish” Robin “frights the maidens” or will “Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm.” They signal the approach of Oberon and Titania and establish that the king and queen of the fairies are currently arguing over ownership of a “changeling” Indian boy that Titania has as her attendant.

Lines 61–147: Titania goes to leave, but Oberon orders her to “Tarry,” asking “am not I thy Lord?,” showing a similar patriarchal authority to Theseus in the mortal court and emphasizing the parallels between these two characters. Titania describes how their quarrel has impacted on the mortal world, showing the darker side of the fairies, as the land is covered with “Contagious fogs” and the corn “Hath rotted.” Oberon argues that Titania could end their quarrel and thus mortal suffering by giving him the little Indian boy, but Titania refuses. Oberon declines Titania’s invitation to dance in the fairy round. She leaves.

Lines 148–191: Using imagery that evokes the limitless and enchanted world of the fairies and reinforces the sexual and hunting themes that recur in the play, Oberon describes to Robin a time when he saw Cupid aim an arrow at “a fair vestal,” but hit a flower instead, turning it “purple with love’s wound.” He sends Robin to collect this flower, the juice from which will make the person on whose “sleeping eyelids” it has been placed fall in love with the first creature they see on waking. Once alone, Oberon reveals his intention to apply the juice to Titania’s eyes and watch her fall in love with the first thing she looks at, “Be it on lion, bear, or wolf or bull.” He will make her “render up her page” before he will remove the spell. Hearing Helena and Demetrius approach, he declares “I am invisible”—reinforcing his magical nature, but also drawing attention to theater and dramatic irony as he, too, becomes an “audience,” invisibly observing the

action.

Lines 192–273: Demetrius is angered by the difficulty in finding his way, claiming that it makes him “wood” (mad or frantic), emphasizing the disorder associated with this setting. He tries to stop Helena following him, telling her that he does not love her and warning that she is risking “the rich worth” of her virginity by entering the woods with him. Helena acknowledges his power over her by describing herself as his “spaniel,” that he may “beat” and “spurn,” although this passivity contrasts with her assertive warning that she will follow him wherever he goes. When they have gone, Robin returns with the flower and Oberon takes some of it to “streak” the eyes of Titania, then sends Robin to apply some to “disdainful” Demetrius—whom he will know by his “Athenian garments”—so that he will love Helena.

ACT 2 SCENE 2

The rapid action of the next few scenes highlights the confusion caused by the fairies’ involvement in the mortal world and the disorienting nature of the dark woods.

Lines 1–34: Titania calls her train to sing her to sleep before they go about their fairy tasks. Once she is asleep, Oberon squeezes the flower’s juice onto her eyelids and leaves.

Lines 35–83: Lysander and Hermia are lost and decide to rest until daylight. Lysander wishes to sleep close to Hermia, but she asks him, out of “love and courtesy” to “Lie further off,” as this is more fitting to her virtue. Robin the Puck enters, complaining that he has searched the forest for an Athenian and “found none.” He sees sleeping Lysander in his Athenian clothes, and Hermia lying at a distance. Assuming that Hermia is distanced because the man is a “lack-love” who has spurned her, he concludes that these are the mortals that Oberon described. He applies the juice to Lysander’s eyelids and leaves as Demetrius enters, running away from Helena.

Lines 84–156: Helena pleads with Demetrius to stop but he refuses and runs off, leaving her alone in the dark. In a speech that makes reference to sight, drawing attention to the way the characters’ literal and metaphorical perception is distorted by both magic and love, she

reveals her jealousy of Hermia and her “blessèd and attractive eyes.” Helena bewails her own appearance, claiming that she is “ugly as a bear” and that Demetrius sees her “as a monster.” She stumbles on Lysander and wakes him. On seeing her, enchanted Lysander falls in love and rejects Hermia, saying that Helena is “the worthier maid.” Helena, convinced that Lysander is mocking her, leaves. He follows, leaving “hated” Hermia alone. Hermia wakes from a nightmare, the description of which highlights the more potentially threatening side of the wood and the fairies, as she finds herself alone in the dark and ready to “swoon almost with fear.”

ACT 3 SCENE 1

Lines 1–51: The artisans rehearse in the glade where Titania sleeps. Theatrical self-awareness is evident throughout the scene, particularly in the allocation of “This green plot” as their stage and “this hawthorn brake” as their “tiring-house,” as stage becomes woodland in the audience’s imagination and is then transformed back into a stage in the minds of the characters. They discuss the details of staging, worrying about the lion or Pyramus’ death upsetting the ladies in the audience, and considering how they will convey moonshine. Their simplistic approach once again emphasizes the sophistication of the wider performance.

Lines 52–190: Robin sustains the theatrical self-awareness as he observes the rehearsals and says that he will “be an auditor, / An actor too perhaps.” Bottom makes a “stage exit,” followed by Robin. He returns with an ass’s head as a result of Robin’s spell and frightens the others away, pursued by Robin. Bottom, confused by their behavior, decides that they mean to frighten him and sings so that they see that he is “not afraid.” His singing wakes Titania, who, under the enchantment of the flower, is “enamoured” and “enthralled” of Bottom’s singing and appearance and falls in love with him. She persuades him to remain in the woods with her, and calls upon four fairies to attend to him as she leads him to her bower.

ACT 3 SCENE 2

Lines 1–40: Oberon wonders what Titania now “must dote on.” Robin appears and reports that she is in love with “a monster,” recounting the events of the previous scene. He says that he has put the juice in

the Athenian's eyes, but as Demetrius and Hermia enter, it becomes clear that Oberon and Robin do not mean the same Athenian. They stand aside and watch.

Lines 41–121: Hermia believes that Demetrius has “slain Lysander in his sleep,” as there can be no other explanation for his leaving her. Demetrius denies this and realizes that there is no point in following Hermia, who leaves. He rests and falls asleep. Oberon realizes Robin's mistake and sends him to fetch Helena, then places the juice on Demetrius' eyelids while chanting a spell. Robin reports that Helena is on her way, followed by Lysander. He revels in the situation and suggests they enjoy the “sport” of watching how “two at once woo one.”

Lines 122–357: As Lysander tries to convince Helena that he loves her, Demetrius wakes up. Under the influence of the flower, he too falls in love with Helena, but she thinks that they are both mocking her. Hermia enters, having heard Lysander's voice, and demands to know why he left her. Lysander declares his love for Helena and his hatred of Hermia, who says that “it cannot be.” Helena, however, thinks that Hermia is part of “this confed'racy” and that all three are joined to spite her. She berates the bewildered Hermia, reminding her of their close friendship since childhood—“Two lovely berries moulded on one stem”—and accuses her of encouraging Lysander and Demetrius.

Lysander challenges Demetrius to a duel. Hermia desperately tries to remind him of the love they share, but he insists that he hates her and loves Helena. Hermia turns on Helena, accusing her of stealing Lysander's love. The two women argue, insulting each other over their respective heights—Hermia describes Helena as a “painted maypole”—but their repeated use of the words “low” and “lower” also apply to their positions in the esteem of the two men, again emphasizing the notion that it is the desire of others that creates worth. Demetrius and Lysander leave together to fight their duel and Helena and Hermia also exit.

Lines 358–408: Oberon suggests that Robin “wilfully” caused the confusion, which he denies, saying that he did as Oberon requested, “'nointed an Athenian's eyes,” although he does confess to finding sport in the resulting “jangling.” Oberon commands Robin to

“overcast the night” and lead Lysander and Demetrius astray, so that they cannot meet and fight. He is to lead them around until they fall asleep, exhausted, and then put the juice of a different herb into Lysander’s eyes, which will make all that has happened “seem a dream.” While Robin does this, Oberon is going to beg Titania for the Indian boy and release her from the spell. Robin says that they must be quick as daylight is approaching—perhaps a metaphor for the impending restoration of order—and fairies “themselves exile from light.” Oberon argues that he can exist in daylight, but agrees that a quick resolution is needed.

Lines 409–480: Pretending to be first Demetrius, then Lysander, Robin leads both characters around the wood, making sure that they never meet, until they are both so tired that they lie down and sleep. Helena and Hermia arrive separately and, not seeing the others, decide to sleep until daylight. Robin squeezes the herb’s juice onto Lysander’s eyelids so that he will love Hermia again, but Demetrius is left in love with Helena, so, as Robin says, “all shall be well.”

ACT 4 SCENE 1

Lines 1–101: Titania dotes upon Bottom, caressing his “fair large ears.” Bottom gives orders to Titania’s attendants to scratch him, until he grows sleepy. Titania twists herself around him as “doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle” and they sleep. Oberon, who has been watching them unseen, says to Robin that he begins to feel sorry for Titania, who has given him the changeling boy. He instructs Robin to change Bottom back so that he may return to Athens believing it all to have been “the fierce vexation of a dream” and releases a confused Titania from the spell. Oberon and Titania dance, then leave as the morning approaches, emphasizing their place in the shadowy world, away from the light and the human order that it represents.

Lines 102–218: Theseus and his party stumble upon the sleeping lovers, and assume that, like them, they are all there to “observe / The rite of May.” Remembering that Hermia must “give answer of her choice,” Theseus commands that the huntsmen wake them with their horns. Lysander admits to running away with Hermia and Egeus calls for “the law, upon his head,” saying that Lysander would have “defeated” Demetrius of a wife. Demetrius, however, says that although he pursued them “in fury,” he now “by some power” finds

his “love to Hermia, / Melted” and the only “pleasure” of his “eye” is Helena. Theseus says that they will hear more “anon,” but for now he overrules Egeus’ will and decrees that Hermia shall marry Lysander and Demetrius shall marry Helena, sharing in the ceremony with himself and Hippolyta. The lovers discuss the dreamlike quality of events, but agree that they are now awake and must follow Theseus. Bottom wakes alone and confused, talking of the dream he has had. He leaves to get Quince to record his dream as a ballad.

ACT 4 SCENE 2

The other artisans look for Bottom, as the play is “marred” without him. Snug reports that the marriages have taken place, and that if they could have performed before the duke they would have been “made men” (beneficiaries of preferment). Bottom appears and they set off for the palace.

ACT 5 SCENE 1

Lines 1–109: Theseus and Hippolyta discuss the lovers’ stories, and Theseus comments on how “The lunatic, the lover and the poet / Are of imagination all compact,” thus highlighting the confused realities within the play, but also its metatheatrical element. They greet the lovers and discuss the possibility of some entertainment “Between our after-supper and bedtime.” Egeus gives Theseus a list of possible “sports” and he selects the artisans’ play.

Lines 110–362: The play-within-the-play provides both linguistic and visual comedy and theatrical self-awareness is present in both the contrast with the wider performance and the presence of the two “audiences.” Both comedy and self-awareness are heightened by the interjections of the onstage audience. The performance concludes and Theseus orders everyone to bed, as “ ’tis almost fairy time.”

Lines 363–430: The fairies return and their final verses, a blessing on the three couples’ marriages, evoke their world and their place in mortal lives and imaginations. Robin’s metatheatrical epilogue to the audience suggests that if the play has offended, they think of it as “a dream,” a final confusion of reality and illusion in the audience’s mind.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM IN PERFORMANCE: THE RSC AND BEYOND

The best way to understand a Shakespeare play is to see it or ideally to participate in it. By examining a range of productions, we may gain a sense of the extraordinary variety of approaches and interpretations that are possible—a variety that gives Shakespeare his unique capacity to be reinvented and made “our contemporary” four centuries after his death.

We begin with a brief overview of the play’s theatrical and cinematic life, offering historical perspectives on how it has been performed. We then analyze in more detail a series of productions staged over the last half-century by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The sense of dialogue between productions that can only occur when a company is dedicated to the revival and investigation of the Shakespeare canon over a long period, together with the uniquely comprehensive archival resource of promptbooks, program notes, reviews, and interviews held on behalf of the RSC at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, allows an “RSC stage history” to become a crucible in which the chemistry of the play can be explored.

Finally, we go to the horse’s mouth. Modern theater is dominated by the figure of the director. He, or sometimes she (like musical conducting, theater directing remains a male-dominated profession), must hold together the whole play, whereas the actor must concentrate on his or her part. The director’s viewpoint is therefore especially valuable. Shakespeare’s plasticity is wonderfully revealed when we hear directors of highly successful productions answering the same questions in very different ways.

FOUR CENTURIES OF THE *DREAM*: AN OVERVIEW

Interpretations and ideas about the play have altered radically over the four centuries since its first performance around 1595–96. Theories suggesting that it was written to celebrate an aristocratic

wedding have fallen into disfavor. The Quarto edition of 1600 claims that it had “beene sundry times publicly acted” by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (later the King’s Men) and it may be the play referred to in a letter which records a court performance of the “play of Robin goode-fellow” on 1 January 1604.¹ There is no further evidence of performance before the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Will Kempe, the company’s chief comic actor at this period, may originally have played Bottom and Richard Burbage Oberon, possibly doubling the role with Theseus. The text suggests Titania’s fairies were small-sized and may have been played by boys, although recent research based on the pattern of appearances of fairies and mechanicals suggests that the same actors may well have doubled these parts,² a theory perhaps corroborated by the cast list of the 1661 droll *The Merry conceited Humours of Bottome the Weaver*, which suggests that Snout, Snug, and Starveling as Wall, Lion, and Moonshine “likewise may present three Faries.”³

The play’s combination of realism and fantasy was not to the taste of Restoration audiences. Samuel Pepys judged it “the most insipid ridiculous play that I ever saw in my life.”⁴ Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century taste preferred romanticized, sanitized versions of Shakespeare’s plays. The drama was heavily influenced by French neoclassicism’s strict adherence to the unities of time, place, and action: decorum was observed and bawdy language eliminated. Theatrical productions emphasized spectacle and there were a number of operatic adaptations which featured the play’s courtly aspects, with music and dancing. William Hazlitt, writing in 1817, argued against all performance on the grounds that theatrical representation is, by its very nature, gross and material, unlike Shakespeare’s airy conception: “The *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand; but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled. Poetry and the stage do not agree well together.”⁵ In fact the version that Hazlitt saw was most likely Frederick Reynolds’ 1816 adaptation, as much a musical as a play.

From the Restoration onward, thanks to technical innovation, increasingly sophisticated theatrical machinery, and movable stage sets, spectacular operatic versions of the play predominated, culminating in the extravaganzas of the great Georgian and Victorian actor-managers such as John Philip Kemble, Charles Kean, Henry Irving, and Beerbohm Tree. Ballet-style productions featured choruses

of fairies, processions with spears and trumpets, and acres of gauze. Mid- and late-nineteenth-century productions focused on pictorial realism and attempted to “illustrate” the plays. Great emphasis was placed on the recreation of historical accuracy in costume and sets to create a complete theatrical illusion. For example, James Grieve, the designer for Kean’s 1858 production, aimed at historical accuracy—the playbill boasted that “The Acropolis, on its rocky eminence, surrounded by marble Temples, has been restored, together with the Theater of Bacchus, wherein multitudes once thronged to listen to the majestic poetry of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.”⁶ Realism was taken to the extreme, reproducing Quince’s workshop and stage properties supposedly made by him, which used descriptions of objects found in the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum for the tools. Tree’s production actually recreated the “bank where the wild thyme blows” and imported live rabbits to scamper across it in his 1911 revival.⁷

Adaptations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* separated out the different elements of the play. The anonymous droll published in 1661 under the title *Bottom the Weaver* was chiefly concerned with the “rude mechanicals,” though it provided abbreviated roles for Oberon, Titania, and Robin. “Duke,” “Duchess,” and two “Lords” represented the courtly audience. In 1692 Thomas Betterton produced *The Fairy Queen, An Opera* with music by Henry Purcell. This included court characters, “The Fairies,” “The Comedians,” and a masque at the end of each act, including “Juno,” “Chinese Men and Women,” “A Chorus of Chineses” (*sic*), “A Dance of 6 Monkeys,” “An Entry of a Chinese Man and Woman,” “A Grand Dance of 24 Chineses.” Richard Leveridge’s *The Comick Masque of Pyramus and Thisbe* (1716) contained the mechanicals plus “Mr Semibreve the Composer,” “Crochet,” “Gamut,” as well as “Prologue,” “Pyramus,” “Wall,” “Lyon,” “Moonshine,” “Thisbe,” and “Epilogue.” And the 1763 adaptation *A Fairy Tale in Two Acts* featured “Men” (the mechanicals) and “Fairies.”

In 1775 David Garrick staged *The Fairies: An Opera taken from A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which featured courtiers and fairies but no mechanicals. It included twenty-eight songs and was moderately successful, certainly in comparison with his later five-act, thirty-three song version—that lasted only one performance. In 1816 Frederick Reynolds presented his version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The title page describes it as “Written by Shakespeare: with Alterations,

Additions, and New Songs; as it is performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden.” In his “Advertisement” for the play, Reynolds denigrated Garrick’s earlier version. Nevertheless, he used quite a lot of the material from it, notably the songs, and his text was almost as abbreviated, although he did reinstate the mechanicals. Lucia Elizabeth Vestris’ 1840 production, in which she played Oberon, although still lavish and incorporating elements of opera and ballet, restored much of Shakespeare’s text. Felix Mendelssohn had originally written the overture to his “Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” in 1826 (opus 21), composing the rest of the score sixteen years later (opus 61) for Ludwig Tieck’s 1843 revival at the Potsdam Court Theatre.

In 1853 Samuel Phelps staged a highly successful production at Sadler’s Wells, in which he played Bottom. Three years later, Charles Kean’s revival at the Princess’s was equally successful—the nine-year-old Ellen Terry played Robin, an experience recalled in her autobiography.⁸ Augustin Daly’s three American productions (1873, 1888, 1895–96) were lavish and spectacularly staged, with a ballet of fifty children in Act 3. Beerbohm Tree’s productions were even more extravagant, but no less popular with audiences and critics alike: “No scene has ever been put upon the stage more beautiful than the wood near Athens in which the fairies revel and the lovers play their game of hide-and-seek.”⁹

The self-reflexive quality of Shakespearean drama was eliminated in all these adaptations and the conventions of Elizabethan staging regarded as limitations to be overcome. The end of the Victorian period saw the beginnings of a contemporary reaction against theatrical realism and the spectacular in favor of simpler, faster-paced productions which used all or most of Shakespeare’s text on recreated Elizabethan-style stages. The most influential directors in this move were William Poel and Harley Granville-Barker. Gordon Craig also offered simplified staging of the play and a full text. Barker’s production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Savoy Theatre in 1914 created a critical sensation which was not wholly favorable. In his *Preface to A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Barker argued that the non-realism of the play, like the “greatness” of *King Lear* and the “scope of the action” of *Antony and Cleopatra*, were problematic for the scenic productions of the modern theater. He suggested producing the play on Shakespeare’s own terms, with an appeal to the ear and the imagination of the audience. The structure of the play should be kept

flexible. He also advocated the use of folk music and dances as opposed to the by then customary Mendelssohn score. Barker made it clear, though, that his emphasis was Shakespeare's own theme:



1. Victorian staging with elaborate set and huge troupe of gossamer-clad fairies.

In fine, Shakespeare has a theme, which only poetry can fully illuminate, and he trusts to poetry. Nor will he risk any conflict of interest, all the rest of his dramatist's equipment must cry small for the occasion. Wherefore we in our turn must plan the play's interpretation upon these terms. Poetry, poetry; everything to serve and nothing to compete with it!¹⁰

Barker's production did not meet with universal approbation. Nevertheless, it was revolutionary for its time and set in train the fashion for stylized and nonnaturalistic productions. His ideas were influenced by a modernist aesthetic which rejected realism and romanticism.

This aesthetic development found perhaps its most complete expression in Peter Brook's 1970 RSC production (discussed in detail below). In 1992, the French Canadian director Robert Lepage also offered a dark reading of the play for Britain's National Theatre, emphasizing its psychological and sexual elements. While incorporating certain aspects of Brook's version, such as the

acrobatics, in other regards Lepage reacted against it. Most dramatically, Brook's celebrated white box was replaced by a mud pool. Critics at the time seem to have been confounded by this, but the hints are there in many film versions from Max Reinhardt onward which feature water, mud and pools, culminating in the mud-wrestling in Michael Hoffman's 1999 version. Hoffman, however, was probably inspired in turn by Lepage, which suggests something of the circularity of cross-media cultural influences today.

The play's spectacular potential has recommended it to operatic composers from Purcell to Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett via Mendelssohn. Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* (1946–52) was inspired by Shakespeare's play. It contains a similar combination of ordinary mortals and supernatural elements. The mortals are two pairs of lovers on the brink of marriage. The supernatural element features a temple with a priest and priestess. Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960) evokes the wood, where his opera starts with discordant glissandos on the cello and a chorus of boys as fairies. Specific instruments are imagined for different groups of characters throughout, in a witty musical way. Fairies are strings, wind section, and percussion, especially the xylophone for Robin. The mechanicals are characterized by the brass section, the trombone for Bottom and, not surprisingly, the flute for Flute. The most striking characterization is the countertenor part for Oberon, which creates an eerie otherworldly effect. Titania sings a beautiful, lyrical aria to Bottom as an ass, and the encounter of Pyramus and Thisbe is written as a subtle parody of Puccini.

The combination of Shakespeare's play and Mendelssohn's music has proved inspirational to choreographers from Petipa (1877) to George Balanchine (1962) and Frederick Ashton (1964). Balanchine created *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the New York City Ballet. He was inspired principally by Mendelssohn's music and, in order to produce his first full-length ballet in America, added extra music from other works of Mendelssohn's. Ashton's *The Dream* is also set in the wood and focuses on the fairies and the lovers. Of the mechanicals only Bottom features as a rustic transformed by Robin who wakes Titania. Lindsay Kemp, who plays Robin in a 1994 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Celestino Coronado, effectively turned the play into "Puck's Dream," in which the action opens and closes with him asleep wrapped in a cobweb. The production is clearly related to Reinhardt's influential 1935 film, on the one hand, and Peter Brook's

staging, influenced by the Polish critic Jan Kott (see below), on the other.

The play's mix of comedy, romance, and magic has proved irresistible to filmmakers, starting with a twelve-minute American silent version in 1909 directed by J. Stuart Blackton and Charles Kent for the Vitagraph Company of America. This was a radically simplified version of the story, shot outdoors on a windy day. There is an obvious attempt at authentic Athenian costume and presumably equally authentic fairy costume. Fairies seem to be female. Robin is a little girl and there are two other little girl fairies. Oberon has turned inexplicably into Penelope.

Max Reinhardt's 1935 film won well-deserved Oscars for Ralph Dawson, Best Film Editing, and Hal Mohr, Best Cinematography. Mohr was never nominated but was the one and only person to win due to a popular write-in campaign. The following year the Academy changed the rules so that it couldn't happen again. The scenes in the wood with a chorus of fairies and an orchestra of elves and gnomes are brilliantly shot and directed to Mendelssohn's music, arranged by Erich Korngold. The overall effect is exhilarating and the casting full of surprises, including a very young Mickey Rooney as Robin and James Cagney as Bottom.

Peter Hall's 1968 film, a version of his RSC stage production, shot at Compton Verney (less than ten miles from Stratford), betrays its age in the women's costumes—Hippolyta, Hermia, and Helena are wearing 1960s miniskirts with long boots. The fairies are flower children and Judi Dench wears nothing except a body stocking and some strategically placed flowers. The 1992 *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, abridged by Leon Garfield, is one of the most successful of this Russian/British collaboration in which a dozen of the most popular plays were reworked for children. Drawing and animation are excellent—incorporating expressive touches such as Titania's lips turning from green to red when she's "enamoured of an ass."

Michael Hoffman's 1999 film is a lush romantic version in which the emphasis is on love and sex. Set in nineteenth-century Italy, the opening titles announce that "necklines were high and parents were rigid," "bustles were in decline," and that "newfangled invention, the bicycle" was on the rise. The central performance is Kevin Kline's romantic Bottom.

The RSC, in conjunction with Film4, produced a screen version

(1996) based on Adrian Noble's 1994 stage production. It reveals its debt to Peter Brook in the modernist set and bright, modern clothes. The story is mediated through the experience of a little boy. The opening shot pans around the child's bedroom and finally focuses on him asleep. In answer to the question "Whose dream is it?," the answer becomes "a child's"—a problematic device in many respects.

Modern critical and theatrical practice responds to the play's metatheatricality, to its knowing self-awareness of life as inherently performative in a way that speaks to postmodern theories relating to the loss of the real and the superabundance of simulacra. Performance styles have moved away from representations of pictorial realism to engage the audience directly. Noble's and Elijah Moshinsky's 1981 BBC television production both have Robin employ the "forbidden look": a stare straight to camera, analogous to the actor's direct address to the audience in Shakespeare's own theater. Contemporary theater has knocked down the fourth wall and is concerned to play with knowing irony on the relationship between actor, role, and audience. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* resonates with our cultural self-reflexivity: modernity, or rather post-modernity, responds to the play's ironic confusion of planes of reality and blurring of boundaries between the political, emotional, psychological, sexual, and spiritual. At one level the play suggests that life is complex and problematic, but things will work out. But at the margins, contained within the play's various fictions, it recognizes only too clearly that they may not.

AT THE RSC

The Shifting Point

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the war amongst the fairies has resulted not only in a loss of control of elements and seasons: human beings also have become at odds with each other. It is a kind of cold war and all life as well as all nature has been set a-jangling. It seems that the mortals can find peace only when Oberon and Titania have found it. And more than this—they can find it only after being drawn into the world of Dreams back to the roots of mythology and folklore and into Oberon's domain of half-

light—more revealing by far in its fantasies than the world of Reality.

(Program note from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1960, Old Vic, directed by Michael Langham)

To the Elizabethans, seasonal festivals and significant calendar events like May Day, Midsummer, and Twelfth Night were not just important landmarks framing the cycle of the year, but in their celebration acted as a release valve for human behavior. The energy normally occupied in maintaining inhibition was freed for celebration. These times of misrule when social norms were turned on their head had a cathartic power, and for the young they often involved “a right of passage between generations, a means of making the transition from the old world to the new.”¹¹ The sanctioned freeing from society’s usual constraints was seen as a release, but also, by contrast, as an affirmation of the rules and morals that normally guided people’s lives.



2. Production of 1959, with a suggestion of Queen Elizabeth. The kind of gentle, picturesque *Dream* that was reacted against in an influential essay by the Polish critic Jan Kott, which proposed a darker and far more sexually charged, even brutal, reading of the play.

The psychological benefits of the May Day festival became key to most post-1960 productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The

exploration of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, of the real world and the fairy world, turned the court of Theseus into the embodiment of society's repression and the forest of Athens into a therapeutic playground for an exploration of the self. After Jan Kott's essay "Titania and the Ass's Head" (in his *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, published in English translation in 1964), productions of the *Dream* picked up on the strand of dark sexuality evident in the text. Peter Brook, whose landmark production of 1970 marked a shifting point in how directors thought about the play, pointed out that "The *Dream* is not a piece for the kids—it's a very powerful sexual play."¹² He also commented:

The *Dream* is a play about magic, spirits, fairies. Today we don't believe in any one of those things and yet, perhaps, we do. The fairy imagery which the Victorian and even post-Victorian tradition has given us in relation to the *Dream* has to be rejected—it has died on us. But one can't take an anti-magical, and down-to-earth view of the *Dream* ... the interest in working on the *Dream* is to take a play which is apparently composed of very artificial, unreal elements and to discover that it is a true, a real play.¹³

Rejecting the "cute, gauzy, bewinged creatures"¹⁴ of the Victorian era, modern productions reinterpreted how magic was represented in the play with a variety of tricks used by weird and wonderful fairies. Attention to the whole art of theatrical illusion, in the staging, and in the Pyramus and Thisbe scene, also emphasized the metatheatrical nature of the play, to a degree that had only been glanced at by productions of the early twentieth century.

Peter Brook's 1970 production was almost without question the most influential single production of any Shakespeare play in the second half of the twentieth century. In the words of the critic Trevor R. Griffiths,

Other directors of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had already seen the need to remove various sentimental accretions, others had made the fairies a strong physical presence in the lovers' quarrels, others had seen possibilities in doubling the mortal and fairy rulers or stressing the

therapeutic value of the events in the wood ... but [Brook's] triumph lay in creating a powerful crystallisation of these various elements into a unified and cohesive whole.¹⁵

No director could avoid the influence of this staging of the *Dream*: “If they did not turn their backs on Brook’s achievement, [they] tried somehow to get around it or to find other ways of presenting the play without going to such extremes as Brook felt compelled to do. Or they reverted to something closer to traditional ‘picture-book’ versions of the play.”¹⁶



3. Peter Brook’s 1970 production, with white box and trapeze.

Exploring Brook’s production and those that followed, this section will examine how the treatment of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* reflects a change in critical thinking about the play. Looking at abstract stagings, nightmarish dreams, and the more overtly sexual take on the scenes in the forest, we will see how the play has come into its own in the latter part of the twentieth century, exploring issues which previous stagings of Shakespeare’s magical play had neglected.

“All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream”¹⁷

In 1970, the theater critic J. C. Trewin remarked that “We have met

the fantasy in so many forms; over-decorated and under-decorated, as a swooningly Victorian album or as a Jacobean masque. The Wood has been a complicated forest and austere, moon-silvered thicket, or a garden in Regent's Park."¹⁸ With productions of the *Dream* occurring every three or four years in the RSC's repertoire, the difficulty for any director is to find new and interesting settings that will emphasize and add to the play's meaning rather than just decorate it. There is also the dilemma of trying to show a correlation between and a melding of the mortal and fairy worlds.

The traditional wooded glade was already beginning to fade from twentieth-century visions of the *Dream* when Peter Brook blew away all previous conceptions, conventions, and clichés with a radically different staging concept. What he called his "celebration of theater" put emphasis on the artificiality of the medium, and demonstrated the impossibility of designing a representational world for the play that a modern audience would believe in. The stage became a blank sheet on which the actors made their own magic through the art of theater itself. Brook's designer, Sally Jacobs, recalled:

Peter wanted to investigate all the ideas of the play, such as the variations on the theme of love, with a group of actors—always inter-relating so that they could play each other's parts—in a very small, very intimate acting area. So the story would remain clear. It wouldn't be blown up into a big production number, with fogs, forests, and Athens, and all of that pretence. We would just keep it very, very simple and make it a presentation of actors performing a play. In doing "The Dream" that way, we could let it be surprising, inconsistent, the source material always being the text rather than a "scheme."¹⁹

Jacobs designed a three-sided white box set, which was held in a constant white light so no trick could go unmissed. Darkness was removed from the forest and the action and characters thrown into sharp relief. The play opened without the traditional safety curtain (something we are used to now, but which was out of the ordinary at the time), with the full company juggling and tumbling. The set was seen variously by reviewers as a child's play box, "a squash court, a clinic, a scientific research station, an operating theater, a gymnasium and a big top ... Two doors were cut in the back wall, two slits in the

sides, two ladders set at the downstage edges, and a gallery or catwalk round its top [allowing] the musicians and fairies to gaze down at the players.”²⁰ The symmetry of the set with the doubling of the characters emphasized Hermia’s words when she comes out of the “dream,” “everything seems double.” It also created an intense and intimate space where the tension never let up.

Brook’s device for distinguishing the different worlds was simple. There was no change in setting; the characters wore long robes in the Athenian court which they quickly removed to reveal their fairy-world costumes, like circus performers readying themselves for action. On leaving the forest at the end of the play the actors simply put the robes back on. Brook was keen to stress that the fairies, the aristocrats, and the mechanicals did not occupy different worlds but were facets of the same world. “The more one examines the play, the more one sees how these worlds interweave,” he said.²¹ Irving Wardle, reviewing the production, commented:

It provides an environment for the *Dream* which removes the sense of being earthbound: it is natural here for characters to fly ... Brook’s company give the play a continuously animated physical line, occupying the whole cubic space of the stage and they ship up and down ladders and stamp about in enormous stilts ... We are accustomed to seeing them as inhabitants of different worlds. Brook shows them as members of the same world. Egeus’s loss of his daughter is matched by Oberon’s loss of his Indian boy. “This same progeny of evils comes from our debate,” says Titania; and as Sara Kestelman delivers it, reclining on the huge scarlet ostrich feather that serves as her bower, the line is meant to embrace the whole action.²²

The acrobatics, circus skills, and trapeze acts of the actors defined them as magical beings that could defy gravity. In keeping with this, the costumes of the fairies resembled a cross between Chinese acrobats and romper-suits. Oberon, Titania, and Robin wore vivid primary colors, whereas the fairies of the lower hierarchy wore gray silk:

The fairies were no longer thought of as decorative, but as

functional. They appeared as hefty circus hands when they swept up the confetti, as familiar spirits when they physically controlled the movements of the lovers and demoniacally trapped them in their steel forest, and as amoral trolls when they stripped Snug of his trousers and created an obscene phallus for Bottom.²³

The box set that Adrian Noble opted for in 1994 was reminiscent of Brook's, but in its simplicity created an environment which suited his particular vision of the play: a low-walled, single-doored chamber was dominated by a trapeze, suggesting the surreal strangeness of a dream. Noble remarked that "of course in its first performance the *Dream* would not have had a wood. What we want to achieve is a sort of fluidity whereby the action is not held up by endless clumsy scene changes."²⁴ The bare set allowed the fluidity of action, but also, "never let the audience forget that we are in the midst of a dream. At certain points in the evening, we hear the sound of heavy breathing, as if we were eavesdropping on the sleeping Shakespeare as he conjures his own play."²⁵

Designer Anthony Ward, on discussing the concept with Noble, recalled that

we found ourselves talking in terms of abstract design, which led me to think immediately of the work of the French Surrealist painter René Magritte ... we were inspired by the idea of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a study of the world of dreaming and sleep. So what we needed was a design style which would allow us to present the conscious, real, world overlapping with the world of the sub-conscious ... [Magritte's] paintings juxtapose items from the ordinary, real world in a way which makes them seem strange and gives them a new and interesting resonance. So, in our production you see ordinary, household objects, such as an umbrella, transformed to serve a completely different function.²⁶

Umbrellas were used as a means of levitation and flight. "Titania's chief mode of conveyance—and bedroom—[was] a vast, suspended Magritte umbrella sumptuously lined with red quilt."²⁷ The use of doors which popped up through the floor and aided the action of the

lovers had a psychological significance: “Why the doors and all the rushing in and out of them that duly ensues? You hardly need ask. People are passing from waking to dreaming, consciousness to subconsciousness, ignorance and self-discovery.”²⁸

In order to differentiate between the Athenian court and the forest, Noble’s lighting designer, Chris Parry, lit the bare set with colors that were descriptive rather than representational—scarlet for Athens and indigo for the enchanted wood:

[Noble] didn’t want trees, a forest, or anything like that ... I wanted to achieve a forest made out of beams of light and light bulbs ... most of the action ... takes place at night, but rather than using the straight-forwards “night-time” blue I have used a lot of purples and lavenders ... very sensuous colors which suggest the mysterious magical quality of night.²⁹

Abstract stagings of the *Dream* are often met with slight hostility by audiences who come to the theater with a preconceived idea of what the play should look like. There is still a tendency for people to hark back to the Victorian image of the fairy in its idyllic forest setting. This holds a certain nostalgia, an innocence, going back to a time in history when people were still willing to believe in such things. However, the image is still prevalent in the social consciousness, and one that can still be found in most gift and card shops. Where these productions have succeeded is in the creation of a completely new magical space with a physical theatricality to complement Shakespeare’s text.

“To wake and be free / From this nightmare we writhe in”³⁰

Brook’s production revealed to many viewers and critics that “the *Dream* is a fearful play.”³¹ Picking up on this dark strand, many productions since have emphasized the nightmarish elements evident in the text. No more so than the RSC’s 2002 production, which made direct references to modern horror films. The *Guardian*’s veteran critic Michael Billington observed that

Richard Jones provides something closer to a gothic nightmare ... designer Giles Cadle [does] everything

possible to create “the fierce vexation of a dream” ... Shakespeare’s Athenian wood, here dominated by a humanised tree with claw-like branches, becomes a sinister conflation of *Friday The Thirteenth*, *Hallowe’en* and *Edward Scissorhands*. Fast breeding flies swarm over Cadle’s box set, hands emerge through the walls as in Polanski’s *Repulsion* and the transformed Bottom sports a disfigured mask with phallic ears while Puck carries his original head tucked underneath his arm.³²

The disorientating and starkly black and white set, like an “optical magician’s *camera obscura*,”³³ combined the surreal and the abstract: “a wonky oblong that’s half-moon, half-egg; cigarette-like cylinders with steps cut into their ends; a sort of squashed ice-cream cone that weirdly doubles as a train on which the rude mechanicals, themselves a grey-garbed ... blend of Soviet convicts and British hikers, decide to arrive.”³⁴

The sex and horror that Jan Kott found in the play were taken to their extreme: “Titania resembling a debauched Hamburg nightclub queen”³⁵ and Robin taking Hermia’s line “O hell! To choose love by another’s eyes” literally, by physically removing and then swapping the eyes of the lovers. Many reviewers felt the actors and the plot were overwhelmed by the mechanics of this imaginative design. They describe them as “competing” with the set and the interpretation of the play, which often worked against the text. However, others felt that this production tapped “into something important. In giving us the Bard as Goth, and putting the ‘witch’ back into bewitching, it reminds us how dark and disturbing this play—Shakespeare’s most beguiling—can be.”³⁶

Albeit with a subtler tone, this emphasis was also strong in John Barton’s 1981 production. He, too, in the words of critic Jay Halio,

totally rejected any cute, gauzy, bewinged creatures and opted instead for wooden puppets that closely resembled the kind of Victorian dolls beloved by the makers of horror films ... Manipulated by black clad actors and actresses who also spoke their lines, those fairies Shakespeare failed to nominate were dubbed in the programme “Black Boy,” “Girl with Red Hair,” “Broken Head,” etc.... At one point, Oberon had to fight his way past a mass of screeching dolls

to get to Titania's bower.³⁷

These puppet fairies first appeared, flying out from a wicker prop basket, trailing colored streamers in various stages of disintegration and decay that moved "in large sweeping and diving motions [against a] black cyclorama, they seem like small macabre souls, darting silently in the blackness ... They hover in the air protectively, around Titania, and they watch anxiously as the fairy king and queen quarrel, shifting and darting, their puppet limbs sometimes clacking quietly in the silence like bones."³⁸ The style of the whole production led reviewers to question what had been described as the RSC's salute to the royal wedding of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer. "If so," wrote Benedict Nightingale in the *New Statesman*,

it's an ambiguous one, with something akin to two fingers sprouting from the patriotically outstretched arm ... the doubling of real and fairy king and queen, with the suggestion that Oberon's revenge on Titania reflects and resolves Theseus's subconscious hostilities toward Hippolyta, his bride-to-be. In other words, Chuck might feel better about Di if he imagined her having sex with a prole with a donkey's head.³⁹

In Gregory Doran's entertaining 2005 production, the mortal world was "a chilly, soulless place, with a suggestion of the totalitarian state about it."⁴⁰ More nightmarish and unforgiving than the fairy world, Theseus' military uniform made him resemble "a fascist leader."⁴¹ With a death threat hanging over her head, Hermia's escape into the forest with Lysander takes her from the proverbial frying pan into the fire. Jonathan Slinger's refreshingly lugubrious and mischievous Robin plays with the lovers as if they are puppets for his amusement. In the hands of this curmudgeonly skeptic, who has no qualms about his treatment of mortals, one would fear for their fate if he were not tempered by his master, Oberon, who feels for the lovers' plight.

The *Spectator's* reviewer, Patrick Carnegy, remarked that

The fairy band is a motley crew of ragamuffins who have one important accomplishment—their magic is that of puppeteers ... Doran gives us the changeling boy as an exquisitely animated puppet ... Bottom's attendants

materialise as a macabre collection of doll-puppets manipulated by their fairy alter egos ... whenever Mustardseed opens his mouth to speak, his head pops up and away off his body.⁴²

The themes of manipulation and entrapment in the forest scenes culminated when Robin led the lovers “Up and down, up and down.” Working together, the fairies physically manipulated the lovers’ movements like their “doll-puppets,” holding onto their limbs and guiding them to the appointed place for Robin to send them to sleep.

Nightmares, as other dreams, offer the possibility for self-exploration and understanding. The lovers, Titania, and Bottom all learn through a period of transformation, akin to a waking dream, that the exploration of the worst parts of themselves can free them from nightmare. Scholar Stanley Wells commented in the program note that

As the lovers go off to marriage, we are likely to feel that they have been through a necessary but profoundly disturbing experience, and that now they are safely on the other side of it. The experience has grown “to something of great constancy,” enriching their lives just as Bottom’s “rare vision” enriches his. They bring back into the ordinary world something that they learned in the world of imagination. The illusory has its part in the total experience of reality.⁴³

In avoiding the baggage of treating the *Dream* as a light fairy-piece for children, many directors have chosen to focus on the darker elements of the play, with varying success. The difficulty for them arises in trying to strike a balance between the comedy and the darkness.

Everything Seems Double

The doubling of the fairy and mortal characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* may appear now as the normal directorial choice. However, this development in staging has only been prevalent in the last fifty years. Through this device directors have explored the relationship between the mortals and the fairies in terms of the conscious and the unconscious.

In 1970 this was a relatively new innovation which radically altered the reading of the play, and extended the psychological journey of Bottom and the four lovers to all the mortals. Brook's *Dream* depicted the unconscious enactment of unresolved tensions which needed to be explored before the royal couple could come together in happy marriage at the end of the play. The director himself explained:

The play unfolds like a dream before [Theseus and Hippolyta's] wedding in which an almost identical couple appear—Oberon and Titania. Yet this other couple are in an opposition so great that, as Titania announces in a language of great strength, it brings about a complete schism in the natural order ... Thus on the one hand we have a man and woman in total dispute and, on the other, a man and woman coming together through a concord found out of a discord. The couples are so closely related that we felt that Oberon and Titania could easily be sitting inside the minds of Theseus and Hippolyta.⁴⁴

In Bill Alexander's 1986 production only Hippolyta and Titania were doubled, while Theseus and Oberon were played by separate actors:

The key to Mr. Alexander's interpretation lies in the moment when, as the rude mechanicals come on stage to rehearse, Janet McTeer's elegant, disdainful Hippolyta passes them on her way off. She and Bottom exchange a long appraising look across a social chasm. What follows is, in effect, Hippolyta's dream.⁴⁵

This Hippolyta, described as "glacial and contemptuous"⁴⁶ in the Athenian scenes, obviously did not relish the prospect of marriage to the boring Theseus. She "has the opportunity to express an inner life—a slinkily clad ice-maiden whose fantasies are realized by transformation into a fairy queen of bewitchingly tender sexual desire."⁴⁷ Her Oberon (Gerard Murphy) became the ideal partner, equal to her in physical strength and passion. The wordless coda at the start of the play also put a different spin on Titania's relationship with Bottom:

In the wood, the affection between [Bottom] and [Titania]

is played almost completely “straight,” emphasizing both its realness and its impossibility. Love that crosses barriers in the night’s most hopeless “dream,” sprinkling regret over the ubiquitous frolics.⁴⁸

This Bottom was gentler and more sympathetic, a true alternative to the chauvinism of Theseus and Oberon; consequently, he drew from Titania a warm and tender response, which, if it did not entirely eliminate the element of lustful sensuality, de-emphasised it considerably.⁴⁹

At the end of the play, Hippolyta stepped into the fairy ring and—as Titania—sang the blessing with Oberon to the newlyweds, harmonizing the worlds of the play, and emphasizing the connection between reality and dreams.

In Michael Boyd’s 1999 production, the fairies were played as doppelgängers of the mortals, releasing their inner selves from their daytime personae. According to *Times* critic Benedict Nightingale,

Theseus and Hippolyta become their subconscious selves, Oberon and Titania. They dream out their conflicts and marry happily. But Boyd takes the approach further ... Athens itself sheds its superego and lets its id rampage, until Theseus, Hippolyta, lovers, mechanicals, everyone, are clattering together in a dance that Zorba himself would have found too anarchic.⁵⁰

Aidan McArdle, who doubled as Robin and Philostrate, explains that Act 3 Scene 2, in which Oberon comforts Robin’s fear at the coming dawn, was given an added significance by the whole concept of the production:

We had it in our heads as we played this ... that they were afraid of turning back into their daylight selves. As it gets light Puck must be transformed into that monster Philostrate—and Philostrate is as much a monster for Puck as Puck is for Philostrate.⁵¹

The opening scenes in the Athenian court contained virtually no color; the characters were wrapped up in large dark overcoats. The fairy

world emerged from the mortal world via a simple device:

The repressed, regimented, grey court, reminiscent of Cold-War Russia, would move to the forest by way of the transformation scene, which would begin with artificial flowers (the first color in the play) sprouting through the stage floor.⁵²

The transformation from Athens to fairyland was enacted by two characters from the Athenian court who stripped off each other's clothes to reveal the "fairy" beneath. This also signaled how the sexual war, and sexual frustrations of the fairy world, were impinging on the real world:

Sirine Saba, Philostrate's side-kick in the court scenes, came on in her white gloves, fur hat, and spectacles. Philostrate appeared in the doorway behind her as she bent down—ostensibly to pick a flower, but somehow in a rather suggestive manner. Philostrate would then stalk her down the stage ... he would catch her up and ... be right behind her the next time she bent down. Philostrate had had an idiosyncratic little gesture, in the court scene, of stepping forward and rocking on his heels. This movement behind a girl bending down was, obviously, very sexual ... She would then turn, and slap me across the face. I would ... then remove her hat, pull off its ear-flaps and throw it away. She would ... then remove my glasses and break the arms off ... take off my bowler hat, spit in it, and throw them all into the wings. Things would then escalate ... until we would be ripping the clothes off each other with frenzied energy. This was followed by energetic kissing, the fierceness of the love/hate relationship descending rapidly into pure sexuality. She would then run away in a very coy, teasing manner, which was the cue for the first line of the scene: "How now, spirit, whither wander you?" ... the scene became directly about desire and passion—everything they had both been repressing at court.⁵³

If We Shadows Have Offended

Puritan writers such as Philip Stubbes were shocked by the degree of sexual license taken at May Day and Midsummer Night festivals. His work *Anatomy of Abuses* published in 1583, then reprinted in 1585 and 1595 (very probably the same year in which Shakespeare wrote the *Dream*), spoke out against the pagan rituals still abundant in England at the time:

All the young men and maids, old men and wives, run gadding over night to the woods, groves, hills, woods, and mountains, where they spend all the night in pleasant pastimes ... I have heard it credibly reported (and that *viva voce*) by men of great gravity and reputation, that of forty, threescore, or a hundred maids going to the wood over night, there have scarcely the third part of them returned home again undefiled. These be the fruits which these cursed pastimes bring forth.⁵⁴ In 1642 the Puritans closed the theaters. In 1644 the May festival was banned. From their representation in his plays, we can imagine that these were not Shakespeare's favorite people.

Most modern productions have the lovers go through various states of undress as they make their journey through the hostile forest. However, it is a mistake to think of this as just a sexual undressing. As the program to Sheila Hancock's 1984 touring production suggested, it is also a process of self-discovery:

In sleep we have a reversion to a more primitive type of experience ... The dream becomes a revelation. It strips the ego of its artificial wrappings and exposes it in its native nudity. It brings up from the dim depths of our sub-conscious life the primal, instinctive impulses, and discloses to us a side of ourselves which connects us with the great sentient world.⁵⁵

In a world where magic and the supernatural are no longer a part of everyday life, "once we are out of childhood the closest we come to magic is through our dreams; in this extra-terrestrial world we meet the part of ourselves which we bury under social convention."⁵⁶ In modern productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that buried part of the self has invariably been depicted as the sexual self—in keeping with the aspect of the May which so appalled Stubbes in Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare critic Mary Maher explains:

If the visual image of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the

nineteenth century was the gauzy-winged fairy, the immediate icon of the late twentieth century was the up-thrust arm between Bottom's legs, the oversized ass's penis created by two actors positioned to show arousal in Peter Brook's 1970 staging of the play ... What Brook did was corrective; he was reinserting and reissuing the seminal strand of sexuality into the mainstream of the play's production history.⁵⁷

Despite being in a recognizable tradition of modern productions of the *Dream*, Michael Boyd's 1999 production was criticized for its overtly sexual reading of the play. He warned the public before it opened:

It won't be a decorative, picturesque dream world, or about public-school lovers with no sexual organs ... [Oberon's fairies were all male and Titania's all female] ... Just as Titania has refused Oberon her bed, so that diktat runs all through the fairy world. The wood will be full of sexual tension ... It won't remind you of a mythical Athens, but of fundamentalist society in the vice-grip of Puritanism and arranged marriage. That's the world Shakespeare was exploring.⁵⁸

When Titania begins her amour with furry-eared Bottom, the effect is usually a little less erotic than the teddy bears' picnic. Not in Michael Boyd's bold and brilliant revival ... Multiple orgasms are clearly occurring in the bed hovering above the stage ... When Josette Simon's squirming, leggy fairy queen tells Daniel Ryan's post-coital Bottom that one of her ogling attendants will "fetch thee new nuts," her hand is on a part of his body that suggests she does not just mean tasty acorns.⁵⁹

A party from a local Catholic school walked out of this production at the interval. Their teacher felt it was unsuitable for children, declaring that "The production has driven a horse and carriage through our school's religious and sex education policies." The tabloids headlined: "Sir Leads Walkout as Bard Sex Shocks Kids" (*Mirror*) and "Children Shocked by Shakespeare in Lust" (*Daily Mail*).

Bottom strolls his way between the world of reality, theatricality,

and the supernatural. His transformation gives the traditional hobbyhorse of the May Day celebration an ironic twist. The hobbyhorse combined the ritualized promise of communal renewal and regeneration through the hybridization of man and beast. Deriving from pagan origins, he symbolized fecundity and continuity. In Elizabethan London, records show that the hobbyhorse was known at Midsummer pageants and at other seasons, in church, city, and court activities. Bottom's transformation, which Jan Kott found both "fascinating and repulsive," has gone comically wrong—instead of being as virile as a beast and as beautiful as a human, it has worked the other way around. The nature of his "translation" turns Titania's desires from something potentially dark into something comic.

There is a tendency for people to assume that because a play contains fairies and magical elements that it has been written for children. This was not true in Shakespeare's day, when a belief in the supernatural pervaded all ages and classes of society. Applauded by most critics for its inventiveness, Michael Boyd's production did have its critics who felt that the overtly sexual reading of the dream, which began for the RSC with Peter Brook, had become old hat. It appeared as though the *Dream* had come full circle, and that audiences were looking forward to the next radical and imaginative rethink of this complex play. They found it with Tim Supple's extraordinary multilingual Indian production for Dash Arts in 2006, at once an homage to Brook and a brilliant reinvention of the play for a multicultural, globalized world.

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT: INTERVIEWS WITH MICHAEL BOYD, GREGORY DORAN, AND TIM SUPPLE

Michael Boyd, born in 1955, trained as a director at the Malaya Bronnaya Theatre in Moscow. He then worked at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry and the Sheffield Crucible before founding his own company, the Tron in Glasgow. He became an Associate Director of the RSC in 1996, coming to prominence with his millennial staging of the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* in the company's "This England" cycle of history plays, which won him an Olivier award for Best Director. In 2003, he took over as Artistic Director, achieving a notable success in 2006–07 with his ambitious Complete Works Festival, whereby all Shakespeare's plays were staged in Stratford-upon-Avon over the course of a year, some by the RSC and others by

visiting companies. His controversial *Midsummer Night's Dream*, with Josette Simon as Hippolyta/Titania and Daniel Ryan as Bottom, was staged in 1999.

Gregory Doran, born in 1958, studied at Bristol University and the Bristol Old Vic theater school. He began his career as an actor, before becoming Associate Director at the Nottingham Playhouse. He played some minor roles in the RSC ensemble before directing for the company, first as a freelance, then as Associate and subsequently Chief Associate Director. His productions, several of which have starred his partner Antony Sher, are characterized by extreme intelligence and lucidity. He has made a particular mark with several of Shakespeare's lesser-known plays and the revival of works by his Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporaries. His 2005 *Midsummer Night's Dream* for the RSC featured Amanda Harris as Titania, Joe Dixon as Oberon, Jonathan Slinger as the Puck, and Malcolm Storry as Bottom.

Tim Supple, born in 1963, studied at Cambridge University. As director of the Young Vic, he pioneered a style of theatrical narrative, often in the form of dramatizations of classic stories (such as Kipling's *Jungle Book* and a selection of tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the versions of Ted Hughes), that was simple and direct but also full of improvisation and innovative stage effect. He directed an RSC production of *The Comedy of Errors* on tour in India, which introduced him to Indian styles of theater, storytelling, and popular entertainment. This gave him the idea of recruiting an Indian company to play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The resulting production for his own company, Dash Arts (funded by the British Council), in a mixture of many Indian tongues as well as English, was a global triumph and a high point of the visiting work featured in the RSC 2006–07 Complete Works Festival.

A wood outside Athens where some very English artisans rehearse their amateur play. Theseus and Hippolyta jumping out of Greek mythology one moment and the English folklore figure of Robin Goodfellow the next. A production history that runs from the bare thrust stage of Shakespeare to elaborate Victorian scenography complete with trees and even live rabbits to Peter Brook's white cube with circus trapeze. How did you and your designer set about imagining and realizing the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Boyd: Tom Piper and I wanted to move from a cold oppressive world (with bad weather) to a much happier and more colorful place, via the comic and disturbing challenge of the wood. We were also very keen to thrust the action as far as possible into the same room as the audience while staying within the sightlines of the old Royal Shakespeare Theatre. What emerged was a smooth raised egg shape rising over the front of the stalls and enclosed by a seamless, seemingly doorless, curved wooden wall at the back of the curve. This closed off the proscenium, put pressure on the space, and also acted as a natural loudspeaker, thus enabling the actors to play freely with the whole range of their voices.

Athens was populated by gray, buttoned-up people in buttoned-up coats, and it snowed. Fur hats and a general air of frigid obedience gave an Eastern European feel to the opening scenes. Even the mechanicals wore identical gray suits, but it was Bottom's vitality and imagination that produced the first crack in this imposed closed order. He imagines and embodies the heroic gesture of "Hold or cut bow-strings" so vividly that his mimed Robin Hood longbow shoots a real arrow into the curved (Berlinesque) wall. The wall opens and a buttoned-up lady walks out of a door as poppies start to grow from the floor in a riot of red all over the stage. Color has arrived and Bottom runs away. The lady starts picking the poppies and is now being followed by the bowler-hatted, white-gloved Philostrate, who has also "escaped" through the hole in the wall. Philostrate harasses the woman in an increasingly sexual manner until they fight, rip each other's clothes apart, and reveal themselves to be Robin and Peaseblossom.

The world of the court now rapidly transforms, costumes morph and reveal highly colored linings. So the world of the fairies bursts out from within the oppressive world of the court, forming two highly charged teams of male and female. Oberon and his men/boys literally burst the floor open with their violent entrances through traps, further smashing the smooth ellipse and trapping Peaseblossom.

Doran: I suppose the first thing you have to acknowledge about the *Dream* is that there are three or four very distinct strata. I began by being aware that in order to create a fantastical world, I wanted to root the real world in a very specific and mundane reality. We began with the world of the rude mechanicals. They've got very specific jobs; there's a weaver, a carpenter, a bellows-mender, etc., and they

work on Athenian stalls. They live under a very strict authority—if they frighten the ladies with the lion they think they will all be hanged, so it's not a cozy society. We wanted to make them real people. I think the problem for me in dressing them in Elizabethan or some sort of abstract costume is that you need a point of departure for the abstraction of the fairies, and you can make the mechanicals exotic by putting them in Elizabethan costume. I wanted them to be absolutely recognizable workingmen. I walked up and down Chapel Market in Islington and looked at the market stalls and the kind of people that worked there. It seemed to me that by making the mechanicals very ordinary, real people they would be funnier and the relationships between them more truthful.

From that point we had to leap off to find out what the world of the court was. In the court you find that the society run by Duke Theseus is again a very dangerous society, in which if girls don't obey their fathers they might be executed or be forced to join a convent. Whenever I come to direct a Shakespeare play, I try to read it as if for the first time, as if the ink is still wet on the page. You draw from that, without necessarily trying to tie everything up, all the various resonances that you can. Athens felt to me a bit like Greece under the Colonels, so I began to look at that as a reference point—a totalitarian dictatorship.

You have within that another whole strand with Duke Theseus. Shakespeare is like some great hydra. You manage to find a setting or locale or reality for one bit and then an extra head plops out and says "Well, you've forgotten me." By looking at the Theseus-Hippolyta story and seeing whether it married, we began to see Theseus as a normal, ordinary, upper-class aristocrat who plays out the fantasy that he has captured the Amazonian queen. It's the first bit of fantasy in the play. We began the play with a fight between two armed warriors, in Greek armor, crashing through an extraordinary sword-and-shield fight, which one of them then won. When the victor took off their helmet it turned out to be a woman. So you have the Amazonian warrior element of Hippolyta, and this time Theseus enjoyed being beaten by the warrior queen. Then they quickly got into their ordinary clothes for the arrival of Philostrate and Egeus. So there was a fantasy element in the role-playing that they were doing. I see very little other element of their, as it were, mythological status. When they are alone in Act 4 and start talking about being on a bear hunt with my kinsmen Hercules and Cadmus we decided that it was their

own fantasy; again, to root them as real people in a real context, as the lovers were real people in a real context. It is more surprising if a fairy appears to somebody who is absolutely real and literal.

That was our starting point, and then the world of the forest became a sort of wasteland. When Shakespeare talks about forests we are in danger of thinking of pretty woodland glades, whereas I think what he is talking about is a wilderness into which people go and are changed by the experience. We created a rather sinister forest, which was a kind of forest and also a junk heap, with lots of detritus that had been chucked away by the world. The rude mechanicals brought a market stall into the forest which they were going to use as their little stage to rehearse, and a supermarket trolley to carry the props. And the fairies leapt from that.

Supple: Our approach was very practical at first: how do we suggest the journey from court to street to forest back to the street and then court? And how do we travel within the forest—how do we suggest different locations, experiences, emotions? And how, when we return to the court, can it feel different than it was? We discussed, sketched, and tried out many things in rehearsal but we were always heading for something light, simple, and suggestive. Something that could move and change with ease but with magical sensation. Before rehearsals began we had decided that the play should begin with a clean image—that the court should play on silk, and against a huge wall of white paper that would look like something classical and solid. We knew that we wanted to pull the silk off the floor, like a tablecloth, and play the street scene on earth. And we knew that we wanted the fairies to enter the play by bursting through the paper and that the torn back wall would suggest the lines and shape of the forest. We knew also that the gradual mess that would be created as the paper was ripped and trampled and the earth churned up during Acts 2 and 3 would naturally create the turbulence we felt to be at the heart of Shakespeare's forest. Indeed, we felt that the forest should transform from scene to scene with the shifting psychological experience of the characters and that we wanted this to be achieved by the simplest, playful means, with the fairies and Robin always central to how things change. The fairies' whirling sticks would create the dangerous war zone of 2.1; the fairies would climb and dance up silks and ropes to sing Titania to sleep in 2.2; the fairies provide a playful, benign forest for the mechanicals in 3.1 before Robin leads a

vicious attack and the same forest turns into a nightmare. We knew that Act 4 would begin with the clean simplicity of dawn—all mess removed, while Act 5 would mark a return to silk but now red and rich and sensual. At all times we were aiming for a design that would open the audience's imagination while providing a concrete enough sense of each place and world—court, street, and forest; mortal and immortal. In rehearsal we were inspired by the place where we worked—Tamil Nadu. Our red earth, natural wooded grid, large leaves, and many other details came from there. In the costumes we worked hard to articulate three distinct worlds that would connect with the eternal folk play-within-the-play while resonating with a modern audience. The aristocrats' clothes trod a fine line between mythic dress and modern cloth; the mechanicals were always to be absolutely real—as one would find them on the streets of Calcutta; the fairies were most elusive for they had to be many things—playful, malign, light, potent—as they are Nature itself. The binding aesthetic was always India. It was not to be set in India but to arise from India: India as it was and as it is.

If the Chamberlain's Men's property store was like that of their rivals under Philip Henslowe, they might have had a wheel-on "bank" for Titania to lie upon, but meeting "by moonlight" in the outdoor Elizabethan theater could not have been achieved by fancy lighting effect. Where in your production did you rely most on modern theater technology and where did you just let the language and the audience's imagination do the work?

Boyd: We flew Bottom and Titania in the bed, we brought Oberon from the substage up to Titania's raised bed with phallic hydraulics, but this was a very simple production, which expressed itself in words, behavior, costume, and through [movement coach] Liz Ranken's sexually charged dance rituals.

Doran: I do think it is important to release the audience's imagination, to allow them to be complicit. In receiving the language they should not be too distracted. We did create a starlit sky. There was a puppet-theater technique we used. Snout had a stall where he was selling greasy hot dogs and falafel, an Athenian greasy spoon. The light on his frying dish was projected against the back wall of the mechanicals' market stall lock-up, so you got a sense of greasy onions

and sausages, etc., projected against the back wall. We used that image but made it rather beautiful in the forest. Steve Tiplady, from Little Angel, by pouring ink and then oil into a Pyrex dish and then putting it onto an overhead projector, created a night sky. All the oil distributed into tiny bubbles, and when you projected that onto the screen you had an astonishing galaxy of stars, which looked absolutely like a night sky. All you then had to do was run your finger through the Pyrex dish and you got fantastic shooting stars. We allowed ourselves to use that, but you were always aware that it was “rough magic,” if you like. And when you saw the fairies with their huge wings you knew that it was a shadow-play trick. So we did allow ourselves quite a lot of fun with that, but tried always to keep the actor and the spoken word at the forefront. We were probably not as rigorous as the way Peter Brook did it when he created the white box, but that was thirty or forty years ago, and I think bringing back a bit of theater magic, without it becoming a Victorian scene with white rabbits, could still create an image in the audience’s mind of night and of the forest being a dangerous place.

We continued the sense of the fairies being obsessed with the adults. In the way that Titania and Oberon are obsessed with the changeling boy, the fairies themselves become obsessed with the lovers in the forest. They became the bushes and the briars through which the lovers scrambled. Basically they denuded the lovers as they went through the scene, by holding their clothes as they tore them off them. We thought hard about what a forest was and what it would be like going through a forest at night and we created that experience not with bushes and briars but by using the fairies. In the scene where Puck takes Demetrius and Lysander off to fight “cheek by jowl” we made the boys’ trips through the forest quite difficult by giving them a lot of physical action to get through the groups of fairies, over the top of them and round about them.



4. Tim Supple's wood: behind, the bamboo frame through which the fairies burst; around, the twine with which Robin entangled the lovers.

With such a huge space, particularly in a proscenium arch, you have to fill that picture frame in some way. You can do it with lights and things other than just physical lumps of scenery. We didn't have very much scenery. Effectively we just kept the space clear and allowed the actors to fill that space. I did have a large globe moon, which was a very interesting element. As soon as we put a moon on the stage, we followed the stages of the moon through the play and realized that something very strange is going on. Hippolyta at the beginning says that in four days' time the moon will be like "a silver bow / New-bent in heaven," talking about the transitional phases of the moon—there is going to be a new moon in four days' time, but until then no moon. But Lysander seems to think there will be a moon "Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold / Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass"; and then as soon as we are in the forest Oberon says "Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania," so instead of there being no moon at all, as is the case in the first scene, suddenly there is a moon. Either Shakespeare is not being literal or he's being very precise, and people have worked out exactly what that means. The moon to us presided over the play. In fact it moved during the show and was lit in different ways, just as the physical globe of the moon is always there in the sky

but is lit from different angles by the sun. We lit it in very different ways during the piece, and then allowed it to blossom into this huge flower which provided the final antidote to the love-in-idleness: “Dian’s bud o’er Cupid’s flower / Hath such force and blessed power”: so we were following through a large abstract idea of the moon and chastity and also its relationship to sex and fecundity. I think that is a key link.



5. Titania (Josette Simon) and Bottom (Daniel Ryan) in Michael Boyd’s sexually charged RSC production.

Supple: Our only use of modern technology is in the lighting—which is very important to the production—and in the microphones that lift the levels of our live musical instruments to fill the large theaters in which we play. On the other hand, we never rely simply on language

and the audience's imagination alone. However minimal, there is always some intervention from the set, the light, or the music to help define a moment. There is a very interesting way in which the most traditional theater practice—still alive in India today—meets with contemporary imaginative theater approaches in the West. In our production a limited set of resources—musical instruments played live, or sticks, rope, silks, and elastic, or even a rubber tire—have provided limitless possibilities of imaginative play. In a way, we are trying to combine the playfulness and freedom of children with the refined, layered sophistication of the wisdom and experience found in the text. In 3.2, when the four lovers dissolve into a deadly fight of jealous rivalry, our Puck gleefully weaves a web of elastic around them in which they become entangled and flail to the point of desperation. This is certainly an addition to the language and a stimulant to the audience's imagination. It suggests another shape to the forest floor, but it also plays a very simple trick on the lovers—one that a child could conceive of, but that also plays with their entangled love with the force of Cupid. This is in fact what the mechanicals themselves discover in 3.1: how do you “bring the moonlight into a chamber”? You get a man to suggest moonshine with a torch and bush! Ingenious, playful, and symbolic.

In what sense was your Hippolyta an Amazonian captive? And how seriously did you take Oberon's assertion that Theseus (led on by Titania) is a serial rapist?

Boyd: Josette Simon has great beauty and dignity and was dressed elegantly as Hippolyta, but chastely. She and Oberon stood far apart as their forthcoming wedding was announced to choreographed applause. Disharmony lay beneath the optimistic rhetoric in the summer snow.

Doran: We felt Theseus was actually a very ordinary man who had this fantasy. Oberon and Titania see them in mythological terms as fantasies that they want to play out. Oberon's description seems to have no relationship to Theseus at all. Theseus himself has a very strange attitude to any kind of imaginative capacity, finding it all a bit suspicious. It seemed to us that that was Oberon and Titania creating a sort of mythological context for the play. I think you could see in my production that there is a relationship to that myth, but that it was

another layer of fantasy. I don't think it helps to see Theseus as a serial rapist.

Supple: Shakespeare is enigmatic, or very open, about both Hippolyta and Theseus. Who knows how much this was deliberate or the mark of unfinished work? But the most interesting approach is to assume that it was deliberate and, rather than fixing the nature of Hippolyta's captivity or Theseus' character, leave it as open as possible. We know that they have fought and that Theseus has won and we know that they get married. We don't know how Hippolyta feels about this. Her first words are ambiguous and could be convincingly played as both willing compliance and biting resentment. When decisions have to be made, we tried to make just enough to bring a story to life and to create the sense of journey and change that all good stories need. In our production, Hippolyta has lost a war, agreed to marry, but has no love for Theseus. An Amazonian queen, she has no voice in Athens' court. Her journey is to come to terms with the situation she is in: his journey is to win her love—not through conquest or through spectacle. This occurs in 4.1 when his flexibility leads him to champion the young lovers over Egeus and the law. What has occurred to bring about this change? We know nothing about Theseus and Hippolyta after 1.1. The process of change is surely to be found in the forest. Titania and Oberon are the continuation of the battle between Hippolyta and Theseus and their turbulent, ferocious fight over marital power, sexual ownership, a child, and the world that they are responsible for is the dream-catharsis that exorcises and resolves the buried issues and frustrations between the two mortal monarchs. We have to take everything that one character says about another seriously, while remembering that it is only the perspective of one character. We would not be surprised if Theseus was a rapist—surely this is common to many powerful figures of myth? But we would not be surprised if Oberon is exaggerating in his jealousy and anger. What we can assume is that Theseus has yet to learn love in its tender, thoughtful, selfless sense. He must make the journey from absolute monarch-soldier who wins his wife on the battlefield to a man who knows love. He is given this by Oberon and Titania, who sit beautifully poised between two modern notions, being both alter egos and spirit-gods of love.

What's going on with all that business in which Oberon and

Titania fight over the Indian boy? Some productions actually include the boy in the cast ...

Boyd: In my Crucible production the boy was played by Mumta Gupta, the gorgeous son of Nirmal Gupta, who ran by far the best curry house in Sheffield and loved the snooker. We had no onstage boy in Stratford, but his unconscious root might be the Child Christ whose mother the Virgin Mary has been so recently banished from English spirituality. Titania's account of disharmony has strong suggestions of an England out of joint following the Reformation.

Doran: [*See Doran's answer to the question about the fairies, [this page](#).*]

Supple: Again, this is an enigmatic, or open, aspect of the play and one can either explain it clearly or leave it open. We chose the latter while never forgetting that it is at the heart of what they are arguing about and so must be essential to their very beings. We are told by Puck that Oberon wants the boy to be a special member of his followers—a scout or ranger. We can imagine that a little mortal child would be as special to a spirit as a spirit-child would be to a mortal. But it is hard to believe that this is all such a terrible fight is about. In the argument between them in 2.1 we can surmise that Oberon is furious that his request is being denied, and perhaps the boy has become a symbol of the love and sexual partnership that she is denying him. “Am not I thy lord?!” he thunders when she tries to leave his company again. Is the boy the battleground for marital power within which sexual availability and fidelity is the real issue? This is possible, but does not feel quite deep or rich enough to enter the bloodstream of such a play of wonderful humanity. It is striking what emerges in Titania's speech when she is pushed. The boy is a child of a woman who loved her and with whom she shared tenderness, humor, and friendship. The woman died, and for her sake Titania has made the boy her own. Is the potent issue here the fact that, being immortals, Titania and Oberon cannot have children? In a play in which all the characters yearn to be other than they are, is it Titania and Oberon's yearning to have a child, to be a family? This is not so fanciful: at the end of the play they come to the marriage beds to bless the sexual union of the three couples and the children that they will have. If the ending requires some profound union between all the characters of the play, this might indeed make a deep

connection between the immortal and mortal worlds. One of the toughest challenges presented by the boy in the play is simply to make it clear—a common phrase one hears from audiences at productions of the *Dream* is: “What exactly are Oberon and Titania fighting about?” It can be useful and interesting to have the boy in the show, as we do, to help establish the character firmly in the story. However, even this cannot make the argument easily clear to all watching. Perhaps, like all marriages, the exact issue in a falling-out can never be clear to outsiders. Or perhaps the most important clue is in the mystery itself. A great concern of the play is the mystery of the immortal or spirit world. We yearn to touch it. In love and art (theater) we can glimpse it, but it will remain a mystery. A dream.

Though it requires some very quick costume changes, many productions double Theseus with Oberon and Hippolyta with Titania. Did yours? Why? Why not? Gains and losses, discoveries?

Boyd: We were bound to double them as our premise was that the woods were a transforming agent on Athenian life, permitting the release of repressed or taboo ideas and urges. The biggest single gain was the moving and dangerous moment when Bottom approached Hippolyta in the burgomasque dance. Both of them half understood what they had each “dreamed” the night before. The humanizing of Nick Jones as Theseus through Oberon was also powerful.

Doran: We didn’t. The reason was that it has actually become the norm to double them. It’s fine for Oberon and Titania, but the worry I had was that Hippolyta and Theseus are rather diminished. You stop regarding them in their own right, and I wanted to look at them in their own capacities and at their own agendas, to try to understand who they are. There’s a physical moment which is very difficult, because you have to have an extraordinarily quick change when they go off and come straight back on again, which seems to indicate to me that it was not the original purpose to double them. Rather than effect a clever quick change I decided not to have that at all and to try and look at them in their own right. I think that brought distinct advantages theatrically. One problem is that, when you get to the moment when Oberon and Titania are reconciled, which I think is an incredibly important moment in the play, then that moment becomes

loaded with the practical issue of how you are going to do the quick change. When the fairies come back on right at the end of the play after Theseus and Hippolyta and the lovers have all gone off to bed, and there is a sense of the play coming to an end, I think not doubling the roles increases the audience's sense of wonder and delight. There's a growing sense of joy there, and I love the fact that Oberon and Titania do come back to enter the palace. The danger is that if Theseus and Hippolyta do another quick change you are more aware of the quick change than you are of the wonder of the moment. There's a sense of benediction at the end of the play. It shows it clearly wasn't just a dream after all. The fairies' role has been reestablished as somehow preservers of the natural order and their benediction of the mothers and the newlyweds was somehow more special without the doubling.

Supple: We did double Theseus with Oberon and Hippolyta with Titania as well as Philostrate with Puck. Even Egeus appears in the forest as a spirit. It seemed absolutely natural to do this on the page and it feels absolutely natural in performance. The reasons are numerous. The perfect structure of the play invites it: the mortal court disappears from view for the middle three acts, leaving its key actors idle if they are not to reappear as the spirit-court. Without this doubling, Theseus and Hippolyta have no process of change or travel: the doubling creates a rich physical and psychological experience at the heart of the play. The core meaning of the play lies in transformation and the forest is the place of change. The lovers transform with wild and released ferocity into sexual animals. Bottom of course transforms into the ultimate sexual beast—the compliant ass. Becoming Titania and Oberon is the transformation undergone by Hippolyta and Theseus. As the spirit-monarchs, they too are released from the restraining forces of civilized society. They can fight their way with no holds barred through the painful, turbulent forest of sexual jealousy, marital power, and mutual frustration. Like all classic folktales, the time and place of transformation is elsewhere and must be forgotten to the conscious mind. Bottom cannot hold on to the memory of his experience in the forest, nor can the lovers. How much more rich is this sense of dream if it is common to all the characters in the play? Hippolyta and Theseus' dream is to have been Titania and Oberon. This makes the stage one and binds the audience into a sensation of dream: "That you have but slumbered here / While these

visions did appear.” What losses there might be is hard to guess at—one would have to play the play the other way to discover. The most obvious loss would be a greater sense of concrete, discreet character in each mortal and each immortal. One might gain a sense of travel—of leaving the court, the city, and entering another, very different world. It would allow extreme differences in casting. One could even play with the two worlds colliding more often. Indeed we can surmise that in Shakespeare’s time the mechanicals doubled with the fairies. This completes the dream, the surrealism of the mortal world becoming the immortal world. However, we definitely wanted mechanicals who would bring a reality to the stage and who would convince as workingmen from India’s streets. This demanded a very different kind of performer and physical personality to those we cast as fairies. Having two different groups produced a vivid contrast between them and created a rich human canvas. It also allowed two wonderful events of meeting: 3.1 and the end.

Hermia and Helena are sharply differentiated, not least by their differing height, but sometimes the boys seem indistinguishable—there are moments when even seasoned playgoers can be hard put to remember who is in love with whom at which moment. That’s partly the Puck’s fault, of course, but would you say that the director needs to work especially hard to help actors realize Demetrius and Lysander distinctively?

Boyd: There’s no excuse for confusing the characters of Lysander and Demetrius. Lysander is clearly a passionate rebel, prone to fits of melancholy. His vivid sense of mortality and his wooing techniques bring readily to mind the young John Donne: the young outsider courtier of the wrong persuasion. He’s one of many trainee Hamlets. Demetrius, on the other hand, is a trainee Laertes. He has a passion in him, but it is buried, and takes second place to the main chance. The *Dream* could, in one sense, be subtitled “The Awakening and Education of Demetrius.” He’s the one lover who is truly and permanently transformed by the experience, and it is a good thing that he ends up a little more like Lysander.

Doran: I think there is a distinct psychology behind all of them. Hermia and Helena are not just distinguished by their heights. Hermia is this spoilt little princess, who has always been the apple of her

important father's eye, who has lived this very privileged existence and has had everything she wants, including the love of Lysander. She's a very determined little madam. I think she uses Lysander, who at the beginning of the play you can absolutely understand as the person that Hermia's father would not want to hang around his daughter. He's a bit of a wastrel. We had him physically sloppier. He's interested in love and the language of love. He's a sort of philosopher in his own mind, whereas Demetrius is the man Hermia's father wants her to marry. He is a city type, a Hooray Henry. The advantage of having the boys in modern dress is that you can have certain signifiers for an audience. If Demetrius is dressed rather uptight, neatly cut hair, city suit, the Man Most Likely To, then you can distinguish him very clearly from Lysander, who wears rather romantic sloppy clothes and has long hair. Hermia is the princess. Helena is paranoid about her height and has rather low self-esteem. What the forest does is expose those paranoias. Hermia, who has always had love and just had to click her fingers for it to come to her, is suddenly abandoned, loved by neither of the men and left wandering around the forest by herself. I think that's very frightening for her. I don't think she's ever had to fall back on her own resources like that before. Helena is a bit of a masochist who has fallen comfortably into the position of playing the victim in life. Her problem is partially that she enjoys playing the victim. She says "But herein mean I to enrich my pain." It's an almost masochistic enjoyment of not being loved, proving that she is not worthy of love by chasing the wrong partner. Yet in the forest she finds herself being chased and adored by two men. Initially she finds it rather disturbing—they must be joking—and then she finds that there are certain advantages, and a certain power struggle evolves because of that. Lysander might be a bit soppy but he does hold true to his love. The revelation at the end comes when Demetrius admits that he has behaved badly, and from being a very arrogant man he becomes a very humble man. All of them have their true selves exposed in the forest. A mirror is held up exposing who they really are and it's very disturbing to see, but they come out of the forest with a better sense of vision. Their vision might be blurry initially, but ultimately they see each other and themselves much more clearly as a result of the night in the forest.

Supple: As usual Shakespeare sits finely poised between ancient and modern theatrical tastes with very interesting results. Actually the two

boys are quite distinct in their actions and words—and they are different to each other both before and after the flower. Lysander is an idealist: a love warrior. His cult is love as he has read, thought, and dreamt of it. He shows courage and the instincts of an adventurer in his pursuit of fidelity: suggesting elopement for marriage and restraining his lust for Hermia in the forest when she calls on him to do so. The flower of course reveals his other side: with Helena he releases his lust, ferocity, and cruelty. It becomes urgent for him to have Helena, destroy Demetrius, and crush Hermia.

Demetrius begins the play as the unreliable, opportunistic outsider of the four. He has loved Helena and ditched her, leaving her distraught, having transferred his desire onto Hermia despite her clear commitment to Lysander. He does not share the trysts and tales referred to by the other three. His reaction to their flight is wild: he will catch and kill Lysander just as Hermia is killing him. He threatens Helena with savagery and rape if she does not leave him alone. He tries to seduce Hermia when she is clearly distraught—allowing her to believe that he has killed Lysander. The effect of the flower is to allow him to worship Helena—he becomes less obsessed with seduction and more with defending her, in his eyes, against the false love of Lysander. After the calming, transforming sleep of the dark hours before dawn, this tangle of feelings is transformed into the deep, rich, devotional love he declares publicly in 4.1. These differences in word and deed must all be fully explored and exploited and made available to an audience. However, in performance the differences are superficial and the two characters remain stubbornly interchangeable. On the one hand I tend to agree with Jan Kott that there is core meaning here. The kind of love that concerns Shakespeare in the play, and in the forest especially, is not the romantic love that tells us that one true partner awaits us as in the final credits of the Hollywood Rom-Com. This is the tougher, more truthful face of young love when a partner can switch in the course of a night. When one's passion for one partner can evaporate in the dark when encouraged to turn its head to another. It is no villainy in Demetrius that his "shower of oaths did melt" when it felt "some heat" from Hermia. It is no villainy in Hermia either. It is just desire. And the *Dream* is about that part of love that is desire and the forest is the arena where desire can finally rule, unrestrained by family, responsibility, fidelity, marriage, or time. In such a place, one partner is much like another and in our heart of hearts this is the truth we feel when we glance at stranger after

stranger and wonder. In these moments of our life—especially in our youth—many partners are possible and anything can happen. On the other hand, the similarity we feel in the two is a result of their theatrical ancestry. The four lovers are in part developments of the lovers of *commedia dell'arte*, struggling through trials, largely created by a difficult father (Egeus). The stories, actions, and expression of these lovers were very much to type and the scene between Hermia and Lysander at the end of 1.1 is especially influenced by the genre. Shakespeare's genius is to retain enough of the genre to appeal to his audience but to discover enough unique psychology in each character to allow them to live for modern audiences. His further genius is to create a group of six workingmen who, though less explored and revealed than his aristocratic lovers, are actually more individually defined.

And the girls: do we need them to feel real pain, real fear, not just of rejection but of rape?

Boyd: Yes. The woods are no less hilarious for being terrifying.

Doran: I think that's right. The comedy of the play has to come out of a reality. It does descend into a fight, but that's not funny if they are not real people. I think there are moments of incredible revelation and shock. Hermia turns to Lysander and says "What, can you do me greater harm than hate?" If you just treat these as funny scenes and funny characters and don't investigate them properly, they won't be funny. But they are funny if you have rooted their desires in reality. Helena's sense of victimization is actually deeply disturbing. She says "Use me but as your spaniel." That girl needs therapy! Unless you get into the reality of that neurosis, the psychological abstraction of the forest doesn't work.

Supple: Of course: real everything! Pain, fear, abandonment, rape, but most of all terror in the face of themselves. Where do they end up by 3.2? Helena with no self-esteem, wishing only that "sleep, that sometime shuts up sorrow's eye, / Steal me awhile from mine own company." Hermia, abandoned by best friend and devoted lover, trying to rip out Helena's eyes. The forest confronts each character with their most secret desire and fear of themselves. And surely this portrait would not be true if it did not include at least one moment in

which Hermia did not want Demetrius and Helena Lysander? Helena cannot have entirely fabricated her image of Hermia sending out “some heat” to Demetrius. And the flower juice is not, of course, a magical potion but a force of super-nature, as simply symbolic as Cupid’s arrow. It brings about what is in our hearts.

Robin Goodfellow is a kind of stage manager, isn’t he? Shakespeare loved writing parts of that kind (Iago, Prospero, and Ariel, the Duke in *Measure for Measure*). Were there particular moments in your production that emphasized this aspect of the Puck’s role?

Boyd: Puck would make a disastrous stage manager. He’s much more of a Bottom than a stage manager. His egotistical lust for messing about in human lives is only matched by Bottom’s egotistical urge to play every part in life. Iago may have liked to think of himself as Puck, but he was in fact a much meaner-spirited, smaller character. Aidan McArdle physically manipulated the lovers like a drunken Tadeusz Kantor [the revolutionary Polish artist and theater director]. He rode them, he beat them, and emptied buckets of earth on them. He has more uncomplicated, unguilty relish than either Prospero, Ariel, or the Duke.

Doran: Yes. As all the fairies become obsessed with the humans, he of course becomes obsessed with the rude mechanicals. He not only messes up the love potion, deliberately or otherwise, he also thoroughly enjoys involving himself in the play and turning Bottom into a literal ass. In a way you don’t have to emphasize the stage manager role because it’s very clearly there.

Supple: Yes, many. Philostrate starts the production, walking slowly to the front center and playing a strange, singing stone that starts the whole dream off. He sits at the front and watches the mechanicals in 1.2, transforming in front of our eyes into Puck as the stage transforms into the forest. He orchestrates the violent entanglement of the lovers in 3.2 by spinning a web of elastic around them and he signals both the start and the end of the interval. As Philostrate he sounds the hunting horns that wake Titania and Oberon up into Hippolyta and Theseus and, also as Philostrate, he makes the stage fit for Act 5. In the blessing dance he transforms again to Puck while

Hippolyta and Theseus are transforming into their spirit alter egos. This all, of course, leads to the most wonderful fruition in the play when Puck offers the audience a simple understanding of the complex picture that has unfurled in front of their eyes: the actors are the shadows, the play a series of visions, and the experience of the event was itself only a dream.

Quince, Bottom, and friends: their play has got to be bad, but you don't want the theater audience to condescend to them, as some members of the onstage audience do during the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe." How did you deal with this problem, how conceive the play-within-the-play?

Boyd: We always remembered that the mechanicals were a loving grotesque of Shakespeare's own chosen profession, and ours. The naïveté of Quince's play and the mechanicals' stagecraft is just a comic rendering of the absurdity of our attempts to capture life in play form. Their imagination and their open hearts more than make up for their mistakes. They are the classic comic apologia to a potentially offended courtly audience: "Don't arrest us or close down our play: we're just a bunch of humble actors, who are a threat to nobody."

Doran: The rude mechanicals are intending to do the play as well as they can, they're just not very good. What we looked at, rather than a lot of comic business, was the moments we remembered from starting out in amateur theater. Those moments of excruciating embarrassment when something unplanned happened. Costumes dropping off, or, as I remember in panto in Lancashire, the vicar's teeth falling out. It's in the attempts to cover it up and keep on doing it well that terrible things happen. That was what made it funny.

We looked at the dirty jokes, which are a crucial part of "Pyramus and Thisbe," but are a very difficult part to play because the verbal jokes tend not to work. Terms like "stones" and "hole" don't quite register nowadays in the context of the play. We addressed that very specifically by making a costume go wrong. The chink has been demonstrated in the rehearsal in the forest as Snout holding his fingers to form a chink. But I don't think when it comes to the performance of the play in front of the duke that the chink being fingers allows the stones and hole jokes to work. So we imagined that Snout, in creating his wall costume—we used a laundry basket

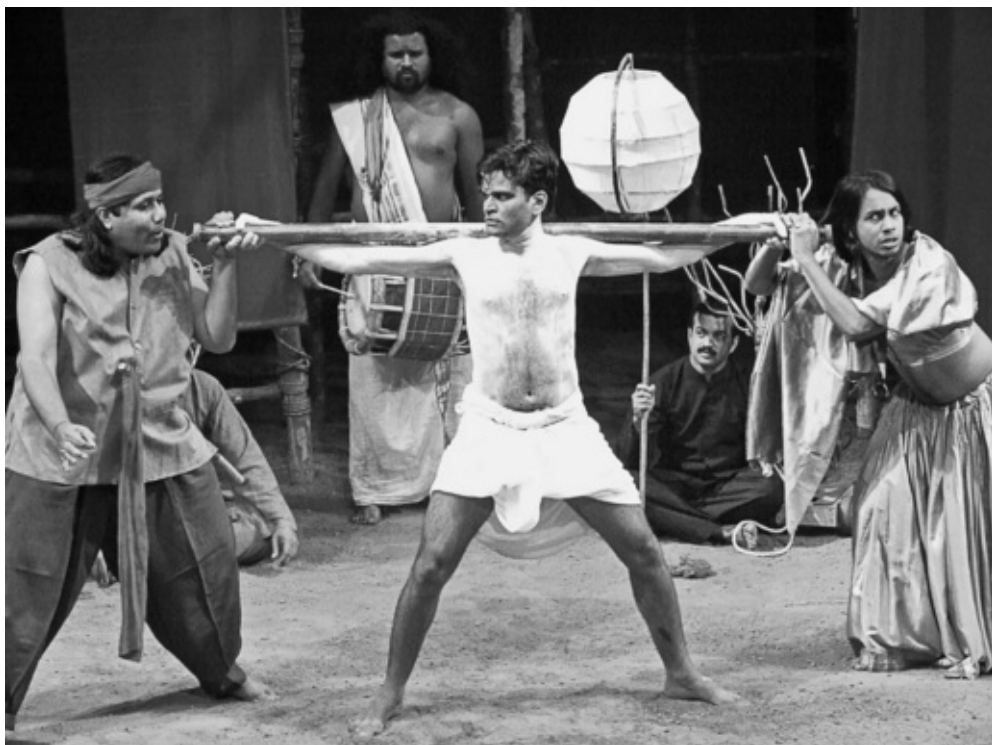
covered in lime and plaster, so he did look like a wall—had forgotten to provide a hole through which he could put his hand. So he had to lift it, which exposed his Y-fronts. As he turned to face Pyramus and Thisbe they were faced with either the front of the Y-fronts or the back of the Y-fronts, which led to the excruciating embarrassment of Flute and Bottom as they had to say these lines about kissing the wall's hole, or referring to his stones knit up "with lime and hair." It was their embarrassment about having to carry on, faced with this big red pair of Y-fronts, that produced the fun. But it was based on a real sense of the embarrassment of being onstage when something goes wrong, rather than trying to invent comic business which isn't really there.

Supple: Firstly, does it have to be bad? Or if so, how bad? And in what way bad? I would only say for sure that it needs to be artless. It must be, truthfully, a play performed by people who have not done plays—apart from one who started the play thinking that he knows more than he does about plays and acting. But has not even Bottom undergone some change, some transformation? Certainly also the language of "Pyramus and Thisbe" has many mistaken uses of English and crude examples of rhyme, meter, and vocabulary. But I am not sure how important the quality of the performance is. The most important questions that we asked about the play-within-the-play were the same as we would ask about any scene: what are they doing, for what end, and with what result? To answer this we made the simple decision to take the mechanicals as seriously as any characters in the play. We thought of them, in detail, as traders and craftsmen. We observed all the details we could from the text of what might be their work, their lives, their social status, their relationship with each other, and their relationship with theater. And we looked for how all these details might change through the course of the story. We were trying to escape from one of the most odious (or "odorous!") habits of the *Dream* in performance: to see the mechanicals as "comic relief" and their play as an excuse for endless directorial and actorly invention of ways in which these thoughtful, struggling men can be made to look foolish or cute. We tried several versions of their "Pyramus and Thisbe," each one an attempt to imagine just how they would do it given they have no money and little art, and indeed have had no time to rehearse as their first and last rehearsal was interrupted by Bottom's transformation. We thought about what kinds

of theater they would have seen—probably theater from the street—and how this would inform their choices. Most of all, we thought about who they are and who they have become by the end of the play. In the end, our version has no mistakes, no invented business—rather, it attempts to reveal in a bare and honest way the experiences of those six men performing at the wedding of the most powerful monarch in their universe.

In terms of theater, I find their journey fascinating and moving and I feel that their version of “Pyramus and Thisbe” is as interesting a passage about theater as the players’ visit to *Hamlet*’s Elsinore. Indeed it should be: Shakespeare has chosen to place it at the end. He has chosen it to be the climax of his action. After the performance there is the magnificent finale of the burgomasque, the exit of the couples to their sexual union, and then the blessing song and dance. This remarkable ending demands that the conclusion of the action before be of greater resonance and value than a bad play that makes us laugh. It needs to be, in some way, a conclusion. Perhaps an epiphany. Or at least an arrival. The mechanicals’ journey from first meeting to performance via the forest is one in which they discover theater for themselves. In their first scene they encounter the basic fears that anyone may hold about performance. Will they become foolish? Will their limitations be exposed? Most of all, will their performance scare their aristocratic audience and lead to their punishment? There is little collective instinct in this first scene. There is conflict between the writer/director and the leading actor—a struggle for leadership—and there are individual issues and anxieties. In the forest this reaches a head. They confront the basic problems of theater: how to reassure the audience that it is not real (prologue) and how to make moonlight and a wall appear in an indoor room. The imaginative solutions that first Quince, then Bottom, propose—that both can be symbolized, simply, by an actor—bring the group together. In the first rehearsal, Flute has to learn the very basic dynamics of drama. Bottom’s transformation into an ass drives a juggernaut through the play rehearsals but will ultimately ignite inspiration into its core. Firstly, the other men realize how much they value him and how much the play meant to them all. They will express this eloquently in 4.2. Secondly, Bottom becomes the only mortal of the play to cross over to the other side—to become the lover of the Queen of the Fairies. Titania promises him that she will purge his mortal spirit so that he will “like an airy spirit go.” This is fulfilled

in the performance. When he awakes, his wonder, and sense of the remarkable mystery that he has experienced, is immediately translated into artistic thinking: he will perform a ballad of his dream. When he returns to the group he has new dignity and poise. Now he can be truly believed as the natural leader he earlier imagined himself to be. In performance of the play he anchors a great achievement. They do it. And not only do they do it, each one of them masters some great challenge: Quince follows a disastrous first prologue with a cogent and passionate second; Snout is strong and dignified as Wall; Snug charms the ladies with eloquence and humility; Starveling overcomes terrible teasing to insist on his role; Flute takes on the female role with tremendous vigor. And Bottom is so inspired in his death that he imagines that his “soul is in the sky.” However crude, however artless, surely something must occur, something must be stirred?



6. Pyramus (Joy Fernandes), Wall (Umesh Jagtap), and Thisbe (Joyraj Bhattacharya) in Tim Supple's production.

The workmen offer the aristocrats a play about the play we have just seen. In the dim recesses of their memory or dream, they and we must be somehow affected by the honesty and directness they bring to the center of the experience.

Tell us about your Bottom: the largest part (!), the most foolish character, but in his way the wisest, certainly the most lovable, but it's crucial to avoid sentimentality toward him, isn't it? And the specific choice of how to do his ass's head: a pair of ears and maybe a comic nose is one thing, a fully realistic animal head quite another. What did you go for? And would you say that this costuming decision plays a major part in determining whether the stage image of Bottom making love to Titania is essentially comical, politically subversive (a weaver making love to a queen!), or perverse and grotesque in the manner of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a beautiful woman having sex with a donkey)?

Boyd: Our Bottom opened the door to the transforming wood with the real force of his imaginative arrow. He and Puck were the *two* Lords of Misrule. He reminded Titania what happiness was, and provided an inspirational leader to the duke's Players. Daniel Ryan's Bottom's Pyramus was actually very good; it was just over-inventive and needed a stronger editor, a more forceful director, than Quince. A full donkey's head (as I had in Sheffield) is too literal and restricts the actor and risks us losing contact with him for too long. Big ears and a powerful groin are the only essential elements. Shakespeare clearly intends to refer to primitive bestiality as well as to subversive Lord of Misrule in Bottom's lovemaking with Titania. We had one foolish teacher who walked his children out of the theater and gained notoriety and a *Guardian* editorial defending us.

Doran: I think with Bottom you have to have a sense of a good-natured braggart. He is absolutely determined to play the biggest part, and all the other parts, which could make him completely intolerable. But then he is faced with this extraordinary fantasy of being wooed by, presumably, the most beautiful, glamorous creature he has ever seen. I remember when I was just starting out as a director, I did the play in a community college in upstate New York. I went to do a seminar on the play in the psychology department and somebody asked me if I felt it was suitable for the students. When I asked why, they said, "Well, jealous husband makes wife have it off with donkey. Isn't that a rather disturbing message?" Of course that is true, in that there is a weirdly subversive sexual nonsense that goes on. But I think it's so funny because Bottom is who Bottom is. If you play with the element of the play's dark sexuality as being as psychologically

complex and dangerous as that, I think you're in danger of tipping the whole play over. I think he plays it with a sort of wit and lightness. I think if you really investigate what Oberon has done, when Titania wakes up and realizes "I just had it off with a donkey," then I don't think there would be any measure of reconciliation between them. There is an exuberant, primal, primitive joy about the whole thing. That's where it becomes a most fantastical dream: where things start morphing into different shapes and it becomes weird and wonderful. I think there is a darkness to it, but a Jan Kott level of darkness just topples the play.

Supple: Yes. Bottom is the very core of the play. See above [[this page](#)]!

The fairies: large or small? Cute or sinister? They've been Victorian children clad in gossamer, they've been doubles of the mechanicals. What were yours like?

Boyd: The fairies were dull, repressed courtiers let loose and strangely morphed and colored.

Doran: The way we approached the fairies was to deal with their abstraction after we had dealt with the reality of them as individuals. Puck seemed to us like he was losing his touch. He was unable any longer to make Oberon smile, because Oberon has been distracted by his obsession with the changeling boy, and Puck, I think, is jealous of that. We felt that the First Fairy saying "Oh, you're that Puck character aren't you," was a bit like somebody saying "Oh, you're that funny guy off the TV." But Puck couldn't live up to that reputation any more. He was a bit like Tony Hancock or an old comedian whose jokes no longer work, who used to be great but suddenly it just isn't working for him. That was the beginning of our take on Puck. And Puck through the play regains Oberon's affection and revivifies as a fairy.

Similarly with Titania and Oberon, we needed to make sure that there was a real battle going on over the changeling boy, and a real sense of deep loss. It seems as though they can both have sex with human beings, but they can never have children. So the obsession with the changeling boy we thought was a very real obsession. Because I really wanted to focus attention on the changeling boy and

his appeal to them, we made a Bunraku puppet of a lifesize toddler. If you want to have the changeling boy on the stage, children are immensely distracting. Even if they are good you still think they might fall over. Certainly what you couldn't do is have a child as young as the changeling boy is clearly meant to be. His mother, it seems, has only recently given birth. We wanted the child to have a presence and we decided that by having a puppet, somehow the fairies would appear real and the puppet a mortal.

That introduced a whole other element in the play, which was an element of fantasy. I developed a relationship with the Little Angel Theatre, having done *Venus and Adonis* with them, and they provided a very special magic. There were two elements of that. One was that I noticed how often the word "shadow" is used in the play, and so felt shadow play might be a fascinating element. We all know from shining a torch against your hand as a child and it making a great big scary shadow on the bedroom ceiling, that shadows can create huge and extraordinary things. Once we had worked out that language it allowed us, when the fairies first appear and are gathering the dewdrops, to have fairies with huge Arthur Rackham wings, who were absolutely the sort of fairies that we immediately think of as fairies. The fairies from the Conan Doyle hoax. We were able to have fairies with great big wings and then undermine that. They could present themselves in your imagination but then they could be very real too.

I was very interested by Shakespeare's use of scale. Apparently the fairies can crawl into an acorn cup, but then Titania can have sex with a human being, so there's a variety of scale there. We spent quite a lot of time looking at those extraordinary Victorian fairy paintings; the mad, rather disturbing ones of Richard Dadd; the Irish painter Daniel Maclise's extraordinary paintings; and the famous fairy paintings by Fuseli and Noel Paton. We looked at how painters can easily enjoy that variety of scale. There are paintings of fairies fighting with owls and bats on a monster scale. We wanted to play with that. The shadow element helped with that, as did the use of dolls. I remember finding a sack of my sisters' old dolls when we were clearing out while moving house, and the dolls had lost their hair and eyes; they were weird-looking things. I showed them to my sisters and they were repelled by them. They found them rather disturbing; these creatures that they had loved and that had become real for them as children were now these ghastly monsters. When Bottom was attended by the fairies they all had these dreadful old dolls, which they presented to

him so that the fairies could land on his hand. I used them as if the fairies were invisible unless they showed the dolls. We played with the iconic idea of the fairy, and then we subverted that into something else.

We did want to make real the way that the dissension between Oberon and Titania has apparently turned the world upside down. So the rude mechanicals were constantly running through the rain. The seasons have altered. The world is uncannily changed. The “forgeries of jealousy” speech seems to suggest global warming. There seems to be this terrifying prospect that the world has been somehow damaged and is out of kilter, and the weather itself is changing. We wanted to utilize that to get away from the sense of the forest as a twinkly, starry place.

Supple: We found the fairies the hardest characters to costume and tried several versions before the final costumes were created during the night between the dress rehearsal and opening performance in Delhi. But we never found them hard to play. We wanted to avoid all stylization and all decisions of one overall tone. We wanted the fairies to be as unpredictable as nature itself and free from all human psychology—especially restraint, morality, tactical thinking, guilt, responsibility, etc. We wanted creatures of pure action. In part they are distant cousins of Harlequin, always playful, and in part they are purely physical forces like dancers or acrobats. How they are comes from what they do. In 2.1 they fight like vicious insects; in 2.2 they magically bind Titania’s lair with a spell to keep her at peace and asleep, then wrap Hermia and Lysander into their own chrysalis of sleep. In 3.1 they playfully provide a benign forest for the mechanicals made up of cane and cloth leaves and of fans and mops and nets. With Puck, they enjoy watching these strange mortals rehearse their play and then, like vicious children, they turn on the mechanicals and drive them mad by chasing them, a screeching assault, out of the forest. At Titania’s demand, they attend to the new king of the fairies—Bottom, tying him up like Gulliver and leading him off to his lover’s bed at the end of 3.1 in a wild bacchanalian dance. We wanted them to have the quality of Ovid’s nymphs: immortal yet servile, free of all constraint yet shot through with an ultimate tragic sense that we see but they cannot. Like insects that live for a day, they have no awareness of what they are missing, or how lucky they are.

We felt that no single image or costume or characterization could encapsulate all this. We had to leave the performer's body and the audiences' minds free to imagine and enjoy. Like Brook and his designer, Sally Jacobs, we chose to let them be performers. Only the performer him/herself, we felt, could be this thing and indeed the nearest we humans can get to these spirits is in performance. The trickery, the playfulness, the athleticism, the skill, the immaturity, the exotic wisdom, the viciousness, the delightfulness, the tenderness, the glimpse of immortality that will never last—all this is touched best by the performer. So our fairies wear as few clothes as possible, all black: beautiful, simple clothes of performance that best suit their bodies and expose as much of their bodies as possible. Flesh and muscle, legs, backs, and arms: these are the key elements of our shadows' costume.

So, do you believe in fairies? More seriously, although this is traditionally the Shakespeare play that has the best chance of making children fall in love with Shakespeare in the theater (was it like that for you?), some astute critics increasingly feel that it is a—perhaps the—central Shakespearean play, because it is such a profound exploration of theater as dream, dream as theater ... the ultimate embodiment of Coleridge's great remark about "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."

Boyd: The poetic faith of Bottom was at the center of our production, or at least our lantern through the forest of our expressed desires and fears and hates.

Doran: The reason I enjoyed the elements of Puck and the mask and the shadow play is because, as an audience, you know how the effect is being produced, but you are still amazed by it. If you could do extraordinary technological things, that wouldn't be as surprising. You would just be rather unemotionally engaged in the trickery. Whereas if you bring the audience in, and allow their imaginations to fly with what's happening in the play, I think it is the most wonderful act of theater, because the play happens somewhere between the actor's imagination and the audience's imagination. It's that complicity which I think makes it such a special and such a blessed play. It is a great benediction.



7. Bottom (Malcolm Storry) in Gregory Doran's shopping trolley, with puppet fairies.

It was surprising in many ways to us. Midsummer meant to the Elizabethans something very different to what it means to us today. To us it means Pimms, Wimbledon, long summer evenings, and that sense of relaxation. To the Elizabethans it was a precarious time, when the crops were in the ground but the harvest hadn't arrived. If the weather was bad at that time it could spell disaster, because if the crops failed shortages could lead to all kinds of rural discontent. It was a dangerous time. It was also a time of year when a portal opened between two worlds, and between Midsummer (St. John's Eve) and the feast of St. Peter the Apostle (23–29 June) was a time when fairies were supposed to be active. So there was a genuine sense of concern at that time. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* to a modern audience sounds a time of relaxation and contentment. In Elizabethan terms it doesn't have quite those connotations of beauty and relaxation and ease. In approaching the play right from the start we began to realize that there were more things going on, and that they were of serious import.

Supple: The *Dream* is, for me, too, the essential expression of Shakespeare's theater. Playfully profound and profoundly playful; one foot in the ancient theater and one foot marching toward the modern theater; narratively exhilarating with time for no less than four major set pieces of song and dance; perfectly constructed; a canvas of

characters that range from the highest aristocrat to a tinker, with characters drawn in meticulous detail or magnificent generality, as befits the needs of the drama. And in the center, the great invention of the fairies: immortals who are most like us. Ultimately the play shatters in its ability to draw all these elements together in an ending as central to the human experience as any work of theater that I know of or can imagine.

SHAKESPEARE'S CAREER IN THE THEATER

BEGINNINGS

William Shakespeare was an extraordinarily intelligent man who was born and died in an ordinary market town in the English Midlands. He lived an uneventful life in an eventful age. Born in April 1564, he was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a glove-maker who was prominent on the town council until he fell into financial difficulties. Young William was educated at the local grammar in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, where he gained a thorough grounding in the Latin language, the art of rhetoric, and classical poetry. He married Ann Hathaway and had three children (Susanna, then the twins Hamnet and Judith) before his twenty-first birthday: an exceptionally young age for the period. We do not know how he supported his family in the mid-1580s.

Like many clever country boys, he moved to the city in order to make his way in the world. Like many creative people, he found a career in the entertainment business. Public playhouses and professional full-time acting companies reliant on the market for their income were born in Shakespeare's childhood. When he arrived in London as a man, sometime in the late 1580s, a new phenomenon was in the making: the actor who is so successful that he becomes a "star." The word did not exist in its modern sense, but the pattern is recognizable: audiences went to the theater not so much to see a particular show as to witness the comedian Richard Tarlton or the dramatic actor Edward Alleyn.

Shakespeare was an actor before he was a writer. It appears not to have been long before he realized that he was never going to grow into a great comedian like Tarlton or a great tragedian like Alleyn. Instead, he found a role within his company as the man who patched up old plays, breathing new life, new dramatic twists, into tired repertory pieces. He paid close attention to the work of the university-educated dramatists who were writing history plays and tragedies for the public stage in a style more ambitious, sweeping, and poetically

grand than anything which had been seen before. But he may also have noted that what his friend and rival Ben Jonson would call “Marlowe’s mighty line” sometimes faltered in the mode of comedy. Going to university, as Christopher Marlowe did, was all well and good for honing the arts of rhetorical elaboration and classical allusion, but it could lead to a loss of the common touch. To stay close to a large segment of the potential audience for public theater, it was necessary to write for clowns as well as kings and to intersperse the flights of poetry with the humor of the tavern, the privy, and the brothel: Shakespeare was the first to establish himself early in his career as an equal master of tragedy, comedy, and history. He realized that theater could be the medium to make the national past available to a wider audience than the elite who could afford to read large history books: his signature early works include not only the classical tragedy *Titus Andronicus* but also the sequence of English historical plays on the Wars of the Roses.

He also invented a new role for himself, that of in-house company dramatist. Where his peers and predecessors had to sell their plays to the theater managers on a poorly-paid piecework basis, Shakespeare took a percentage of the box-office income. The Lord Chamberlain’s Men constituted themselves in 1594 as a joint stock company, with the profits being distributed among the core actors who had invested as sharers. Shakespeare acted himself—he appears in the cast lists of some of Ben Jonson’s plays as well as the list of actors’ names at the beginning of his own collected works—but his principal duty was to write two or three plays a year for the company. By holding shares, he was effectively earning himself a royalty on his work, something no author had ever done before in England. When the Lord Chamberlain’s Men collected their fee for performance at court in the Christmas season of 1594, three of them went along to the Treasurer of the Chamber: not just Richard Burbage the tragedian and Will Kempe the clown, but also Shakespeare the scriptwriter. That was something new.

The next four years were the golden period in Shakespeare’s career, though overshadowed by the death of his only son, Hamnet, aged eleven, in 1596. In his early thirties and in full command of both his poetic and his theatrical medium, he perfected his art of comedy, while also developing his tragic and historical writing in new ways. In 1598, Francis Meres, a Cambridge University graduate with his finger on the pulse of the London literary world, praised Shakespeare for his

excellence across the genres:

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labours Lost*, his *Love Labours Won*, his *Midsummer Night Dream* and his *Merchant of Venice*: for tragedy his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

For Meres, as for the many writers who praised the “honey-flowing vein” of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, narrative poems written when the theaters were closed due to plague in 1593–94, Shakespeare was marked above all by his linguistic skill, by the gift of turning elegant poetic phrases.

PLAYHOUSES

Elizabethan playhouses were “thrust” or “one-room” theaters. To understand Shakespeare’s original theatrical life, we have to forget about the indoor theater of later times, with its proscenium arch and curtain that would be opened at the beginning and closed at the end of each act. In the proscenium-arch theater, stage and auditorium are effectively two separate rooms: the audience looks from one world into another as if through the imaginary “fourth wall” framed by the proscenium. The picture-frame stage, together with the elaborate scenic effects and backdrops beyond it, created the illusion of a self-contained world—especially once nineteenth-century developments in the control of artificial lighting meant that the auditorium could be darkened and the spectators made to focus on the lighted stage. Shakespeare, by contrast, wrote for a bare platform stage with a standing audience gathered around it in a courtyard in full daylight. The audience was always conscious of themselves and their fellow spectators, and they shared the same “room” as the actors. A sense of immediate presence and the creation of rapport with the audience were all-important. The actor could not afford to imagine he was in a closed world, with silent witnesses dutifully observing him from the darkness.

Shakespeare’s theatrical career began at the Rose Theatre in Southwark. The stage was wide and shallow, trapezoid in shape, like a

lozenge. This design had a great deal of potential for the theatrical equivalent of cinematic split-screen effects, whereby one group of characters would enter at the door at one end of the tiring-house wall at the back of the stage and another group through the door at the other end, thus creating two rival tableaux. Many of the battle-heavy and faction-filled plays that premiered at the Rose have scenes of just this sort.

At the rear of the Rose stage, there were three capacious exits, each over ten feet wide. Unfortunately, the very limited excavation of a fragmentary portion of the original Globe site, in 1989, revealed nothing about the stage. The first Globe was built in 1599 with similar proportions to those of another theater, the Fortune, albeit that the former was polygonal and looked circular, whereas the latter was rectangular. The building contract for the Fortune survives and allows us to infer that the stage of the Globe was probably substantially wider than it was deep (perhaps forty-three feet wide and twenty-seven feet deep). It may well have been tapered at the front, like that of the Rose.

The capacity of the Globe was said to have been enormous, perhaps in excess of three thousand. It has been conjectured that about eight hundred people may have stood in the yard, with two thousand or more in the three layers of covered galleries. The other “public” playhouses were also of large capacity, whereas the indoor Blackfriars Theatre that Shakespeare’s company began using in 1608—formerly the refectory of a monastery—had overall internal dimensions of a mere forty-six by sixty feet. It would have made for a much more intimate theatrical experience and had a much smaller capacity, probably of about six hundred people. Since they paid at least sixpence a head, the Blackfriars attracted a more select or “private” audience. The atmosphere would have been closer to that of an indoor performance before the court in the Whitehall Palace or at Richmond. That Shakespeare always wrote for indoor production at court as well as outdoor performance in the public theater should make us cautious about inferring, as some scholars have, that the opportunity provided by the intimacy of the Blackfriars led to a significant change toward a “chamber” style in his last plays—which, besides, were performed at both the Globe and the Blackfriars. After the occupation of the Blackfriars a five-act structure seems to have become more important to Shakespeare. That was because of artificial lighting: there were musical interludes between the acts, while the candles were trimmed

and replaced. Again, though, something similar must have been necessary for indoor court performances throughout his career.

Front of house there were the “gatherers” who collected the money from audience members: a penny to stand in the open-air yard, another penny for a place in the covered galleries, sixpence for the prominent “lord’s rooms” to the side of the stage. In the indoor “private” theaters, gallants from the audience who fancied making themselves part of the spectacle sat on stools on the edge of the stage itself. Scholars debate as to how widespread this practice was in the public theaters such as the Globe. Once the audience were in place and the money counted, the gatherers were available to be extras onstage. That is one reason why battles and crowd scenes often come later rather than early in Shakespeare’s plays. There was no formal prohibition upon performance by women, and there certainly were women among the gatherers, so it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that female crowd members were played by females.

The play began at two o’clock in the afternoon and the theater had to be cleared by five. After the main show, there would be a jig—which consisted not only of dancing, but also of knockabout comedy (it is the origin of the farcical “afterpiece” in the eighteenth-century theater). So the time available for a Shakespeare play was about two and a half hours, somewhere between the “two hours’ traffic” mentioned in the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* and the “three hours’ spectacle” referred to in the preface to the 1647 Folio of Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays. The prologue to a play by Thomas Middleton refers to a thousand lines as “one hour’s words,” so the likelihood is that about two and a half thousand, or a maximum of three thousand lines, made up the performed text. This is indeed the length of most of Shakespeare’s comedies, whereas many of his tragedies and histories are much longer, raising the possibility that he wrote full scripts, possibly with eventual publication in mind, in the full knowledge that the stage version would be heavily cut. The short Quarto texts published in his lifetime—they used to be called “Bad” Quartos—provide fascinating evidence as to the kind of cutting that probably took place. So, for instance, the First Quarto of *Hamlet* neatly merges two occasions when Hamlet is overheard, the “fishmonger” and the “nunnery” scenes.

The social composition of the audience was mixed. The poet Sir John Davies wrote of “A thousand townsmen, gentlemen and whores, / Porters and servingmen” who would “together throng” at the public

playhouses. Though moralists associated female play-going with adultery and the sex trade, many perfectly respectable citizens' wives were regular attendees. Some, no doubt, resembled the modern groupie: a story attested in two different sources has one citizen's wife making a post-show assignation with Richard Burbage and ending up in bed with Shakespeare—supposedly eliciting from the latter the quip that William the Conqueror was before Richard III. Defenders of theater liked to say that by witnessing the comeuppance of villains on the stage, audience members would repent of their own wrongdoings, but the reality is that most people went to theater then, as they do now, for entertainment more than moral edification. Besides, it would be foolish to suppose that audiences behaved in a homogeneous way: a pamphlet of the 1630s tells of how two men went to see *Pericles* and one of them laughed while the other wept. Bishop John Hall complained that people went to church for the same reasons that they went to the theater: “for company, for custom, for recreation ... to feed his eyes or his ears ... or perhaps for sleep.”

Men-about-town and clever young lawyers went to be seen as much as to see. In the modern popular imagination, shaped not least by *Shakespeare in Love* and the opening sequence of Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* film, the penny-paying groundlings stand in the yard hurling abuse or encouragement and hazelnuts or orange peel at the actors, while the sophisticates in the covered galleries appreciate Shakespeare's soaring poetry. The reality was probably the other way round. A “groundling” was a kind of fish, so the nickname suggests the penny audience standing below the level of the stage and gazing in silent openmouthed wonder at the spectacle unfolding above them. The more difficult audience members, who kept up a running commentary of clever remarks on the performance and who occasionally got into quarrels with players, were the gallants. Like Hollywood movies in modern times, Elizabethan and Jacobean plays exercised a powerful influence on the fashion and behavior of the young. John Marston mocks the lawyers who would open their lips, perhaps to court a girl, and out would “flow / Naught but pure Juliet and Romeo.”

THE ENSEMBLE AT WORK

In the absence of typewriters and photocopying machines, reading aloud would have been the means by which the company got to know

a new play. The tradition of the playwright reading his complete script to the assembled company endured for generations. A copy would then have been taken to the Master of the Revels for licensing. The theater book-holder or prompter would then have copied the parts for distribution to the actors. A partbook consisted of the character's lines, with each speech preceded by the last three or four words of the speech before, the so-called "cue." These would have been taken away and studied or "conned." During this period of learning the parts, an actor might have had some one-to-one instruction, perhaps from the dramatist, perhaps from a senior actor who had played the same part before, and, in the case of an apprentice, from his master. A high percentage of Desdemona's lines occur in dialogue with Othello, of Lady Macbeth's with Macbeth, Cleopatra's with Antony, and Volumnia's with Coriolanus. The roles would almost certainly have been taken by the apprentice of the lead actor, usually Burbage, who delivers the majority of the cues. Given that apprentices lodged with their masters, there would have been ample opportunity for personal instruction, which may be what made it possible for young men to play such demanding parts.



8. Hypothetical reconstruction of the interior of an Elizabethan playhouse during a performance.

After the parts were learned, there may have been no more than a single rehearsal before the first performance. With six different plays to be put on every week, there was no time for more. Actors, then, would go into a show with a very limited sense of the whole. The notion of a collective rehearsal process that is itself a process of discovery for the actors is wholly modern and would have been incomprehensible to Shakespeare and his original ensemble. Given the number of parts an actor had to hold in his memory, the forgetting of lines was probably more frequent than in the modern theater. The book-holder was on hand to prompt.

Backstage personnel included the property man, the tire-man who oversaw the costumes, call-boys, attendants, and the musicians, who might play at various times from the main stage, the rooms above, and within the tiring-house. Scriptwriters sometimes made a nuisance of themselves backstage. There was often tension between the acting companies and the freelance playwrights from whom they purchased scripts: it was a smart move on the part of Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men to bring the writing process in-house.

Scenery was limited, though sometimes set pieces were brought on (a bank of flowers, a bed, the mouth of hell). The trapdoor from below, the gallery stage above, and the curtained discovery-space at the back allowed for an array of special effects: the rising of ghosts and apparitions, the descent of gods, dialogue between a character at a window and another at ground level, the revelation of a statue or a pair of lovers playing at chess. Ingenious use could be made of props, as with the ass's head in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a theater that does not clutter the stage with the material paraphernalia of everyday life, those objects that are deployed may take on powerful symbolic weight, as when Shylock bears his weighing scales in one hand and knife in the other, thus becoming a parody of the figure of Justice who traditionally bears a sword and a balance. Among the more significant items in the property cupboard of Shakespeare's company, there would have been a throne (the "chair of state"), joint stools, books, bottles, coins, purses, letters (which are brought onstage, read or referred to on about eighty occasions in the complete works), maps, gloves, a set of stocks (in which Kent is put in *King Lear*), rings, rapiers, daggers, broadswords, staves, pistols, masks and vizards, heads and skulls, torches and tapers and lanterns that served to signal night scenes on the daylight stage, a buck's head, an ass's head, animal costumes. Live animals also put in appearances, most notably the dog

Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and possibly a young polar bear in *The Winter's Tale*.

The costumes were the most important visual dimension of the play. Playwrights were paid between £2 and £6 per script, whereas Alleyn was not averse to paying £20 for “a black velvet cloak with sleeves embroidered all with silver and gold.” No matter the period of the play, actors always wore contemporary costume. The excitement for the audience came not from any impression of historical accuracy, but from the richness of the attire and perhaps the transgressive thrill of the knowledge that here were commoners like themselves strutting in the costumes of courtiers in effective defiance of the strict sumptuary laws whereby in real life people had to wear the clothes that befitted their social station.

To an even greater degree than props, costumes could carry symbolic importance. Racial characteristics could be suggested: a breastplate and helmet for a Roman soldier, a turban for a Turk, long robes for exotic characters such as Moors, a gabardine for a Jew. The figure of Time, as in *The Winter's Tale*, would be equipped with hourglass, scythe, and wings; Rumour, who speaks the prologue of *2 Henry IV*, wore a costume adorned with a thousand tongues. The wardrobe in the tiring-house of the Globe would have contained much of the same stock as that of rival manager Philip Henslowe at the Rose: green gowns for outlaws and foresters, black for melancholy men such as Jaques and people in mourning such as the Countess in *All's Well That Ends Well* (at the beginning of *Hamlet*, the prince is still in mourning black when everyone else is in festive garb for the wedding of the new king), a gown and hood for a friar (or a feigned friar like the duke in *Measure for Measure*), blue coats and tawny to distinguish the followers of rival factions, a leather apron and ruler for a carpenter (as in the opening scene of *Julius Caesar*—and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where this is the only sign that Peter Quince is a carpenter), a cockle hat with staff and a pair of sandals for a pilgrim or palmer (the disguise assumed by Helen in *All's Well*), bodices and kirtles with farthingales beneath for the boys who are to be dressed as girls. A gender switch such as that of Rosalind or Jessica seems to have taken between fifty and eighty lines of dialogue—Viola does not resume her “maiden weeds,” but remains in her boy's costume to the end of *Twelfth Night* because a change would have slowed down the action at just the moment it was speeding to a climax. Henslowe's inventory also included “a robe for to go

invisible”: Oberon, Robin, and Ariel must have had something similar.

As the costumes appealed to the eyes, so there was music for the ears. Comedies included many songs. Desdemona’s willow song, perhaps a late addition to the text, is a rare and thus exceptionally poignant example from tragedy. Trumpets and tuckets sounded for ceremonial entrances, drums denoted an army on the march. Background music could create atmosphere, as at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, during the lovers’ dialogue near the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, when the statue seemingly comes to life in *The Winter’s Tale*, and for the revival of Pericles and of Lear (in the Quarto text, but not the Folio). The haunting sound of the hautboy suggested a realm beyond the human, as when the god Hercules is imagined deserting Mark Antony. Dances symbolized the harmony of the end of a comedy—though in Shakespeare’s world of mingled joy and sorrow, someone is usually left out of the circle.

The most important resource was, of course, the actors themselves. They needed many skills: in the words of one contemporary commentator, “dancing, activity, music, song, elocution, ability of body, memory, skill of weapon, pregnancy of wit.” Their bodies were as significant as their voices. Hamlet tells the player to “suit the action to the word, the word to the action”: moments of strong emotion, known as “passions,” relied on a repertoire of dramatic gestures as well as a modulation of the voice. When Titus Andronicus has had his hand chopped off, he asks “How can I grace my talk, / Wanting a hand to give it action?” A pen portrait of “The Character of an Excellent Actor” by the dramatist John Webster is almost certainly based on his impression of Shakespeare’s leading man, Richard Burbage: “By a full and significant action of body, he charms our attention: sit in a full theater, and you will think you see so many lines drawn from the circumference of so many ears, whiles the actor is the centre.”

Though Burbage was admired above all others, praise was also heaped upon the apprentice players whose alto voices fitted them for the parts of women. A spectator at Oxford in 1610 records how the audience was reduced to tears by the pathos of Desdemona’s death. The Puritans who fumed about the biblical prohibition upon cross-dressing and the encouragement to sodomy constituted by the sight of an adult male kissing a teenage boy on stage were a small minority. Little is known, however, about the characteristics of the leading apprentices in Shakespeare’s company. It may perhaps be inferred that

one was a lot taller than the other, since Shakespeare often wrote for a pair of female friends, one tall and fair, the other short and dark (Helena and Hermia, Rosalind and Celia, Beatrice and Hero).

We know little about Shakespeare's own acting roles—an early allusion indicates that he often took royal parts and a venerable tradition gives him old Adam in *As You Like It* and the ghost of old King Hamlet. Save for Burbage's lead roles and the generic part of the clown, all such castings are mere speculation. We do not even know for sure whether the original Falstaff was Will Kempe or another actor who specialized in comic roles, Thomas Pope.

Kempe left the company in early 1599. Tradition has it that he fell out with Shakespeare over the matter of excessive improvisation. He was replaced by Robert Armin, who was less of a clown and more of a cerebral wit: this explains the difference between such parts as Lancelet Gobbo and Dogberry, which were written for Kempe, and the more verbally sophisticated Feste and Lear's Fool, which were written for Armin.

One thing that is clear from surviving "plots" or storyboards of plays from the period is that a degree of doubling was necessary. *2 Henry VI* has over sixty speaking parts, but more than half of the characters only appear in a single scene and most scenes have only six to eight speakers. At a stretch, the play could be performed by thirteen actors. When Thomas Platter saw *Julius Caesar* at the Globe in 1599, he noted that there were about fifteen. Why doesn't Paris go to the Capulet ball in *Romeo and Juliet*? Perhaps because he was doubled with Mercutio, who does. In *The Winter's Tale*, Mamillius might have come back as Perdita and Antigonus been doubled by Camillo, making the partnership with Paulina at the end a very neat touch. Titania and Oberon are often played by the same pair as Hippolyta and Theseus, suggesting a symbolic matching of the rulers of the worlds of night and day, but it is questionable whether there would have been time for the necessary costume changes. As so often, one is left in a realm of tantalizing speculation.

THE KING'S MAN

The new king, James I, who had held the Scottish throne as James VI since he had been an infant, immediately took the Lord Chamberlain's Men under his direct patronage. Henceforth they would be the King's Men, and for the rest of Shakespeare's career they were favored with

far more court performances than any of their rivals. There even seem to have been rumors early in the reign that Shakespeare and Burbage were being considered for knighthoods, an unprecedented honor for mere actors—and one that in the event was not accorded to a member of the profession for nearly three hundred years, when the title was bestowed upon Henry Irving, the leading Shakespearean actor of Queen Victoria's reign.

Shakespeare's productivity rate slowed in the Jacobean years, not because of age or some personal trauma, but because there were frequent outbreaks of plague, causing the theaters to be closed for long periods. The King's Men were forced to spend many months on the road. Between November 1603 and 1608, they are to be found at various towns in the south and Midlands, though Shakespeare probably did not tour with them by this time. He had bought a large house back home in Stratford and was accumulating other property. He may indeed have stopped acting soon after the new king took the throne. With the London theaters closed so much of the time and a large repertoire on the stocks, Shakespeare seems to have focused his energies on writing a few long and complex tragedies that could have been played on demand at court: *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Cymbeline* are among his longest and poetically grandest plays. *Macbeth* only survives in a shorter text, which shows signs of adaptation after Shakespeare's death. The bitterly satirical *Timon of Athens*, apparently a collaboration with Thomas Middleton that may have failed on the stage, also belongs to this period. In comedy, too, he wrote longer and morally darker works than in the Elizabethan period, pushing at the very bounds of the form in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*.

From 1608 onward, when the King's Men began occupying the indoor Blackfriars playhouse (as a winter house, meaning that they only used the outdoor Globe in summer?), Shakespeare turned to a more romantic style. His company had a great success with a revived and altered version of an old pastoral play called *Mucedorus*. It even featured a bear. The younger dramatist John Fletcher, meanwhile, sometimes working in collaboration with Francis Beaumont, was pioneering a new style of tragicomedy, a mix of romance and royalism laced with intrigue and pastoral excursions. Shakespeare experimented with this idiom in *Cymbeline* and it was presumably with his blessing that Fletcher eventually took over as the King's Men's company dramatist. The two writers apparently collaborated on

three plays in the years 1612–14: a lost romance called *Cardenio* (based on the love-madness of a character in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*), *Henry VIII* (originally staged with the title "All Is True"), and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a dramatization of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale." These were written after Shakespeare's two final solo-authored plays, *The Winter's Tale*, a self-consciously old-fashioned work dramatizing the pastoral romance of his old enemy Robert Greene, and *The Tempest*, which at one and the same time drew together multiple theatrical traditions, diverse reading, and contemporary interest in the fate of a ship that had been wrecked on the way to the New World.

The collaborations with Fletcher suggest that Shakespeare's career ended with a slow fade rather than the sudden retirement supposed by the nineteenth-century Romantic critics who read Prospero's epilogue to *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's personal farewell to his art. In the last few years of his life Shakespeare certainly spent more of his time in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he became further involved in property dealing and litigation. But his London life also continued. In 1613 he made his first major London property purchase: a freehold house in the Blackfriars district, close to his company's indoor theater. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may have been written as late as 1614, and Shakespeare was in London on business a little over a year before he died of an unknown cause at home in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1616, probably on his fifty-second birthday.

About half the sum of his works were published in his lifetime, in texts of variable quality. A few years after his death, his fellow actors began putting together an authorized edition of his complete *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*. It appeared in 1623, in large "Folio" format. This collection of thirty-six plays gave Shakespeare his immortality. In the words of his fellow dramatist Ben Jonson, who contributed two poems of praise at the start of the Folio, the body of his work made him "a monument without a tomb":

And art alive still while thy book doth live
And we have wits to read and praise to give ...
He was not of an age, but for all time!

SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS: A CHRONOLOGY

- 1589–
91 ? *Arden of Faversham* (possible part authorship)
- 1589–
92 *The Taming of the Shrew*
- 1589–
92 ? *Edward the Third* (possible part authorship)
- 1591 *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth*, originally called
 Theprobable)
- 1591–
92 *TheTwo Gentlemen of Verona*
- 1591–
92; *The Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus* (probably
perhaps cowritten with, or revising an earlier version by,
revised George Peele)
- 1594
- 1592 *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*, probably with Thomas
 Nashe and others
- 1592 /
1594 *King Richard the Third*
- 1593 *Venus and Adonis* (poem)
- 1593–
94 *The Rape of Lucrece* (poem)

- 1593– *Sonnets* (154 poems, published 1609 with *A Lover's*
1608 *Complaint*, a poem of disputed authorship)
- 1592– *Sir Thomas More* (a single scene for a play originally by
94 *or* Anthony Munday, with other revisions by Henry Chettle,
1600– Thomas Dekker, and Thomas Heywood)
03
- 1594 *The Comedy of Errors*
- 1595 *Love's Labour's Lost*
- 1595– *Love's Labour's Won* (a lost play, unless the original title for
97 another comedy)
- 1595– *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
96
- 1595– *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*
96
- 1595– *King Richard the Second*
96
- 1595– *The Life and Death of King John* (possibly earlier)
97
- 1596– *The Merchant of Venice*
97
- 1596– *The First Part of Henry the Fourth*
97
- 1597– *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*
98
- 1598 *Much Ado About Nothing*
- 1598–
99 *The Passionate Pilgrim* (20 poems, some not by Shakespeare)

- 1599 *The Life of Henry the Fifth*
- 1599 “To the Queen” (epilogue for a court performance)
- 1599 *As You Like It*
- 1599 *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*
- 1600–01 *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (perhaps revising an earlier version)
- 1600–01 *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (perhaps revising version of 1597–99)
- 1601 “Let the Bird of Loudest Lay” (poem, known since 1807 as “The Phoenix and Turtle”[turtledove])
- 1601 *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*
- 1601–02 *The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida*
- 1604 *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*
- 1604 *Measure for Measure*
- 1605 *All’s Well That Ends Well*
- 1605 *The Life of Timon of Athens*, with Thomas Middleton
- 1605–06 *The Tragedy of King Lear*
- 1605–08 ? contribution to *The Four Plays in One* (lost, except for A *Yorkshire Tragedy*, mostly by Thomas Middleton)
- 1606 *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (surviving text has additional scenes by Thomas Middleton)
- 1606–07 *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*
- 1608 *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*

- 1608 *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, with George Wilkins
- 1610 *The Tragedy of Cymbeline*
- 1611 *The Winter's Tale*
- 1611 *The Tempest*
- 1612– *Cardenio*, with John Fletcher (survives only in later
13 adaptation called *Double Falsehood* by Lewis Theobald)
- 1613 *Henry VIII (All Is True)*, with John Fletcher
- 1613– *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, with John Fletcher
14

FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

CRITICAL APPROACHES

Barber, C. L., *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (1959). Half a century after publication, still the best book on Shakespearean comedy.

Calderwood, James L., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1992). Good on "metadrama," theatrical self-awareness.

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Levine, Laura, "Rape, Repetition, and the Politics of Closure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (1996), pp. 210–28. An example of a feminist approach.

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THE PLAY IN PERFORMANCE

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Jacobs, Sally, "Designing the Dream," in *Peter Brook's Production of William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for the Royal Shakespeare Company: The Complete and Authorised Acting Edition*, ed. Glen Loney (1974). Insider's voice.

McArdle, Aidan, "Puck (and Philostrate)," in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood (2003). Perceptive actor's view.

RSC "Exploring Shakespeare: A *Midsummer Night's Dream*," www.rsc.org.uk/explore/plays/dream.htm. Particular focus on the multilingual Dash Arts production directed by Tim Supple.

Selbourne, David, *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Eye-Witness Account of Peter Brook's Production from First Rehearsal to First Night* (1982). Invaluable record of the seminal production.

Styan, J. L., *The Shakespeare Revolution: Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century* (1977). Good on changing production styles and relationship between criticism and theater.

Warren, Roger, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Text and Performance (1983). Useful.

Williams, Gary Jay, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre* (1997). Overview of stage history.

For a more detailed Shakespeare bibliography and selections from a wide range of critical accounts of the play, with linking commentary, visit the edition website, www.therscshakespeare.com.

AVAILABLE ON DVD

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Charles Kent and J. Stuart

Blackton (1909, on DVD *Silent Shakespeare*, 2004). Short silent version, nicely exploiting the technological “magic” of the new medium of film.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by William Dieterle and Max Reinhardt (1935, DVD 2007). One of the all-time classic Shakespeare films, with James Cagney as Bottom and Mickey Rooney as Puck.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Peter Hall (1968, DVD 2005). Television broadcast of an exemplary RSC production, with Ian Richardson (Oberon), Judi Dench (Titania), David Warner (Lysander), Diana Rigg (Helena), Helen Mirren (Hermia), and Ian Holm (Puck).

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Elijah Moshinsky (1981, DVD 2004). Despite Helen Mirren's presence as Titania, a weak made-for-television production in the BBC complete Shakespeare series.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Adrian Noble (1996, DVD 2001). Film adaptation of RSC stage production.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Michael Hoffman (1999, DVD 2002). Patchy, despite (or because of) strong Hollywood cast, including Kevin Kline as Bottom and Michelle Pfeiffer as Titania.

The Children's Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Christine Edzard (2001, DVD 2006). Is what it says it is: acted (with varying degrees of success) by children.

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List of parts

PHILOSTRATE ... court in the Quarto text, he is the Master of the Revels who introduces the entertainment in the final act; in Folio, this role is taken by Egeus, leaving Philostrate a non-speaking role in the first scene.

Act 1, Scene 1

1.1 Location: Athens **Theseus** mythical Duke of Athens who conquered the Amazons **Hippolyta** mythical Queen of the Amazons, captured by Theseus

2 apace quickly

2 Four happy days the action actually extends over two days and the intervening night

4 lingers draws out/keeps waiting

5 Like to like

5 stepdame stepmother

5 dowager widow

6 withering out i.e. using up

6 young man's revenue i.e. her son's inheritance

7 steep soak, be suffused in

9 moon ... bow Diana was goddess of hunting and the moon

10 New-bent ready to be strung or to let an arrow loose

11 solemnities ceremonies, celebrations

14 pert lively

16 pale companion melancholy fellow

16 pomp splendid display, ceremony

17 with my sword Hippolyta was captured during Theseus' campaign against the Amazons

18 injuries wrongs

20 triumph public celebration

20.1 Hermia name of Aristotle's disreputable mistress; may be derived from "Hermione" (daughter of Helen of Troy)

20.1 Lysander derived from "Alexander" (another name for Paris, who carried off Helen of Troy)

20.1 Demetrius a villainous Demetrius appears in North's Plutarch and in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

32 feigning singing softly/deceitful/joyful/desirous/longing

33 stol'n ... fantasy cunningly imprinted yourself in her imagination

34 gauds showy playthings

34 conceits trinkets

35 Knacks knickknacks

35 trifles insignificant tokens

35 nosegays small bouquets of flowers

35 **sweetmeats** confectionary

36 **prevailment** persuasion, influence

36 **unhardened** inexperienced, yielding

37 **filched** stolen

40 **Be it so** if

46 **Immediately** directly

52 **disfigure** alter/erase

56 **kind** respect

56 **wanting** lacking

56 **voice** approval

58 **would** wish

62 **concern** benefit

63 **presence** the duke/assembled people/ceremonial place

67 **die the death** be executed

68 **society** company

70 **Know of** learn from

70 **blood** passions

72 **livery** clothing (and lifestyle)

73 **aye** always

73 **mewed** confined

78 **earthlier happy** i.e. more happy on earth

78 **distilled** whose essence is extracted for perfume

80 **single blessedness** i.e. celibacy

82 **Ere** before

82 **virgin patent** privilege of virginity

83 **his lordship** i.e. Demetrius

86 **sealing day** i.e. wedding day

90 **would** wishes

91 **Diana** Roman goddess of chastity and the moon

91 **protest** vow

92 **aye** ever

94 **crazèd** flawed/unsound/mad

94 **title** claim

96 **Do** i.e. why don't

98 **render** give to

- 100 **estate unto** bestow upon
- 101 **derived** descended
- 102 **possessed** propertied, i.e. affluent
- 103 **fairly** nobly/equally
- 104 **with ... Demetrius'** superior to those of Demetrius
- 107 **prosecute** pursue
- 108 **avouch** declare
- 108 **head** i.e. face
- 109 **Made love to** wooed
- 109 **Helena** perhaps named after Helen of Troy
- 110 **dotes** is infatuated
- 112 **spotted** (morally) stained
- 115 **self-affairs** personal matters
- 116 **lose** forget
- 118 **schooling** admonition/advice
- 119 **look** be sure
- 119 **arm** prepare
- 120 **fancies** desires
- 122 **extenuate** moderate
- 125 **go** come
- 127 **Against** in preparation for
- 128 **nearly that** that closely
- 132 **Belike** probably
- 133 **Beteem** grant
- 134 **ought** anything, whatever
- 137 **blood** rank
- 138 **cross** hindrance/vexation
- 139 **misgraffèd** mismatched
- 141 **stood** depended
- 141 **merit** Folio's emendation of Quarto's "friends" (meaning "relatives"); some editors assume that both texts are wrong and that the line should read "Or merit stood upon the choice of friends"
- 143 **sympathy** agreement
- 145 **momentary** fleeting
- 147 **collied** blackened
- 148 **spleen** fit of temper

148 **unfolds** reveals

149 **ere** before

151 **quick** living/brief

151 **confusion** ruin

152 **ever crossed** always thwarted

154 **trial** experience of this trial

157 **fancy's** love's

158 **persuasion** opinion

161 **seven leagues** about twenty-one miles

162 **respects** considers

167 **without** outside

169 **do ... May** i.e. celebrate May Day

170 **stay** wait

172 **Cupid** Roman god of love

173 **best ... head** i.e. one causing love (Cupid's lead arrows were supposed to induce loathing)

174 **simplicity** innocence

174 **doves** symbols of fidelity, these birds drew the goddess of love's chariot

175 **knitteth** binds together

176 **Carthage queen** Dido, who committed suicide on a pyre when Aeneas deserted her

177 **false Trojan** the Trojan Aeneas

183 **fair** beautiful/fair-complexioned

185 **happy** favored, lucky

186 **lodestars** guiding stars

186 **air** melody

187 **tuneable** harmonious

188 **green** fresh, new

189 **favour** good looks/a favorable attitude

190 **catch** seize

193 **bated** omitted (with play on "baited, hooked")

194 **translated** transformed

200 **move** arouse

203 **none** i.e. no fault

206 **fly** flee

212 **Phoebe** another name for the Roman moon goddess

213 **glass** mirror (i.e. water)

- 215 **still** always
- 218 **faint** pale
- 218 **wont** accustomed
- 219 **counsel** inmost thoughts/advice
- 222 **strange** foreign, new
- 229 **o'er other some** more than others
- 232 **all** everyone else
- 235 **quantity** value/substance/proportion (to what love makes them into)
- 236 **form** ordered, attractive appearance/substance
- 238 **blind** Cupid was traditionally depicted as a sightless **child**
- 239 **of ... taste** the least bit of reason
- 240 **figure** symbolize
- 242 **beguiled** deceived, misguided
- 243 **waggish** playful, mischievous
- 243 **game** jest/play
- 243 **themselves forswear** break their word
- 245 **eyne** eyes
- 251 **intelligence** information
- 252 **dear expense** effort worth making/high price to pay (as Demetrius will pursue Hermia)/begrudging gratitude (from Demetrius)

Act 1, Scene 2

- 1.2 **Quince** probably from “quines” or “quoins,” a **carpenter’s** wooden wedges
- 1.2 **Snug** close-fitting; a good name for a **joiner** (craftsman who makes furniture)
- 1.2 **Bottom** the core onto which the **weaver’s** yarn was wound, or a ball of thread; did not have modern sense of “arse” **Flute** suggests the fluted pipes of a church organ operated by **bellows**; perhaps Flute also has a reedy, high voice
- 1.2 **Snout** possibly Snout has a large nose (some editors suppose a reference to the spout of a kettle, which a **tinker** would have to mend, but sixteenth-century kettles did not have spouts)
- 1.2 **Starveling** tailors were proverbially thin
- 2 **generally** malapropism for “severally” (i.e. individually)
- 3 **scrip** scrap of paper/script (i.e. what is written down; the word did not have its modern theatrical sense)
- 5 **interlude** short play
- 7 **treats on** deals with, is about
- 8 **grow ... point** approach a conclusion
- 10 **Marry** by the Virgin Mary

- 14 **spread yourselves** spread out
- 20 **ask** require
- 22 **condole** express great sorrow
- 23 **humour** inclination
- 23 **Ercles** i.e. the Greek hero Hercules
- 23 **rarely** magnificently, exceptionally
- 24 **tear ... in** rant and bluster
- 24 **split** go to pieces
- 26 **shivering** shattering
- 29 **Phibbus' car** the chariot of Phoebus, the sun god
- 31 **mar** ruin
- 32 **Fates** three goddesses in control of human destiny
- 33 **lofty** grandiose, exalted, impressive
- 34 **vein** temperament
- 38 **wand'ring** i.e. on a mission
- 42 **That's all one** it doesn't matter
- 43 **small** high-pitched
- 43 **will** can
- 44 **An** if
- 52 **Thisbe's ... Thisbe's father** these characters never actually appear
- 57 **fitted** equipped, provided for (perhaps maintaining the language of joinery)
- 60 **do it extempore** improvise
- 70 **discretion** sound judgment
- 71 **aggravate** malapropism for "moderate"
- 72 **roar** roar for
- 72 **sucking dove** conflation of "sitting dove" and "sucking lamb," both proverbially quiet and gentle
- 72 **an 'twere** as if it were
- 75 **proper** handsome
- 81 **discharge** perform
- 81 **your** i.e. you know the sort
- 82 **orange-tawny** yellowish-brown
- 82 **purple-in-grain** dyed red
- 83 **French-crown-coloured** i.e. the gold color of the French coin
- 84 **crowns** heads; baldness was an effect of syphilis ("the French disease")
- 87 **con** learn

90 **devices** plans

91 **draw** draw up

91 **bill** list

94 **obscenely** malapropism, perhaps for “seemly” or “obscurely”

94 **courageously** spiritedly

94 **perfect** word perfect

96 **hold ... bowstrings** archers’ saying, possibly meaning “stand firm and fight, or cut your bowstrings in preparation for capture”

Act 2, Scene 1

2.1 **Location: a wood near Athens Robin Goodfellow** name traditionally given to a mischievous hobgoblin

2.1 **Puck** a kind of mischievous goblin

4 **park** enclosed hunting ground

4 **pale** fenced-in area

5 **Thorough** through

7 **sphere** stars and planets were thought to be contained within revolving hollow spheres

9 **orbs** i.e. fairy rings (dark circles in the grass)

10 **pensioners** bodyguards

12 **favours** tokens of favor

13 **savours** (sweet) scent

16 **lob** country bumpkin

17 **anon** soon

20 **passing fell** excessively fierce

20 **wrath** angry

23 **changeling** child taken by the fairies (usually exchanged for a fairy child)

25 **trace** traverse

26 **perforce** forcibly

29 **fountain** spring

29 **sheen** brightness

30 **square** quarrel

32 **making** physical appearance

32 **quite** entirely

33 **shrewd** cunning

35 **villagery** villages

36 **Skim** take the cream off

- 36 **quern** churn; also a mill for grinding corn
- 37 **bootless** in vain
- 38 **barm** yeasty froth on top of fermenting ale
- 39 **mislead** i.e. with false fire that moves from place to place
- 46 **bean-fed** well-fed
- 47 **filly** female
- 48 **gossip's** old friend's
- 48 **bowl** i.e. drinking cup
- 49 **crab** crab apple
- 51 **dewlap** loose fold of skin hanging at the neck
- 52 **aunt** old woman
- 55 **"tailor"** cry of surprise; possibly because she ends up sitting on the floor (customary posture for tailors), or because she sits on her "tail" (i.e. **bum**)
- 56 **quire** company
- 57 **waxen** increase
- 57 **neeze** sneeze
- 58 **wasted** spent
- 59 **room** make way
- 59 **Oberon** name often given to the King of Fairies
- 59.1 **Titania** used by Ovid to refer to Diana (moon goddess) and Circe (enchantress)
- 64 **Tarry** stay
- 64 **wanton** willful one, perhaps also with sense of "promiscuous"
- 64 **lord** husband
- 65 **lady** wife
- 67 **Corin** conventional pastoral name
- 68 **corn** straw
- 68 **versing** composing/uttering verses of
- 69 **Phillida** conventional pastoral name
- 70 **step** limit
- 71 **forsooth** in truth
- 71 **bouncing** big, strapping (perhaps with sexual connotations)
- 72 **buskined** wearing high hunting boots ("buskins")
- 76 **Glance at** refer to/cast aspersions on
- 76 **credit** favor
- 78 **glimmering** twinkling, shimmering

- 79 **Perigenia** (sometimes spelled “Perigouna”) Theseus slept with her after he killed her robber father
- 79 **ravishèd** carried off/seized/raped
- 80 **Aegles** nymph loved by Theseus
- 81 **Ariadne** she helped Theseus find his way out of the labyrinth; he then abandoned her
- 81 **Antiopa** Amazon seduced or abducted by Theseus before being abandoned by him
- 83 **middle summer’s spring** i.e. beginning of midsummer
- 84 **mead** meadow
- 85 **pavèd** with a pebbly base
- 85 **rushy** edged with rushes
- 86 **in** on
- 86 **beachèd** covered with shingle
- 86 **margent** margin, edge
- 87 **ringlets** circular fairy dance
- 88 **brawls** quarrels/noise; also lively French dance (contrasts with calmer **ringlets**)
- 88 **sport** recreation
- 89 **piping** whistling
- 91 **Contagious** pestilential/harmful
- 92 **petty** small
- 92 **proud** swollen
- 93 **overborne their continents** exceeded their boundaries (i.e. flooded)
- 94 **stretched** strained at/pulled
- 95 **lost** wasted
- 96 **ere ... beard** before developing the awn (bristly growth)
- 97 **fold** animal pen
- 98 **murion** infected
- 99 **nine men’s morris** ground marked out for a game involving nine pegs (“**men**”)
- 100 **quaint** elaborate
- 100 **mazes** pattern of paths cut in the turf
- 100 **wanton green** lush grass
- 102 **want ... blessed** i.e. though the weather is wintry, there are no winter festivities (some editors emend “here” to “cheer”)
- 104 **Therefore** i.e. because of our dispute
- 104 **floods** tides
- 105 **washes** saturates, renders moist
- 106 **rheumatic diseases** illnesses involving watery discharge, such as colds

107 **distemperature** poor weather/disorder

108 **hoary-headed** white-haired

110 **Hiems** personification of winter

111 **chaplet** garland

113 **childing** fertile

114 **wonted** customary

114 **mazèd** confused/dumbstruck/terrified

115 **increase** produce

117 **debate** discord

117 **dissension** discord

118 **original** point of origin

122 **henchman** squire, page

125 **votress** female follower, bound by a vow

127 **Full** very

128 **Neptune** Roman god of the sea

129 **Marking** observing, noting

129 **th'embarkèd traders** sailing merchants or their ships

129 **flood** sea

131 **wanton** playful/lustful

132 **swimming gait** smooth, graceful motion

137 **of that boy** i.e. in childbirth

141 **Perchance** perhaps

142 **patiently** calmly

142 **round** circular dance

144 **spare** avoid

147 **chide** quarrel

147 **downright** utterly

148 **from** go from

151 **Since** when

151 **promontory** headland

153 **dulcet** sweet

153 **breath** i.e. song

154 **rude** rough

155 **certain** surely/particular

160 **all** fully

160 **certain** accurate/specific

161 **vestal** woman vowed to chastity, here assumed by most commentators to be an allusion to Queen Elizabeth I
(the imperial votress)

163 **As** as if

164 **might** could

167 **fancy-free** unaffected by love

168 **bolt** arrow

170 **purple** blood-colored

171 **love-in-idleness** pansy or heartsease

174 **or** either

177 **leviathan** sea monster

178 **girdle** belt

194 **The ... stayeth** i.e. I will confront Lysander; it is Hermia who is preoccupying me (some editors emend to “slay ... slayeth”)

196 **wood** angry/mad (puns on “wooed”)

199 **draw** attract (magnetically)

199 **adamant** hard magnetic substance

201 **Leave you** give up

203 **you fair** favorably, kindly to you

209 **but** only

210 **leave** permission

218 **impeach** discredit

222 **desert** desolate, isolated

224 **privilege** safeguard

224 **for that** because

231 **brakes** bushes

235 **Apollo ... chase** a reversal of the myth in which Daphne, being chased by Apollo, was spared rape by being turned into a laurel tree

236 **griffin** mythical beast, part lion part eagle

236 **hind** female deer

237 **Bootless** pointless

239 **stay** wait for

244 **set ... sex** make me behave in a way that disgraces womankind

248 **upon** by/at

254 **blows** blossoms

- 255 **oxlips** flowers resembling both cowslip and primrose
- 256 **Quite** completely
- 256 **woodbine** honeysuckle
- 257 **musk-roses** wild climbing roses
- 257 **eglantine** sweetbriar, a sweetly scented rose
- 258 **sometime** at some time or other
- 260 **throws** sheds
- 261 **Weed** garment
- 271 **fond on** infatuated with
- 1 **roundel** circular dance
- 3 **cankers** worms that destroy plants
- 4 **reremice** bats
- 4 **leathern** leathery
- 7 **quaint** strange/dainty
- 8 **offices** duties
- 9 **double** i.e. forked
- 11 **blind-worms** adders
- 13 **Philomel** nightingale; Philomela was transformed into a nightingale after being raped by her brother-in-law
- 18 **nigh** near
- 24 **etc.** indicates chorus is to be repeated
- 26 **aloof** at a distance
- 26 **sentinel** guard
- 30 **ounce** lynx
- 31 **Pard** leopard/panther
- 36 **troth** truth
- 38 **tarry ... day** wait till the cooler part of the day
- 42 **troth** pledge (of love)/faith
- 45 **take the sense** i.e. interpret correctly
- 46 **Love ... conference** i.e. love allows lovers to understand one another
- 52 **lie** mislead (you) (puns on "lie down")
- 53 **prettily** charmingly/cleverly
- 54 **besrew** curse
- 56 **friend** lover
- 57 **human** polite/courteous
- 59 **Becomes** befits

65 **wisher's eyes** i.e. Lysander's

65 **pressed** i.e. closed in sleep

68 **approve** test

78 **Churl** villain/scoundrel

79 **owe** own

80 **forbid ... eyelid** prevent you from sleeping

85 **charge** command

85 **haunt** pursue/hang around

86 **darkling** in the dark

88 **fond** foolish/doting

89 **grace** favor

90 **lies** is/resides

96 **marvel** wonder

97 **as** as if (from)

98 **glass** mirror

99 **sphery eyne** heavenly eyes

104 **Transparent** radiant/see-through

104 **art** skill (allowing him to see through Helena's body)

109 **What though** what of it (if)

115 **will** inclination (plays on sense of "sexual desire/penis")

118 **ripe not** i.e. was not mature enough

119 **point** peak

119 **skill** discernment

120 **marshal** guide

121 **o'erlook** read

122 **stories** narrative/true history

123 **Wherefore** why

129 **Good troth** truly

129 **good sooth** indeed

132 **lord** possessor

132 **gentleness** nobility/courtesy/kindness

134 **of** by

134 **abused** mistreated

137 **surfeit** excess

139 **leave** renounce

140 **those ... deceive** i.e. the former heretics themselves

142 **Of** by

143 **address** direct

150 **prey** act of preying

151 **removed** departed

153 **an if** if

154 **of all loves** for love's sake

Act 3, Scene 1

3.1 **Clowns** lower-class comic characters

2 **Pat** punctually

4 **brake** thicket

4 **tiring-house** dressing room

7 **bully** old mate, good fellow

12 **By'r lakin** by our ladykin (i.e. the Virgin Mary)

12 **parlous** perilous

14 **done** i.e. said and done

15 **Write me** write/write for me

22 **eight and six** alternating lines of eight and six syllables (common meter for ballads)

25 **afeard** afraid

26 **it** either the lion, or that the ladies will be afraid

29 **fearful** frightening

29 **wild-fowl** i.e. wild beast (literally, bird)

35 **defect** malapropism for "effect"

37 **My ... yours** by my life (literally, I would lay down my life for you)

38 **pity ... life** a bad thing, by my life/my life would be at risk

41 **plainly** may pun on "plane" (carpenter's tool)

46 **almanac** calendar

49 **casement** section of a window

52 **bush ... lantern** the traditional props of the man in the moon

53 **disfigure** malapropism for "figure" (i.e. represent)

53 **present** represent

60 **rough-cast** lime and gravel mixture used for plastering walls

65 **rehearse** recite

68 **hempen home-spuns** those wearing homemade/rustic clothes

68 **swagg'ring** blustering

69 **cradle** place of rest

70 **toward** in preparation

78 **by and by** shortly

85 **brisky juvenal** lively young man

85 **eke** also

85 **Jew** desperate rhyme, or perhaps short for "juvenal" or "jewel" as a term of affection

88 **Ninus** founder of Nineveh

89 **part** an actor's written part consisted solely of his lines and cues

93 **were** would be

93 **fair** handsome

96 **round** circular dance/circuitous route

99 **fire** will-o'-the-wisp, a flame over marshy ground (caused by gas but popularly supposed to be a hobgoblin's trick)

102 **knavery** trick

109 **translated** transformed

114 **ousel cock** male blackbird

116 **throstle** song thrush

117 **quill** reed/pipe (i.e. voice)

120 **plain-song** melodically simple

122 **dares ... nay** is unable to deny the truth of the cuckoo's cry of "cuckold" (man with an unfaithful wife)

123 **who ... bird** adaptation of "do not set your wit against a fool's" (proverbial)

124 **give ... lie** accuse the bird of lying

124 **cuckoo** i.e. "cuckold" **never so** ever so much

127 **enthralled** enslaved

128 **virtue's** qualities'

128 **perforce** of necessity

134 **gleek** make a jest

137 **turn** purposes

139 **wilt** wish to

140 **rate** worth, rank

141 **still** always

141 **tend upon** serve, wait upon

141 **state** status as queen

144 **deep** bottom of the sea

146 **grossness** bodily form

148 **Peaseblossom** flower of plants of the pea family; **Pease** also meant “something of very small value or importance”

148 **Moth** pronounced “mote” (i.e. speck) so this sense may also be implied

155 **eyes** i.e. sight

156 **apricocks** apricots

156 **dewberries** type of blackberry

158 **humble-bees** bumblebees

159 **night-tapers** candles

161 **arise** possible erectile connotations

169 **cry ... mercy** beg your pardon

172 **desire ... acquaintance** want to be better acquainted with you

173 **if ... you** cobwebs were used to stop bleeding

176 **Squash** unripe pea pod

177 **Peascod** pea pod (a traditional remedy for lovesickness, with play on “codpiece”)

181 **patience** endurance (as mustard is eaten with beef)

184 **made ... water** since mustard is hot in the mouth

188 **weeps** i.e. causes dew

189 **enforcèd** violated

190 **Tie ... tongue** perhaps because Bottom is braying

3 **in extremity** to excess

5 **night-rule** mischievous, disordered nighttime activity

5 **haunted** much frequented

7 **close** private/secluded

8 **dull** inactive

9 **patches** clowns/fools

9 **rude mechanicals** uneducated manual workers

13 **barren sort** stupid group

15 **Forsook** left

15 **scene** performance space

17 **noll** head

19 **mimic** burlesque actor/performer

20 **fowler** hunter

21 **russet-pated choughs** reddish-brown jackdaws (with play on “chuff,” rustic boor)

21 **many in sort** i.e. in a large flock

22 **report** sound of firing

23 **Sever** scatter

23 **sweep** move swiftly across

30 **yielders** those who yield to fear

36 **latched** ensnared/wetted

40 **of force** by necessity

41 **close** concealed

45 **chide** rebuke (you)

45 **use** treat

48 **Being o'er shoes** having waded

50 **true** loyal

53 **whole** solid, intact

53 **bored** pierced through

54 **centre** i.e. of the earth

55 **Her brother's** i.e. the sun's

55 **th'Antipodes** the people/places on the opposite side of the globe

57 **dead** deadly/murderous

61 **Venus** bright planet; also Roman goddess of love

61 **sphere** orbit/hollow surrounding sphere

62 **to** got to do with

65 **cur** dog

67 **numbered** counted

68 **once** once and for all

69 **Durst** would you/did you dare

69 **a** have

70 **brave touch** fine/impudent deed

71 **worm** snake

72 **doubler** more divided/deceitful

74 **spend** expend/waste

74 **passion** powerful feelings

74 **misprised mood** mistaken anger

78 **therefor** for it

82 **vein** mood

84 **So ... owe** i.e. lack of sleep and sorrow combined are making me very tired

84 **heavier** harder to bear/sleepier

85 **For** because of the

87 **his tender** sleep's offer

87 **make some stay** stay here awhile

88 **quite** utterly

90 **misprision** error

92 **one ... troth** for each man who keeps his word/faith in love

93 **confounding** breaking

93 **on** after

95 **look** be sure

96 **fancy-sick** lovesick

96 **cheer** face

97 **sighs ... dear** each sigh was thought to drain a drop of blood from the heart

98 **illusion** deception

99 **against** in preparation for when

101 **Tartar's bow** powerful bow from Central Asia

104 **apple** pupil/center

109 **remedy** relief, resolution

113 **fee** payment

114 **fond pageant** foolish spectacle

119 **alone** unique/on its own

121 **preposterously** perversely, out of the normal course of events

124 **Look when** whenever

125 **nativity** i.e. through weeping

127 **badge** outward sign (as worn on servants' livery), i.e. tears

128 **advance** show

129 **truth kills truth** i.e. his vows to Hermia and to Helena invalidate one another

129 **devilish-holy fray** quarrel involving false and true vows

130 **o'er** up

133 **light as tales** false as rumors/lies

136 **Demetrius ... you** there may be a missing rhyme line for Helena hereafter

139 **ripe** i.e. full and red

139 **show** appearance

141 **pure congealèd white** i.e. pale skin (considered to be especially beautiful)

141 **Taurus** mountain range in Turkey

142 **turns ... crow** seems black in comparison (with Helena's white skin)

144 **seal** promise

145 **bent** disposed

146 **set against** be hostile to

148 **do ... injury** insult me so much

150 **join in souls** unite

152 **gentle** noble/mild

153 **superpraise** praise excessively

153 **parts** qualities

157 **trim** fine

160 **extort** torture/wring

169 **will none** i.e. want nothing to do with her

171 **but ... sojourned** stayed with her merely as a visitor

176 **abide** suffer for/pay for

176 **dear** at great cost

178 **his** its

179 **apprehension** perception

186 **press** urge

187 **bide** remain

188 **engilds** brightens with gold

189 **yon** i.e. those over there

189 **oes** spangles (i.e. stars)

193 **confed'racy** alliance

195 **fashion** contrive

195 **in spite** to vex

196 **Injurious** harmful, unjust

198 **bait** persecute/torment

199 **counsel** inmost thoughts/advice

201 **chid** scolded

204 **artificial** skilled in the arts of creation

207 **one key** total harmony

209 **incorporate** indivisible, one body

210 **Like** similar

213 **heart** may pun on "hart," a common heraldic device

214 **first** i.e. **bodies** (plays on sense of "dominant color on a shield")

214 **coats** coats of arms (which can appear twice on a shield though under **one crest**)

215 **Due ... one** a coat of arms is allocated to a specific individual

216 **rent** rend, tear

216 **ancient** long-standing

216 **asunder** apart

227 **rare** splendid/exceptional

231 **tender** offer

233 **grace** favor

238 **Persever** persevere

238 **sad** solemn

239 **mouths** faces

240 **hold ... up** maintain the joke

241 **carried** conducted

243 **argument** subject (for a joke)

257 **withdraw** i.e. remove yourself from present company (for a duel)

259 **whereto** to what end

260 **Ethiope** Ethiopian, i.e. dark-complexioned (in comparison with fair Helena)

262 **take on as** behave as if

264 **Hang off** leave hold

264 **burr** prickly seed head that sticks easily to clothing

264 **let loose** get off

266 **rude** harsh, unkind, offensive

268 **Out** exclamation of impatience (“get away!”)

268 **tawny** dark-skinned

268 **Tartar** person from central Asia

269 **medicine** i.e. poison

271 **sooth** truly

274 **weak bond** i.e. Hermia (plays on earlier sense of “oath”)

280 **erewhile** before

286 **out of** free from

289 **juggler** trickster

289 **canker-blossom** flower-destroying worm

295 **Impatient** angry

296 **puppet** false thing/small person

299 **urged** insisted on/brought forward

300 **personage** appearance

304 **painted** made-up (with cosmetics)

304 **maypole** i.e. tall, skinny person

308 **curst** ill-tempered

309 **shrewishness** scolding/bad temper

310 **right** true/typical

312 **something lower** somewhat shorter

316 **evermore** always

319 **stealth** stealing away

321 **chid me hence** tried to drive me away with scolding

323 **so** if

326 **fond** foolish

332 **part** side

333 **keen** sharp

333 **shrewd** vicious

337 **suffer** allow

340 **minimus** tiny, insignificant being

340 **knot-grass** type of creeping weed

347 **abide** pay for

351 **cheek by jowl** i.e. side by side

352 **coil** turmoil

352 **'long** on account

357.1 **Exit ... Hermia** the Quarto text gives Hermia the exit line "I am amazed and know not what to say"; Folio's omission of this was probably a printer's error, but it might conceivably have been the purposeful cut of a weak line that converts a rhyming couplet to a triplet

365 **sort** fall out

366 **As** in that

366 **jangling** squabbling

368 **Hie** hasten

369 **welkin** sky

370 **drooping** falling

370 **Acheron** one of the four rivers of Hades (the classical underworld)

371 **testy** irritable

372 **As** so that

373 **Like ... tongue** sometimes imitate Lysander's voice

374 **wrong** insults

375 **rail** rant

378 **batty** bat-like

379 **herb** i.e. the antidote

380 **liquor** liquid, juice

380 **virtuous** powerful

381 **his** its

382 **wonted** accustomed, former

383 **derision** ridiculousness

385 **wend** make their way

386 **league** alliance, friendship

386 **date** duration

392 **dragons** supposedly pulling the chariot of night or the moon

392 **cut** cut through

393 **Aurora's harbinger** the morning star, which can be seen before dawn

396 **crossways** crossroads, the unconsecrated burial place for suicides

396 **floods** "burial" place of those who had drowned (and whose bodies were unrecoverable)

400 **aye** eternity

400 **consort** keep company

402 **morning's love** either Aurora's lover, or Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn (i.e. Oberon does not have to disappear before dawn like the other **spirits**)

402 **made sport** amused myself/made love to

403 **forester** guardian of the forest

405 **Neptune** Roman god of the sea

412 **Goblin** Puck refers to himself

415 **drawn** with sword drawn

417 **straight** at once

418 **plainer** flatter/more open

424 **recreant** coward

428 **try** test

436 **spite** vexation, grievance

438 **Abide** confront/endure

438 **wot** know

443 **buy** pay for

445 **constraineth** compels

449 **Abate** shorten

478 **Jack ... Jill** "all shall be well and Jack shall have Jill" (proverbial)

- 479 **Nought** nothing
- 480 **man ... mare** proverbial
- 2 **amiable** lovable
- 2 **coy** caress
- 15 **overflown** flowed over, drenched
- 18 **neaf** fist
- 19 **leave your courtesy** stop bowing/put your hat back on
- 21 **Cavalery** cavalier (i.e. courtly gentleman)
- 22 **Cobweb** apparently an error for **Peaseblossom**
- 23 **marvellous** extremely
- 27.1 **rural music** simple rustic music
- 27 **tongs** simple metal musical instrument, struck to produce sound
- 27 **bones** pieces of bone clapped together between the fingers
- 29 **peck** quantity (quarter of a bushel) **provender** fodder (for animals)
- 30 **bottle** bundle
- 31 **fellow** equal
- 32 **vent'rous** adventurous, daring
- 35 **stir** wake
- 36 **exposition of** malapropism for “disposition to”
- 38 **all ways away** gone in all directions
- 39 **woodbine** bindweed, which entwines itself with **honeysuckle**
- 41 **Enrings** encircles
- 45 **dotage** infatuation
- 47 **favours** love tokens (perhaps flowers)
- 51 **sometime** formerly
- 52 **orient** from the east/lustrous
- 53 **flowerets** small flowers
- 63 **swain** rustic
- 64 **other** others
- 65 **repair** make their way
- 66 **accidents** events
- 71 **Dian's bud** i.e. Oberon's corrective herb, linked to Diana, Roman goddess of chastity
- 81 **these five** i.e. Bottom and the lovers
- 82 **charmeth** brings about by magic
- 82.1 **Music, still** the “rural music” may **still** have been playing or perhaps this is a cue for “still” (i.e. gentle) music;

Oberon's **Silence awhile** may cue the suspension of the former before **Sound, music!** cues the latter

87 **solemnly** ceremoniously

88 **triumphantly** with great celebration

92 **attend** listen

94 **sad** solemn

95 **Trip** move swiftly

101.1 **his** i.e. Theseus'

103 **observation** observance (of May morning rites)

104 **vaward** vanguard (i.e. foremost part)

106 **Uncouple** release (pairs of dogs for the hunt)

111 **Cadmus** founder of Thebes

112 **bayed** pursued with dogs

113 **hounds of Sparta** dogs famed for their skill

114 **chiding** i.e. barking

118 **kind** breed

119 **So flew** with the same large cheek folds

119 **sanded** sandy-colored

121 **dewlapped** with loose folds of skin hanging at the neck

121 **Thessalian** from Thessaly, an ancient region of northeastern Greece

122 **matched in mouth** united in barking (i.e. harmonious)

123 **tuneable** melodious

124 **hallowed to** had "halloo" (a cry of encouragement) shouted to it

124 **cheered** urged on

126 **soft** wait a moment

130 **of** at

133 **in grace of** to honor

133 **solemnity** ceremony

138 **Saint Valentine** 14 February, the day on which birds were thought to choose their mates

139 **couple** pair off

144 **jealousy** suspicion

157 **defeated** frustrated/deprived

163 **fancy** love/infatuation

167 **idle gaud** worthless trinket

179 **overbear** overrule

180 **by and by** soon

182 **for** since

182 **something worn** somewhat spent

183 **purposed** intended

185 **in** with

185 **solemnity** ceremony

187 **undistinguishable** unrecognizable

189 **parted** divided/unfocused

193 **Mine ... own** i.e. because **found**, of uncertain ownership

201 **by** on

204 **God's** God save

205 **hence** away from here

205 **rare** unique/marvelous

206 **wit** understanding

207 **go about** endeavor

210 **patched** i.e. wearing a fool's multicolored costume

211 **The ... was** garbled version of a famous passage about what the Geneva Bible calls "the bottom of God's secrets"
(1 Corinthians 2:9–10)

215 **bottom** foundation/(is) unfathomable

216 **Peradventure** perhaps

217 **her** presumably Thisbe's

Act 4, Scene 2

4.2 *Location: Athens*

3 **transported** carried off/transformed

5 **forward** ahead

7 **discharge** perform

8 **wit** intellect

10 **person** appearance, bearing

11 **paramour** malapropism for "paragon"

13 **naught** i.e. wickedness, shame (with possible vaginal connotations)

16 **we ... men** i.e. our fortunes would have been made

17 **sixpence a day** i.e. as a reward from the duke (a considerable sum, half a day's wage)

18 **scaped** escaped, avoided

19 **An** if

22 **hearts** fine friends

27 **fell out** happened

29 **of** from

30 **strings** i.e. with which to attach the beards

31 **pumps** light shoes

31 **presently** at once

33 **preferred** recommended

34 **pare** trim

Act 5, Scene 1

5.1 *his* i.e. Theseus'

1 **that** that which

3 **antic** bizarre/grotesque, with pun on "antique," antiquated, which is the Quarto spelling

3 **fairy toys** foolish stories about fairies

5 **shaping** creative

5 **apprehend** grasp (intellectually)

8 **compact** composed

10 **frantic** mad, frenzied

11 **Helen's** Helen of Troy's

11 **brow of Egypt** dark-skinned complexion (thought unattractive)

14 **bodies forth** gives shape to

19 **apprehend** conceive

20 **comprehends** incorporates

24 **transfigured** changed, affected

25 **More witnesseth** is more certain testimony

26 **constancy** consistency, truth

27 **admirable** wondrous, extraordinary

32 **board** table

33 **masques** courtly entertainments involving music, dancing, and elaborate costumes

35 **after-supper** time after the evening meal

41 **abridgement** pastime (to shorten the evening)

44 **brief** summary

44 **ripe** fully prepared

46 **battle ... Centaurs** probably derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which tells of the battle of the Centaurs and the Lapithae; some versions say that **Hercules** was present

50 **riot ... rage** another tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Orpheus was torn apart by female followers of Bacchus (Roman god of wine)

- 52 **device** show
- 54 **thrice ... beggary** possible reference to Spenser's poem "The Tears of the Muses"
- 56 **critical** judgmental
- 57 **sorting with** appropriate for
- 61 **strange snow** a word may be missing here, e.g. "strange black snow"
- 62 **concord** harmony
- 67 **fitted** suitable, apt
- 76 **toiled** exhausted, taxed
- 76 **unbreathed** unpracticed, inexperienced
- 77 **against** in preparation for
- 83 **conned** learned
- 87 **simpleness** unassuming simplicity
- 89 **wretchedness o'er-charged** humble people overburdened
- 90 **his service** its attempt to serve
- 92 **kind** respect
- 94 **take** accept, comprehend, value
- 95 **noble respect** dignity and consideration that comes with nobility
- 96 **in ... merit** in terms of effort rather than actual value
- 97 **clerks** scholars
- 100 **Make periods** full stops/rhetorical pauses
- 101 **accent** speech, intonation
- 104 **picked** extracted, detected
- 105 **modesty** propriety/shyness
- 105 **fearful** frightened
- 109 **capacity** understanding
- 110 **addressed** ready
- 112 **will.** Quince inadvertently inserts a full stop here and changes the meaning of the line
- 114 **will.** another misplaced full stop
- 115 **end** aim
- 116 **despite** malice
- 117 **We ... you** correctly punctuated, this would read "we come—but in despite we do not come—as minding to content you"
- 118 **is.** erroneous full stop
- 118 **All** exclusively
- 118 **delight** missing punctuation (e.g. full stop, semicolon)

119 **here.** erroneous full stop

120 **show** appearance/performance

121 **like** likely

122 **stand upon points** dwell on trivialities/insist on (correct) punctuation

123 **rid** dispensed with/ridden

123 **rough** untrained

124 **stop** pulling-up (of a horse)/full stop

127 **government** control

128 **nothing** not

135 **sunder** separate

140 **scorn** shame, disdain

142 **hight** is called

145 **mantle** loose cloak

145 **fall** let fall

147 **tall** fine/brave

150 **broached** pierced

153 **twain** two/separated

158 **interlude** short play

166 **sinister** left

167 **fearful** frightened

170 **partition** wall/section of a scholarly book

173 **grim-looking** grim-looking, forbidding

180 **chink** plays on sense of “vagina/anus”

181 **Jove** Roman supreme god

184 **stones** plays on sense of “testicles”

185 **sensible** capable of feeling

185 **again** in response

189 **pat** exactly

194 **lime** probably pronounced “limb,” thus playing on sense of “penis”

194 **hair** plays on “pubic hair”

196 **an** if

197 **thou ... love** Thisbe misplaces the pause that should be after “love”

198 **lover’s grace** i.e. gracious lover

199 **Limander** malapropism for “Leander,” lover of Hero

200 **Helen** mistake for “Hero”

201 **Shafalus to Procrus** mistakes for “Cephalus,” who was married to “Procris”

204 **hole** plays on “arsehole”

206 **Tide** betide, i.e. come

209 **mural** wall

211 **walls ... hear** derived from the proverb “walls have ears”

211 **wilful** willing

214 **in this kind** of this sort

214 **shadows** images/reflections/actors

222 **monstrous** frightening/enormous

224 **rough** wild/cruel

226 **fell** fierce

226 **dam** mother

230 **at** i.e. at playing

230 **beast** puns on **best**

231 **a very fox** i.e. cunning

231 **for** i.e. for all

232 **goose ... discretion** i.e. foolish

232 **discretion** judgment/prudence

234 **carries** i.e. literally, as prey

238 **hornèd** i.e. crescent-shaped

239 **horns ... head** i.e. as a cuckold (men with unfaithful wives were said to grow horns)

240 **no crescent** no growing moon (presumably because he is so thin)

248 **in snuff** in need of blowing out/angry

251 **in the wane** decreasing/lacking

251 **reason** i.e. reasonable behavior

251 **stay the time** wait for the moment, sit it out

265 **moused** seized/shaken (refers to Thisbe’s mantle)

274 **dole** sorrow, grievous occurrence

280 **Furies** three classical goddesses of vengeance

280 **fell** fierce

281 **Fates** three classical goddesses in control of human destiny (a thread which would be cut when death was due)

282 **thrum** end of warp-thread on a weaving loom, i.e. everything

283 **Quail** end, destroy

283 **quell** overcome, ruin

284 **passion** fit of grief

284 **friend** lover

285 **go near to** almost

286 **Beshrew** curse

287 **frame** create

288 **deflowered** presumably a mistake for “devoured”

290 **cheer** face/joy

293 **pap** breast (usually a woman’s)

300 **Tongue** error for “eye”

303 **die** one of a pair of dice

303 **ace** one (single spot on a die)

307 **ass** puns on **ace**

311 **passion** sorrow/suffering (resulting in death)

312 **long one** i.e. fit of grief

314 **mote** tiny particle

318 **means** laments/intends

318 **videlicet** “that is to say” (Latin)

331 **Sisters Three** i.e. the Fates

335 **shore** shorn, cut

336 **thread of silk** i.e. life

339 **imbrue** pierce

347 **Bergomask dance** rustic dance, named after the people of Bergamo, Italy

347 **between** i.e. performed by

355 **iron tongue** clapper of a bell

355 **told** counted, i.e. rung (puns on “toll’d”)

358 **overwatched** stayed up late

359 **palpable-gross** obviously clumsy

359 **beguiled** whiled away

360 **heavy gait** slow/sleepy passage

361 **solemnity** celebration

365 **heavy** exhausted

366 **fordone** worn out

367 **wasted brands** burned logs

368 **screech-owl** the barn owl’s cry was thought to be a bad omen

373 **sprite** spirit

376 **triple Hecate** classical goddess of witchcraft and night, associated with the moon; often represented in triple

form, she was known as Luna/Cynthia in heaven, Diana on earth, and Proserpina in the underworld

376 **team** i.e. the creatures, probably dragons, pulling her chariot

379 **frolic** frolicsome, merry

381 **hallowed** blessed

382 **behind** out from behind/behind

383 **give glimmering light** probably a command to the fairies, who may have candles with them (perhaps carried on their heads to leave their hands free for dancing)

388 **trippingly** skillfully, lightly

389 **rehearse** recite

389 **rote** heart

395 **best bride-bed** i.e. that of Theseus and Hippolyta

397 **issue** children

397 **create** created

404 **prodigious** ominous

407 **consecrate** holy, blessed

408 **gait** (own) course

409 **several** individual

413 **stay** delay

419 **weak** deficient

419 **idle** foolish/trifling

420 **yielding but** meaningful than

421 **Gentles** ladies and gentlemen

421 **reprehend** reprove

422 **mend** improve, put it right

425 **serpent's tongue** i.e. audience hisses

429 **Give ... hands** i.e. applaud

430 **restore amends** make amends in return