

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*



FULLY ANNOTATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY **BURTON RAFFEL**

WITH AN ESSAY BY **HAROLD BLOOM**

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William Shakespeare

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*With an essay by Harold Bloom*

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Burton Raffel, General Editor

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For Yehuda Yair Pride



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



In act 5, scene 1, Hippolyta and her future husband, Theseus, conduct the following exchange:

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

*Theseus* More strange than true. I never may believe  
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.  
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact.  
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?  
 (lines 1–22)

This was perfectly understandable, we must assume, to the mostly very average persons who paid to watch Elizabethan plays. But who today can make much sense of it? In this very fully annotated edition, I therefore present this passage, not in the bare form quoted above, but thoroughly supported by bottom-of-the-page notes:

*Hippolyta* 'Tis strange my Theseus, that<sup>1</sup> these lovers speak of.  
*Theseus* More strange than true. I never may<sup>2</sup> believe  
 These antique fables,<sup>3</sup> nor these fairy toys.<sup>4</sup>  
 Lovers and madmen have such seething<sup>5</sup> brains,  
 Such shaping<sup>6</sup> fantasies, that apprehend<sup>7</sup>  
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
 The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact.<sup>8</sup>  
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:

1 that which

2 can

3 antique fables = old/old-fashioned legendary/mythological fiction, falsehoods, nonsense

4 idle/fantastic tales

5 boiling, tumultuous, ceaselessly agitated

6 formative/creative

7 learn, perceive, understand, become conscious of

8 (1) composed, (2) linked closely together

That is the madman. The lover, all<sup>9</sup> as frantic,<sup>10</sup>  
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.<sup>11</sup>  
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy,<sup>12</sup> rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.  
 And as imagination bodies forth<sup>13</sup>  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation,<sup>14</sup> and a name.  
 Such tricks<sup>15</sup> hath strong imagination,<sup>16</sup>  
 That<sup>17</sup> if it would but<sup>18</sup> apprehend some joy,  
 It comprehends<sup>19</sup> some bringer of that joy.  
 Or<sup>20</sup> in the night, imagining some fear,  
 How easy is a bush supposed a bear?

The modern reader or listener may well better understand this intensely sarcastic speech in context, as the play continues. But without full explanation of words that have over the years shifted in meaning, and usages that have been altered, neither the modern reader nor the modern listener is likely to be equipped for anything like the full comprehension that Shakespeare intended and all readers or listeners deserve.

- 9 every bit
- 10 wild, raging
- 11 brow of Egypt = dark/gypsy face
- 12 fine frenzy = pure/consummate/elevated delirium/mania
- 13 bodies forth = embodies, gives shape to
- 14 local habitation = spatial position, dwelling, residence
- 15 devices, stratagems
- 16 iMAgiNAsiON
- 17 so that
- 18 would but = only
- 19 grasps, understands
- 20 in the same way

I believe annotations of this sort create the necessary bridges from Shakespeare's four-centuries-old English across to ours. Some readers, to be sure, will be able to comprehend unusual, historically different meanings without glosses. Those not familiar with the modern meaning of particular words will easily find clear, simple definitions in any modern dictionary. But most readers are not likely to understand Shakespeare's intended meaning, absent such glosses as I here offer.

My annotation practices have followed the same principles used in *The Annotated Milton*, published in 1999, and in my annotated editions of *Hamlet*, published (as the initial volume in this series) in 2003, and *Romeo and Juliet* (published in 2004). Classroom experience has validated these editions. Classes of mixed upper-level undergraduates and graduate students have more quickly and thoroughly transcended language barriers than ever before. This allows the teacher, or a general reader without a teacher, to move more promptly and confidently to the non-linguistic matters that have made Shakespeare and Milton great and important poets.

It is the inevitable forces of linguistic change, operant in all living tongues, which have inevitably created such wide degrees of obstacles to ready comprehension—not only sharply different meanings, but subtle, partial shifts in meaning that allow us to think we understand when, alas, we do not. Speakers of related languages like Dutch and German also experience this shifting of the linguistic ground. Like early Modern English (ca. 1600) and the Modern English now current, those languages are too close for those who know only one language, and not the other, to be readily able always to recognize what they correctly understand

and what they do not. When, for example, a speaker of Dutch says, “Men kofer is kapot,” a speaker of German will know that something belonging to the Dutchman is broken (*kapot* = “ka-putt” in German, and *men* = “mein”). But without more linguistic awareness than the average person is apt to have, the German speaker will not identify “kofer” (“trunk” in Dutch) with “Körper”—a modern German word meaning “physique, build, body.” The closest word to “kofer” in modern German, indeed, is “Scrankkoffer,” which is too large a leap for ready comprehension. Speakers of different Romance languages (such as French, Spanish, or Italian), and all other related but not identical tongues, all experience these difficulties, as well as the difficulty of understanding a text written in their own language five, or six, or seven hundred years earlier. Shakespeare’s English is not yet so old that it requires, like many historical texts in French and German, or like Old English texts—for example, *Beowulf*—a modern translation. Much poetry evaporates in translation: language is immensely particular. The sheer sound of Dante in thirteenth-century Italian is profoundly worth preserving. So too is the sound of Shakespeare.

I have annotated prosody (metrics) only when it seemed truly necessary or particularly helpful. Except in the few instances where modern usage syllabifies the “e,” whenever an “e” in Shakespeare is *not* silent, it is marked “è”. The notation used for prosody, which is also used in the explanation of Elizabethan pronunciation, follows the extremely simple form of my *From Stress to Stress: An Autobiography of English Prosody* (see “Further Reading,” near the end of this book). Syllables with metrical stress are capitalized; all other syllables are in lowercase letters. I have man-

aged to employ normalized Elizabethan spellings, in most indications of pronunciation, but I have sometimes been obliged to deviate, in the higher interest of being understood.

I have annotated, as well, a limited number of such other matters, sometimes of interpretation, sometimes of general or historical relevance, as have seemed to me seriously worthy of inclusion. These annotations have been most carefully restricted: this is not intended to be a book of literary commentary. It is for that reason that the glossing of metaphors has been severely restricted. There is almost literally no end to discussion and/or analysis of metaphor, especially in Shakespeare. To yield to temptation might well be to double or triple the size of this book—and would also change it from a historically oriented language guide to a work of an unsteadily mixed nature. In the process, I believe, neither language nor literature would be well or clearly served.

Since the original printed texts of (there not being, as there never are for Shakespeare, any surviving manuscripts) are frequently careless as well as self-contradictory, I have been relatively free with the wording of stage directions—and in some cases have added brief directions, to indicate who is speaking to whom. I have made no emendations; I have necessarily been obliged to make choices. Textual decisions have been annotated when the differences between or among the original printed texts seem either marked or of unusual interest.

In the interests of compactness and brevity, I have employed in my annotations (as consistently as I am able) a number of stylistic and typographical devices:

- The annotation of a single word does not repeat that word
- The annotation of more than one word repeats the words

being annotated, which are followed by an equals sign and then by the annotation; the footnote number in the text is placed after the last of the words being annotated

- In annotations of a single word, alternate meanings are usually separated by commas; if there are distinctly different ranges of meaning, the annotations are separated by arabic numerals inside parentheses—(1), (2), and so on; in more complexly worded annotations, alternative meanings expressed by a single word are linked by a forward slash, or solidus: /
- Explanations of textual meaning are not in parentheses; comments about textual meaning are
- Except for proper nouns, the word at the beginning of all annotations is in lower case
- Uncertainties are followed by a question mark, set in parentheses: (?)
- When particularly relevant, “translations” into twenty-first-century English have been added, in parentheses
- Annotations of repeated words are not repeated. Explanations of the first instance of such common words are followed by the sign ★. Readers may easily track down the first annotation, using the brief Finding List at the back of the book. Words with entirely separate meanings are annotated only for meanings no longer current in Modern English.

The most important typographical device here employed is the sign ★ placed after the first (and only) annotation of words and phrases occurring more than once. There is an alphabetically arranged listing of such words and phrases in the Finding List at the back of the book. The Finding List contains no annotations

but simply gives the words or phrases themselves and the numbers of the relevant act, the scene within that act, and the footnote number within that scene for the word's first occurrence.

### *This Text*

For most of Shakespeare's plays, there are competing contemporary printed versions. (There are no manuscript versions of any of the plays.) Editorial judgment, in such situations, is frequently not an option, but a necessity.

But *Dream* has only one authoritative contemporary text, the 1600 Quarto. Inevitably, there are typographical (and perhaps other errors) in the Quarto; these are for the most part noted, here, and sometimes discussed in the annotations to particular words and passages. Some lesser errors are corrected in the 1623 Folio and a very few in the 1619 Second Quarto. The twenty-first-century editor must be cautious about tampering with an essentially unique textual source, four hundred years old.

Spelling is not on the whole a basic issue, but punctuation and lineation must be given high respect. The First Quarto uses few exclamation marks or semicolons, which is to be sure a matter of the conventions of a very different era. Still, our modern preferences cannot be lightly substituted for what is, after a fashion, the closest thing to a Shakespeare manuscript we are likely ever to have. We do not know whether these particular seventeenth-century printers, like most of that time, were responsible for question marks, commas, periods and, especially, all-purpose colons, or whether these particular printers tried to follow their handwritten sources. Nor do we know if those sources, or what part thereof, might have been in Shakespeare's own hand, or even whether those sources were accurate representations of what

Shakespeare wrote, either in the first version of the play, in 1595, or in the later, revised versions that appear to have been produced. But in spite of these equivocations and uncertainties, it remains true that, to a very considerable extent, punctuation tends to result from just how the mind responsible for that punctuating *hears* the text. And twenty-first century minds have no business, in such matters, overruling seventeenth-century ones. Whoever the compositors were, they were more or less Shakespeare's contemporaries, and we are not.

Accordingly, when the First Quarto text uses a comma, we are being signaled that *they* (whoever "they" were) did not hear the text coming to a syntactic stop but continuing to some later stopping point. To replace Quarto commas with editorial periods is thus risky and, in a lyrically textured play, on the whole an undesirable practice. (The dramatic action of a tragedy may require us, for twenty-first-century readers, to highlight what four-hundred-year-old punctuation standards may not make clear—and may even, at times, misrepresent. But *Dream* is a complex comedy, in the formal Elizabethan sense of comedic, and its appreciation therefore depends less on action than on a blending of narrative and meditation. Verbal rhythms thus have a prominence, in *Dream*, that they do not have, say, in *Romeo and Juliet*, for all that *Romeo* is justly considered to be richly poetic. So too, for that matter, is *Hamlet* richly poetic—but its presentation of dramatic action is, like *Romeo's*, bound into a quite different verbal texture.)

When the First Quarto text has a colon, what we are being signaled is that *they* heard a syntactic stop—though not necessarily or even usually the particular kind of syntactic stop we associate, today, with the colon. It is therefore inappropriate, in a lyrical drama like *Dream*, to substitute editorial commas for Quarto

colons. It is also inappropriate to employ editorial colons when *their* syntactic usage of colons does not match ours. In general, the closest thing to *their* syntactic sense of the colon is our (and their) period.

The Quarto's interrogation (question) marks, too, merit extremely respectful handling in a play like *Dream*. In particular, editorial exclamation marks should very rarely be substituted for the Quarto's interrogation marks. The exclamation marks of the Quarto should of course be preserved.

It follows from these considerations that the movement and sometimes the meaning of what we must take to be Shakespeare's *Dream* will at times be different, depending on whose punctuation we follow, *theirs* or our own. I have tried to use the First Quarto's seventeenth-century text as a guide to both *hearing* and *understanding* what Shakespeare wrote.

## INTRODUCTION



There has never been much question that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is delightful. Probably written and first performed in 1595, though we have no clear proof of either dating, it is usually viewed from two main perspectives: first, as an examination of the nature and intensity of the rare and often exalted delight it gives us, and second, as a kind of turning point in the overall development of Shakespeare as a dramatist. These are accurate and useful approaches. Yet I do not think an analysis of *Dream's* many delights, in particular, takes us anything like as far as we need to go, for a full appreciation of the play. Both its pleasures and its achievement are based in profound and broad-ranging complexities—of characterization, of narrative and structure, of language—which are the furthest thing from light or happily inconsequential. The play's intensity is primarily lyrical, which necessarily changes both its overall texture and the relative prominence given to poetic meditation as contrasted with dramatic action. But no one would suggest, I think, that the lyrics of Shakespeare's younger contemporary, John Donne, are light and happily inconsequential. When Harold C. Goddard, one of the most dependably sensible of Shakespearean critics, calls *Dream*

“one of the lightest and in many respects the most purely playful of Shakespeare’s plays,” he perpetuates a long-standing tradition of miscomprehension (*Meaning of Shakespeare*, 1:74). I want to demonstrate in some detail why such simplistic approaches do not do justice to a resplendent lyrical drama that, like all great lyricism, is chock-full of social and psychological wisdom of the most serious sort.

### *Characterization*

The numerical total of a play’s cast of characters is usually irrelevant, especially in Elizabethan drama. *Dream* and the two plays that immediately precede it, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II*, are generally agreed to be the first of Shakespeare’s incontestably great dramas. These three plays have, respectively, Dramatis Personae of twenty-two, twenty-six, and twenty-three named roles. But among the three plays, the gradations of importance, from lead to supporting and, finally, to minor (that is, more than merely walk-on but less significant and much less developed) roles, are exceedingly unlike. *Romeo and Juliet* has just two lead roles (Romeo and Juliet), though Juliet’s Nurse, Friar Lawrence, and Mercutio have large supporting parts, and there are three other supporting roles (Paris, Benvolio, and Tybalt). *Richard II* has two lead roles (Richard and Bolingbroke), plus three supporting roles (York, Isabel, and the Duchess of Gloucester). But *Dream* has nine lead roles (Theseus, Lysander, Demetrius, Bottom, Hermia, Helena, Oberon, Titania, and Puck)—or, if we choose to say that there are in fact no lead roles whatever, the play then has twelve supporting roles (adding Egeus, Quince, and Hippolyta). The precise gradations are not important. However, the huge differ-

ence between *Dream* and its two immediate predecessors is not only deeply significant but is, in fact, a basic difference between *Dream* and all of Shakespeare's great plays. From *Romeo* to *The Tempest*, they are each dominated and shaped by one lead role (Portia, Hal, Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Henry V, Brutus), sometimes by two (Hotspur, Falstaff, Othello and Iago, Anthony).

It would be hard to overstate the dramatic consequences of a play with nine lead roles (or with none). If the audience cannot focus on one or, usually, on at most two lead roles, how can spectator attention and plot continuity be maintained? How, indeed, can a playwright satisfactorily characterize nine lead roles in the same evening's work? He has only two and a half or three hours with which to operate. Divide 150 or 180 minutes by 9 and, even if there were no other characters present on stage, and no more or less wordless action to consume additional stage time, there would still be from 15 to a maximum of 20 minutes for each lead role. *Dream* is not a brief playlet, a mere interlude, but a full-length, five-act performance. It is plainly a vastly superior and a gorgeously satisfying performance vehicle. But how is that possible? No beef stew worth eating can be prepared with nine potatoes, a carrot, and a hamburger, nor can a functional football team be made up of nine centers, a pass thrower, and a pass catcher. What legerdemain, what the-hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye magic, has Shakespeare employed?

Under "Characterization," this first of my three subheadings, let me consider, in summary fashion rather than by close examination, only the three royal figures in *Dream*, a human duke and a fairy king and queen. To begin with the characters of highest social standing would be a proper Elizabethan approach—and I

want to postpone textual analysis for the second and the third of my categories, “Narrative and Structure” and “Language.”

Neither Theseus nor Oberon commands the stage as do Richard II and Bolingbroke, who have greater visibility—many more lines to speak, much more time in which to display themselves. Yet both Theseus and Oberon have the distinctly individuated personalities associated with lead roles. Theseus is quietly, confidently commanding. He is not arrogant, though understandably proud of his link with Hercules. (Who would not be?) For an Elizabethan male, he is remarkably deferential to his soon-to-be duchess. He is suave and sensitive in handling Egeus and the young lovers, not playing out his cards until he needs to, carefully conducting delicate negotiations in private. Though clearly well disposed toward a union between Lysander and Hermia, he does not make such a marriage possible, over the continued, stubborn objections of her father, until Demetrius’ pursuit of Hermia has been terminally aborted. He is well inclined toward the artisans and their play, displaying tact and (for the time) a wonderfully sympathetic stance toward men considered to be infinitely below him. He is wise about the workings of the artistic mind. And all these traits are manifested in relatively spare, subtly eloquent ways, not even deeply expansive when he expounds on his all-pervading fascination—shared by Hippolyta, his Amazon queen—with the very sounds of *the* aristocratic avocation of the Renaissance, hunting.

Oberon is a totally different sort of ruler. His status as a fairy is not a controlling cause of his personality, except perhaps in his comparative immaturity: after all, fairies have no great need to grow up, or to be socially responsible. Oberon is inclined to arrogance, petulance, and the kind of slack but peremptory attitude

toward subordinates that he plainly shares with most human rulers. He demands obedience without ensuring it. And when he is opposed, he immediately seeks vengeance: neither conciliation nor compromise ever occurs to him. He is capable of feeling pity for Titania, wallowing in her ridiculous, drug-induced love for Bottom—but only once she has agreed to give him the servant he so wants. Before that point, his almost adolescent relish for her ludicrous displays is utterly shameless. He can think logically and correctly about his status, as fairy and as a king, but has no patience for thought and reason in other contexts. Oberon is without question kingly—and because he for the most part acts in ways that we, the audience, either approve of or find appropriate to a fairy ruler, he does not present himself as obnoxious.

Titania is both a woman and, within her queenly provinces, a ruler. Queens were notoriously subordinate to kings, in direct confrontation, but capable of successful maneuvering in their own best interests. Women, in Elizabethan perspective, were more feeling toward others, especially other women. Women were also viewed as sexually less self-controlled than men. These characteristics are quite evident in Titania. But there is a good deal more to her personality. She exudes fairy lightness, in movement, speech, and all her dealings. Oberon has compelled her into her ludicrous relationship with Bottom, but like a hypnotist he cannot eliminate her basic character: she perfectly understands Bottom's unending talkativeness, and when she has him brought to her bower, for sexual activity, she orders her servants to muzzle him. "Tie up my lover's tongue," she instructs, "bring him silently" (3.1.180). Her impudent chiding of Oberon is wonderfully pert; her deft manipulation of Bottom is wholly admirable; her re-emergence as a fully empowered queen is sweepingly

effected. Oberon is to tell her, she declares in her final lines, “How it came this night / That I sleeping here was found / With these mortals on the ground” (4.1.99–101). With these “mortals,” indeed!

Shakespeare’s “magic,” in matters of characterization, is founded in (1) his amazing capacity for such three-dimensional, individuated portrayals, and (2) the narrative and structural urgencies that simultaneously link and shape such portrayals. *Dream* is a reciprocally integrated whole, a flowing series of evolving inter-relationships. Nothing—or very nearly nothing—is presented to us outside that evolution, which is constantly in motion. That is, nothing is presented in isolation, or purely for the sake of being inserted into the play. No songs are sung for the sake of having music; no words are spoken in order to make the drama eloquent; no actions are taken because action for the sake of action seems to the playwright to be necessary. *Dream* is a fully realized, totally interdependent entity—the kind of functioning, delicate complexity so perfectly engineered that it does not seem to be anything like as complex as in truly is, but merely light and “purely playful.”

This is, of course, an exceedingly rare achievement, within the grasp of very, very few writers. In a university course dealing with sixteenth-century English lyric poetry, I once brought students through the marshes, bogs, underbrush, and half-cleared woodlands of Skelton, Surrey, Wyatt et al., up to the towering summit of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Starting with the first sonnet, not particularly famous, I said that, without embroidering, I would show how many poetic balls this magician could and did keep in the air at the same time, effortlessly, seamlessly, unobtrusively. An hour later, I had still not exhausted *what was actually there*, and had to leave the remainder of this one uncelebrated poem for our next meeting.

Shakespeare is entirely human; he can and does make mistakes, he is capable of work that is less than completely, seamlessly perfect. But he is also an astonishing genius, an immortal mortal of a kind seldom seen on this earth. The rest of us inevitably have difficulty fully recognizing just what a towering figure like Shakespeare has given us. We ignore or, Lord help us, condescend to his achievement only at our own risk.

### *Narrative and Structure*

The four-sided relationships between and among Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena are the most obvious and, at the same time, the most complex narrative skeins from which Shakespeare weaves his play. The positions at the start are as follows:

1. Lysander loves Hermia
2. Demetrius loves Hermia
3. Hermia loves Lysander
4. Helena loves Demetrius

But the complications are immediately under way:

- 2a. Egeus, Hermia's father, wants her to marry Demetrius
- 3a. Theseus, ruling Duke of Athens, is obliged to endorse Egeus' right to have Hermia marry the man he wishes her to marry—and when Egeus invokes the terms of that law, requiring Hermia to marry her father's choice or become a nun or die, things turn distinctly dark
- 1a. Lysander and Hermia agree to meet in the wood outside Athens, and to elope
- 4a. Helena, Hermia's old friend, passes this information on to Demetrius

2b. Demetrius pursues the lovers, and Helena follows  
Demetrius

It is night, it is dark, and it is Midsummer Night's Eve, known also as St. John's Eve. This is the evening before the summer solstice, an important seasonal event, observed all across Europe from prehistorical times, and with great fervor and special rites. Matters of love were of marked importance; supernatural beings were thought to be especially evident; and though we have lost sight (and knowledge) of much that was thought to take place, on that night, neither Shakespeare nor his time had yet forgotten. And more than likely, Shakespeare elaborated, and for artistic purposes freely crossed one tradition with another.

Accordingly, after many exchanges between and among the four lovers, Shakespeare introduces a major narrative intervention:

5. At Oberon's instigation, and in an attempt to improve matters, Puck (mistaking one Athenian for another) causes:

- 1b. Lysander to fall in love with Helena
- 1c. Demetrius to fall in love with Hermia

This in turn causes all manner of complications, progressing through a swift-moving variety of circumstances to:

- 2c. Demetrius and Lysander developing serious hostility toward each other, and
- 3c. Hermia and Helena following suit

Ultimately, Puck makes things well, and:

- 1. Lysander again loves Hermia
- 2. Hermia still loves Lysander

3. Demetrius again loves Helena (to whom he had earlier been engaged)
4. Helena still loves Demetrius

which allows Theseus to override Egeus' objections, and three marriages are celebrated at once.

As thus schematicized, it surely sounds distinctly light, supremely playful. But this is no more than the plot, and narrative movement cannot be considered apart from dramatic structure. Narrative is in a sense more or less an outline, a skeleton; dramatic structure puts flesh on the bare bones. And Shakespeare builds that structure swiftly, yet subtly. Within fewer than a hundred lines, in the play's first scene, Egeus goes from a ranting father to a drastically threatening one; Theseus goes from celebratory prospective groom to stern authoritarian ruler, with whom Hermia tries, in vain, to dispute. "I would my father looked but with my eyes," she says. "Rather," Theseus declares, quietly switching the argument from emotions (hers) to morality (the law's), "your eyes must with [your father's] judgment look" (1.1.57–58). Theseus most delicately attempts to persuade her, first, to marry as she has been told to, but if not, then at least to live—and the play has just as delicately moved away from sheer narrative and into all the possible but as yet unknown complications of structure. Hermia declares, as emphatically as she can, that she will not marry Demetrius. Acting as a wise ruler, but also as a man now somehow personally involved in the lovers' situation, Theseus counsels her to "Take time to pause" (1.1.84). Lysander now adds another complication, revealing that Demetrius had earlier wooed Helena. At once, Theseus steps into even deeper possible structural depths:

I must confess that I have heard so much,  
 And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof.  
 But being over full of self affairs,  
 My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come,  
 And come, Egeus: you shall go with me.  
 I have some private schooling for you both. (I. I. 111–16)

Shakespeare moves so fast, and with such a light step, that we can easily overlook the startling implications of these three and a half lines:

1. The supreme figure in Athens knows who has been wooing whom
2. It seems not to be generally understood that Theseus has his sources of information (“I have heard”)
3. Theseus is (why?) apologetic (“I must confess”)
4. More: he intended to speak to Demetrius about this (to say what?)
5. Theseus almost deferentially, and very indirectly, mentions the cause of his inaction, namely, his imminent wedding, “self affairs” of which he has been “over full” (what is the *real* reason for this strange self-criticism? to what does it connect? and where might it lead?)
6. “My mind did lose it” is cast as an extension of self-criticism—that is, negatively, but it is in fact a declaration that Theseus’ mind/attention has now *found* the matter, and a muffled but plain assertion that this time he will not let it slip away

These are structural rather than purely narrative factors, because they are as yet inchoate, narratively unrealized. They are possibil-

ities, motivating forces that *might* move the narrative this way, or perhaps that, if the other thing (whatever it is) does not intervene. If we speak of narrative as having threads, we must categorize dramatic structure in terms of implications, which may or may not turn into clear storyline threads.

*Dream* is so chock-full of dramatic structure (as simple, light narratives cannot be, by definition: that which is light cannot be dense) that, although Theseus seems to turn away, at this point, Shakespeare has still more motivational arrows in his quiver.

1. “You shall go with me,” Theseus says—not to Lysander, not to Hermia, but to Egeus and Demetrius. “I have some private schooling for you both” (“schooling” is at least as pregnant, here, as “private”: the meaning of the word—“scolding”—clearly depends on the fact that Elizabethan teachers were more corrective than persuasive).
2. After reaffirming her situation to Hermia, Theseus plants perhaps the most delicate bit of dramatic structure yet: it is “the law of Athens [which] yields you up,” he says. In whose hands does that actually lie? His. But he separates himself from the law and adds, apparently to reinforce his own helplessness in the face of the law, “Which by no means we may extenuate.” This is the first mention of extenuation, and it comes from Authority’s own mouth. Much later, Theseus *will* extenuate the law. But here is where the seed of that has been planted.

Nor does Shakespeare allow lightness to interfere with the somber darkness he has created. Instead, as in truth he does over and over in *Dream*, he deepens the darkness that has fallen on Hermia. Lysander remarks on her pallor; she, apparently weeping,

comments on her readily understandable sorrow. And Lysander launches into a commentary and illustration of the theme that “The course of true love never did run smooth” (I.I.134). They both wax eloquently and even passionately miserable, and we listen (or read) with troubled sympathy, knowing “how quick bright things come to confusion” (I.I.149).

The possibility of hope is only then broached. Not the certainty, but the possibility. Even Lysander, who suggests the scheme of fleeing from Athens, under cover of darkness, is not certain: “Keep promise, love,” he urges (I.I.179). *We* may expect Hermia to be as good as her word, but he is plainly not quite sure. And at this point, as Lysander puts it, “Look, here comes Helena” (I.I.179)—and with her, inevitably, a quiver-full of structural complications. After Helena’s dismal statement of her own love problems, and acting out of sympathy and affection for an old friend, Hermia assures Helena that Demetrius won’t be seeing her again, because she and Lysander are eloping. Hermia and then Lysander leave—and Helena proceeds to open several Pandora boxes:

1. She’s as pretty as Hermia: what’s wrong?
2. Love itself is at fault, since “in choice he is so oft beguiled”
3. Until Demetrius “looked on Hermia’s eyne,” everything was fine
4. Though she clearly knows she ought not to, Helena resolves to inform Demetrius of Lysander and Hermia’s plans; like a spy (the key word being “intelligence”), she knows she will be paid, though not very much, for her report (the key words being “dear expense” and “enrich”). She does not care what her betrayal might mean, since she

will at least “have his sight thither and back again” (1.1.251). Not only “is Love said to be a child,” we might observe, but lovers too are like selfish little children. Indeed, much of the play is devoted to demonstrating exactly that, often quite devastatingly. But lightly?

### *Language*

It is a truism that poetry, and especially non-narrative poetry, relies far more on the resources of sheer language than do drama and prose fiction. *Dream* is written, like much of Shakespeare’s work, in both prose and verse, and it places heavy reliance on both characterization and narrative and dramatic structure. But all analytical categorizations are in a sense artificial devices, employed to clarify complex entities not readily amenable to analysis. In the end, we must remind ourselves that separation of any living entity into its component parts is precisely like dissection—and the dissecting knife either kills what is already dead, or is not picked up until death has taken place.

I have left examination of *Dream*’s language to the end of this introductory essay in order to emphasize how intimately, *essentially* it is interwoven with the play’s characterizations and narrative and dramatic structure. Much of the verbal glory of *Dream*, inevitably, shines out of the poetry, a good deal of that poetry being not only in rhyme but in formal measures. But the prose, too, rises glowingly to the occasion:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—

there is no man can tell what. Methought I was—and methought I had—but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. (4.1.203–212)

This is Bottom speaking, as he awakens from his personal dream. He remains the “bully Bottom” he has been from the start, bubbling over, grandiose. Shakespeare does not, like many playwrights then and now, switch his characters this way and that, first good, then bad, depending on the dramatic needs of his play. But Bottom's dream is—as we have witnessed him experiencing it—too much for an untrained, unlearned, deeply plebian mind to encompass. Bottom fairly stutters as he reaches for words, beginning to soar and then confounded by his stark inability to go farther. He pauses, regroupes, and does the same thing over and over. It is marvelously in character; it is wonderfully fulfilling of the narrative and the quivering, resonant depths of dramatic structure. But it is also masterfully glorious use of language, harnessing words and their movement across the syntactical shape of wickedly pungent sentences. Having just emerged from the highest point his life has ever known, or probably will ever know, Bottom here achieves the closest thing to eloquence he will ever come to. Yet there is no sophistication to his words, no reliance on the kind of rhetorical devices, or the deft poetry, the loftier characters quite naturally employ. It is all—like the porridge that Goldilocks finally tastes, and eats—*just right*. Quite rightly, Shakespeare never assigns Bottom the sort of elaborately fanciful oration we hear from Titania:

These are the forgeries of jealousy.  
 And never, since the middle summer's spring  
 Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,  
 By pavèd fountain or by rushy brook,  
 Or in the beachèd margent of the sea,  
 To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,  
 But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.  
 Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
 As in revenge have sucked up from the sea  
 Contagious fogs which, falling in the land,  
 Have every pelting river made so proud  
 That they have overborne their continents.  
 The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,  
 The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn  
 Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.  
 The fold stands empty in the drownèd field,  
 And crows are fatted with the murrion flock.  
 The nine men's morris is filled up with mud,  
 And the quaint mazes in the wanton green  
 For lack of tread are undistinguishable.  
 The human mortals want their winter cheer.  
 No night is now with hymn or carol blest.  
 Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
 Pale in her anger, washes all the air  
 That rheumatic diseases do abound.  
 And thorough this distemperature we see  
 The seasons alter. Hoary-headed frosts  
 Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,  
 And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
 An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds

Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,  
 The chiding autumn, angry winter, change  
 Their wonted liveries. And the mazèd world,  
 By their increase, now knows not which is which.  
 And this same progeny of evils comes  
 From our debate, from our dissension.  
 We are their parents and original. (2.1.81–117)

What Titania is saying is that, just as she and Oberon have been upset, so too has the world. They are immortal, but the consequences of their wrangling are everywhere visible and, for the poor mortals who do not live in the fairies' shadow realm, those consequences are exceedingly bad. I have summed up that "message" in a bare two sentences: Why does Titania require thirty-six packed lines?

1. Titania is a queen; she will by her very nature negotiate—especially with the king who happens to be her husband—on the very highest level, taking the most commanding view possible.
2. The audience must be drawn into, made to deeply feel and to appropriately weigh the role of the fairies in this narrative. Fairy power must take on, for us, an importance that a merely "playful" drama cannot possess. Titania's long speech is elegant, to be sure, and singularly beautiful. Yet its resonance with the dramatic complexities of *Dream*, and especially its throbbing evocation of humankind's eternally precarious position in the physical universe, are every bit as important as the magnificently sweeping lines. Shakespeare's audience lived far more closely tied to the earth than do most of us, in the twenty-first century. Their response to

Titania's declarations were likely to be a good deal more intense even than ours.

In this introductory essay, I have said and intend to say little about Shakespeare's handling of the four young lovers' love agonies. These miseries are real and not at all difficult to find. They ought not to be perceived as either light or playful. There is comedy in some of their encounters, notably those between Demetrius and Lysander, but not much comedy in a desperate Demetrius threatening Helena with his sword, or a terrified Hermia, left alone in the dark wood, running after her ever-faithful Lysander—who stuns her with scorn and insults. All the lovers are threatened with deprivation, desertion, bewildering confusion, betrayal, and even death. We do indeed know, this play being a comedy and its ending assuredly happy, that everything will come out well. But what we *feel*, as the lovers indeed feel while experiencing their various torments, should be, and I think is, less sanguine and often distinctly painful.

Let me conclude with Puck. Known also as Robin Goodfellow, he was in popular legend not always kind, and often rather malicious. He was in fact not so much a fairy (the categories fade into one another) as a goblin, and goblins were notoriously unpleasant. Shakespeare somewhat softens Puck's image—but not entirely:

I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
 I jest to Oberon and make him smile  
 When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
 Neighing in likeness of a filly foal,  
 And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl  
 In very likeness of a roasted crab,

And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,  
 And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.  
 The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,  
 Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me.  
 Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,  
 And “tailor” cries, and falls into a cough,  
 And then the whole quire hold their hips and loffe,  
 And waxen in their mirth and neeze and swear  
 A merrier hour was never wasted there. (2.1.43–57)

Puck is, in a sense, the fairy-realm counterpart of Bottom: lively, forceful, self-absorbed, and rather crude. He is Oberon’s jester, and does his job, on the whole, very well—though like Bottom he is demonstrably not infallible. Ariel, in *The Tempest*, is indeed a light-spirited fairy, but Puck has more than a little of the earthly about him. His roots are in the peasant wit of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, not the fastidious tracery-work of Sir Philip Sidney, much less the elaborate Platonisms of Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*.

For all that, Shakespeare gives Puck deftly turned, flowing, immaculately rhymed iambic pentameter couplets. This is perfectly polished verse, yet so tuned to who Puck is, and is not, that reading (and even hearing) this speech, most of us will not notice either the rhyming or even the iambic pentameter prosody. Art that does not seem artful: this is the fuel that *Dream*’s smooth, powerful engines run on. No one, not even Shakespeare, has ever written a more perfect, or more perfectly human, comedy.

SOME ESSENTIALS OF THE  
SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE



*The Stage*

- There was no *scenery* (backdrops, flats, and so on).
- There were virtually no *on-stage props*, only an occasional chair or table, a cup or flask.
- *Costumes* (which belonged to and were provided by the individual actors) were very elaborate. As in most premodern and very hierarchical societies, clothing was the distinctive mark of who and what a person was.
- What the actors *spoke*, accordingly, contained both the dramatic and narrative material we have come to expect in a theater (or movie house) and (a) the setting, including details of the time of day, the weather, and so on, and (b) the occasion. The *dramaturgy* is thus very different from that of our own time, requiring much more attention to verbal and gestural matters. Strict realism was neither intended nor, under the circumstances, possible.
- There was *no curtain*. Actors entered and left via the side of the stage.

- In *public* theaters, there was no *lighting*; performances could take place only in daylight hours.
- For *private* theaters, located in large halls of aristocratic houses, candlelight illumination was possible.

### *The Actors*

- Actors worked in *professional* for-profit companies, sometimes organized and owned by other actors, and sometimes by entrepreneurs who could afford to erect or rent the company's building. Public theaters could hold, on average, a probable two-thousand-size audience, most of whom viewed and listened while standing. Significant profits could be and were made. Private theaters were smaller, more exclusive; profit-making was not an issue.
- There was *no stage director*. A prompter, presumably standing in one wing, had a text marked with entrances and exits; a few of these survive. Rehearsals seem to have been largely group affairs; we know next to nothing of the dynamics involved or from what sort of texts individual actors worked. However, we do know that, probably because Shakespeare's England was largely an oral culture, actors learned their parts rapidly and retained them intact for years. This was *repertory* theater, regularly repeating popular plays and introducing some new ones each year.
- *Women* were not permitted on the professional stage. All female parts were acted by prepubescent *boys*.

*The Audience*

- London's professional theater operated in what might be called a "red-light" district, featuring brothels, restaurants, and the kind of *open-air entertainment* then most popular, like bear-baiting (in which a bear, tied to a stake, was set on by dogs).
- A theater audience, like most of the population of Shakespeare's England, was largely made up of *illiterates*. Being able to read and write, however, had nothing to do with intelligence or concern with language, narrative, and characterization. People attracted to the theater tended to be both extremely verbal and extremely volatile. Actors were sometimes attacked, when the audience was dissatisfied; quarrels and fights were relatively common. Women were commonly in attendance, though no reliable statistics exist.
- Plays were almost never *printed*, during Shakespeare's lifetime. Not only did drama not have the cultural esteem it has in our time, but neither did literature in general. Shakespeare wrote a good deal of nondramatic poetry yet so far as we know did not authorize or supervise whatever of his work appeared in print during his lifetime.
- Playgoers, who had paid good money to see and hear, plainly gave dramatic performances very careful, detailed attention. For some closer examination of such matters, see Burton Raffel, "Who Heard the Rhymes and How: Shakespeare's Dramaturgical Signals," *Oral Tradition* 11 (October 1996): 190–221, and Raffel, "Metrical Dramaturgy in Shakespeare's Earlier Plays," *CEA Critic* 57 (Spring–Summer 1995): 51–65.



# A Midsummer Night's Dream



CHARACTERS (DRAMATIS PERSONAE)

*Theseus* (Duke of Athens)

*Egeus* (Hermia's father)

*Lysander* (courtier in love with Hermia)

*Demetrius* (courtier in love with Hermia)

*Philostrate* (Theseus' Master of the Revels)

*Lords / Attendants*

*Peter Quince* (carpenter: "Prologue")

*Snug* (woodworker:<sup>1</sup> "Lion")

*Nick Bottom* (weaver: "Pyramus")

*Francis Flute* (bellows mender: "Thisbe")

*Tom Snout* (tinker:<sup>2</sup> "Wall")

*Robin Starveling* (tailor: "Moonshine")

*Hippolyta* (Queen of the Amazons)

*Hermia* (in love with Lysander)

*Helena* (in love with Demetrius)

*Oberon* (Fairy King)

*Titania* (Fairy Queen)

*Puck / Robin Goodfellow* (Oberon's jester)

*Peaseblossom* (Titania's fairy)

*Cobweb* (Titania's fairy)

*Moth* (Titania's fairy)

*Mustardseed* (Titania's fairy)

*Other Fairies*

<sup>1</sup> also called a "joiner"

<sup>2</sup> a mender of metal utensils

# Act I



## SCENE I

*Theseus' palace, Athens*

ENTER THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE,  
AND ATTENDANTS

*Theseus* Now fair<sup>3</sup> Hippolyta, our nuptial hour<sup>4</sup>  
Draws on apace.<sup>5</sup> Four happy days<sup>6</sup> bring in  
Another moon.<sup>7</sup> But O, methinks,<sup>8</sup> how slow  
This old moon wanes!<sup>9</sup> She lingers<sup>10</sup> my desires,

3 beautiful (often used conventionally, politely)\*

4 our nuptial hour = time of our wedding

5 draws on apace = comes about/advances quickly/speedily

6 four happy days = the length of the enormously important Midsummer festival (Midsummer being a time for lovers, for all manner of magic, and for unconventional or mad behavior)

7 (the play is “a night’s dream”; the moon is goddess of the night – and in Shakespeare’s time moon and stars were far more visible and of very much greater cultural importance)

8 it seems to me\*

9 decreases, dwindles

10 dawdles over, delays

5 Like to a stepdame<sup>11</sup> or a dowager<sup>12</sup>  
 Long withering out<sup>13</sup> a young man's revenue.<sup>14</sup>

*Hippolyta* Four days will quickly steep<sup>15</sup> themselves in night,  
 Four nights will quickly dream away the time,  
 And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
 10 New bent in heaven,<sup>16</sup> shall behold the night  
 Of our solemnities.<sup>17</sup>

*Theseus* Go, Philostrate,  
 Stir up<sup>18</sup> the Athenian youth to merriments,  
 Awake the pert and nimble<sup>19</sup> spirit of mirth,  
 Turn melancholy forth<sup>20</sup> to funerals.  
 15 The pale companion<sup>21</sup> is not for our pomp.<sup>22</sup>

EXIT PHILOSTRATE

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,<sup>23</sup>  
 And won thy love, doing thee injuries.  
 But I will wed thee in another key,  
 With pomp, with triumph and with reveling.

11 stepmother

12 widow with inherited property (which a son who marries will have in her stead)

13 withering out = drying out, shriveling

14 income

15 soak, saturate

16 (the new or crescent moon, pale/silver in color, is slender and curved like a bow; eternally chaste Diana, Apollo's twin, is a nature, a hunting, and a moon goddess)

17 ceremonies, celebrations

18 stir up = move, urge, stimulate, excite

19 pert and nimble = lively/quick/cheerful and clever/swift/light/agile

20 away

21 pale companion = timorous/pallid associate/partner/fellow\*

22 magnificent show/celebration\*

23 (Theseus, an ally of Hercules, had defeated her in battle; in some versions Theseus rapes her, and in others she is killed by Hercules)

ENTER EGEUS, HERMIA, LYSANDER, AND DEMETRIUS

*Egeus* Happy be Theseus, our renownèd Duke! 20  
*Theseus* Thanks, good<sup>24</sup> Egeus.<sup>25</sup> What's the news with thee?  
*Egeus* Full of vexation<sup>26</sup> come I, with complaint  
 Against my child, my daughter Hermia.<sup>27</sup>  
 Stand forth,<sup>28</sup> Demetrius.<sup>29</sup> My noble lord,  
 This man hath my consent to marry her. 25  
 Stand forth, Lysander.<sup>30</sup> And, my gracious Duke,  
 This man hath bewitched the bosom<sup>31</sup> of my child – <sup>32</sup>  
 Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,<sup>33</sup>  
 And interchanged<sup>34</sup> love tokens<sup>35</sup> with my child.  
 Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung, 30  
 With feigning<sup>36</sup> voice, verses of feigning love,  
 And stol'n<sup>37</sup> the impression<sup>38</sup> of her fantasy<sup>39</sup>  
 With bracelets<sup>40</sup> of thy hair, rings, gawds,<sup>41</sup> conceits,<sup>42</sup>

24 (form of conventional polite address)\*

25 IYdjis

26 trouble, distress, grief

27 HERmiyA

28 step forward

29 diMiTriyUS

30 liSANDer

31 heart\*

32 this MAN hath beWITCHED the BOSom OF my CHILD

33 poems, verses

34 exchanged

35 gifts

36 deceitful, artful

37 appropriated/taken possession of/captured secretly/dishonestly/by trickery

38 belief

39 imagination\* (and STOL'N the impRESSion OF her FANtaSY)

40 ornamental bands

41 showy ornaments, gewgaws

42 fancy trifles

Knacks,<sup>43</sup> trifles, nosegays,<sup>44</sup> sweetmeats<sup>45</sup> – messengers<sup>46</sup>  
 35 Of strong prevailment<sup>47</sup> in unhardened<sup>48</sup> youth.  
 With cunning hast thou filched<sup>49</sup> my daughter's heart,  
 Turned her obedience, which is due to me,  
 To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,  
 Be it so<sup>50</sup> she will not here before<sup>51</sup> your Grace  
 40 Consent to marry with Demetrius,  
 I beg the ancient privilege<sup>52</sup> of Athens.  
 As she is mine, I may dispose<sup>53</sup> of her,  
 Which shall be either to this gentleman  
 Or to her death, according to our law,  
 45 Immediately<sup>54</sup> 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<sup>55</sup> your beauties, yea, and one  
 To whom you are but as a form in wax,  
 50 By him imprinted,<sup>56</sup> and within his power  
 To leave<sup>57</sup> the figure<sup>58</sup> or disfigure<sup>59</sup> it.

43 trinkets

44 bouquets

45 cookies, cakes, and other sweet, candylike delights

46 envoys, ambassadors, forerunners

47 influence

48 still soft/inexperienced

49 stolen (not from herself but from her father, to whom its destiny was owed)

50 be it so = if it happens/comes to pass that

51 in front of\*

52 legal right

53 do with, deliver

54 directly (without pause or appeal)

55 produced, formed

56 stamped, shaped

57 allow to remain

58 form, shape

59 destroy, deface

Demetrius is a worthy<sup>60</sup> gentleman.

*Hermia* So is Lysander.

*Theseus* In himself he is.

But in this kind,<sup>61</sup> wanting<sup>62</sup> your father's voice,<sup>63</sup>

The other<sup>64</sup> must be held<sup>65</sup> the worthier. 55

*Hermia* I would<sup>66</sup> my father looked but<sup>67</sup> with my eyes.

*Theseus* Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

*Hermia* I do entreat your Grace to pardon<sup>68</sup> me.

I know not by what power<sup>69</sup> I am made bold,<sup>70</sup>

Nor how it may concern<sup>71</sup> my modesty<sup>72</sup> 60

In such a presence<sup>73</sup> here to plead my thoughts.

But I beseech your Grace that I may know

The worst that may befall<sup>74</sup> me in this case,

If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

*Theseus* Either to die the death, or to abjure, 65

For ever, the society of men.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,

60 honorable, reputable\*

61 character, function\*

62 lacking\*

63 approval, agreement

64 man (Demetrius)

65 accepted, considered\*

66 wish\*

67 only

68 make allowance for, excuse

69 capacity, strength, authority, permission

70 daring, presumptuous, immodest\*

71 effect, implicate

72 obligatory womanly behavior/reserve\*

73 a presence = company

74 happen/ occur to\*

75 (not the society of *males* but – she being forced to become a nun – the society of all other human beings)

Know of<sup>76</sup> your youth, examine well your blood,<sup>77</sup>  
 Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,  
 70 You can endure the livery<sup>78</sup> of a nun,  
 For aye<sup>79</sup> to be in shady cloister<sup>80</sup> mew'd,<sup>81</sup>  
 To live a barren sister<sup>82</sup> all your life,  
 Chanting faint<sup>83</sup> hymns to the cold fruitless<sup>84</sup> moon.  
 Thrice blessèd they that master so<sup>85</sup> their blood  
 75 To undergo<sup>86</sup> such maiden pilgrimage.<sup>87</sup>  
 But earthlier happy<sup>88</sup> is the rose distilled<sup>89</sup>  
 Than that, which withering on the virgin thorn,<sup>90</sup>  
 Grows, lives, and dies in single<sup>91</sup> blessedness.<sup>92</sup>  
*Hermia* So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,  
 80 Ere<sup>93</sup> I will yield my virgin patent<sup>94</sup> up  
 Unto his lordship,<sup>95</sup> whose unwishèd<sup>96</sup> yoke<sup>97</sup>

76 know of = be aware of

77 emotions, passions\*

78 garments, clothing\* ("habit")

79 ever\*

80 shady cloister = retired/sheltered convent/nunnery/religious habitat

81 confined, cooped up

82 nun

83 feeble, timid, languid

84 cold fruitless = lacking ardor/warmth/sexless barren/childless

85 master so = overcome/tame in that way

86 to undergo = in order to experience/endure/subject themselves to

87 maiden pilgrimage = virginal\* religious journey

88 earthlier happy = happier on earth

89 concentrated/purified into scent/perfume by the process of distillation

90 aversion/hostility/prickliness (to men)

91 solitary, celibate; slight, poor, trivial

92 (the religious reward available to either sex for remaining sexless)

93 before, sooner than\*

94 title, privilege

95 his lordship = Demetrius' control/rule/mastery (lord = husband)\*

96 whose unwishèd = to whose unwanted

97 wooden collar on an animal's neck, to link it with another animal\*

My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

*Theseus* Take time to pause and, by the next new moon –

The sealing<sup>98</sup> day betwixt<sup>99</sup> my love and me,

For everlasting bond<sup>100</sup> of fellowship<sup>101</sup> –

85

Upon that day either prepare to die

For disobedience to your father's will,

Or else to wed Demetrius, as he<sup>102</sup> would,

Or on Diana's altar to protest<sup>103</sup>

For aye austerity<sup>104</sup> and single life.

90

*Demetrius* Relent, sweet Hermia. And Lysander, yield

Thy crazèd title<sup>105</sup> to my certain<sup>106</sup> right.

*Lysander* You have her father's love, Demetrius.

Let me have Hermia's. Do<sup>107</sup> you marry him.<sup>108</sup>

*Egeus* Scornful Lysander! True, he hath my love,

95

And what is mine<sup>109</sup> my love shall render<sup>110</sup> him.

And she is mine, and all my right<sup>111</sup> of her

I do estate<sup>112</sup> unto Demetrius.

98 (to put a seal on something is to make it visibly genuine / approved)  
99 between

100 mutually binding responsibilities

101 partnership, sharing

102 that is, Egeus

103 formally declare, solemnly affirm

104 life that is harsh, rigorous, severe ("ascetic")

105 crazèd title = flawed/unsound claim (as in title to land or other property,  
the man possesses the woman)

106 reliable, trustworthy, settled\*

107 proceed to ("go ahead and")\*

108 let ME have HERMya's DO you MARRy HIM

109 (Hermia)

110 give, deliver, hand over, surrender to

111 moral and legal entitlement

112 (verb) give, bestow

*Lysander* I am, my lord, as well derived<sup>113</sup> as he,  
 100 As well possessed.<sup>114</sup> My love is more<sup>115</sup> than his,  
 My fortunes<sup>116</sup> every way as fairly ranked,<sup>117</sup>  
 If not with vantage,<sup>118</sup> as Demetrius'.  
 And, which is more than all these boasts can be,  
 I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.  
 105 Why should not I then prosecute<sup>119</sup> my right?  
 Demetrius, I'll avouch<sup>120</sup> it to his head,<sup>121</sup>  
 Made love<sup>122</sup> to Nedar's daughter, Helena,  
 And won her soul. And she, sweet lady, dotes,<sup>123</sup>  
 Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,  
 110 Upon this spotted<sup>124</sup> 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<sup>125</sup> of self<sup>126</sup> affairs,  
 My mind did lose<sup>127</sup> it. But, Demetrius, come,  
 115 And come, Egeus: you shall<sup>128</sup> go with me.

113 descended

114 having property/wealth

115 greater

116 standing, hopes

117 strong, great

118 if not with vantage = and perhaps advantageously

119 pursue, persist in, take advantage of

120 certify, prove, confirm, guarantee

121 to his head = to his face, to him directly

122 made love = wooed, courted

123 to be wildly/foolishly in love\*

124 morally stained/blemished

125 preoccupied, absorbed

126 my own

127 forget, failed to keep track/sight of

128 (1) expression of future tense ("will"), (2) expression of obligation ("must")\*

I have some private schooling<sup>129</sup> for you both.  
 For you, fair Hermia, look you arm<sup>130</sup> yourself  
 To fit your fancies<sup>131</sup> to your father's will,  
 Or else the law of Athens yields<sup>132</sup> you up –  
 Which by no means we may extenuate<sup>133</sup> – 120  
 To death, or to a vow of single life.  
 Come,<sup>134</sup> my Hippolyta: what cheer,<sup>135</sup> my love?  
 Demetrius and Egeus, go along,<sup>136</sup>  
 I must employ<sup>137</sup> you in some business<sup>138</sup>  
 Against<sup>139</sup> our nuptial, and confer with you 125  
 Of something nearly that<sup>140</sup> concerns yourselves.  
*Egeus* With duty<sup>141</sup> and desire<sup>142</sup> we follow you.

EXEUNT ALL BUT LYSANDER AND HERMIA

*Lysander* How now,<sup>143</sup> my love? Why is your cheek so pale?  
 How chance<sup>144</sup> the roses there do fade so fast?  
*Hermia* Belike<sup>145</sup> for want of rain, which I could well 130

129 scolding

130 provide/furnish with the means

131 moods, inclinations

132 gives, delivers

133 mitigate, lessen

134 (an expression of encouragement, unrelated to the usual meanings of  
 “come”)

135 what cheer = how are you, how do you feel

136 go along = come with/follow me

137 make use of

138 BIZINESS

139 with regard to\*

140 nearly that = that particularly/especially

141 submission, respect\*

142 pleasure, satisfaction

143 how now = how do you do, how are you (conventional polite greeting)

144 does it happen, come about

145 probably, possibly, perhaps\*

Beteem<sup>146</sup> them from the tempest<sup>147</sup> of my eyes.

*Lysander* Ay me!<sup>148</sup> For aught<sup>149</sup> that I could ever read,

Could ever hear by tale<sup>150</sup> or history,<sup>151</sup>

The course<sup>152</sup> of true<sup>153</sup> love never did run smooth,

135 But either it<sup>154</sup> was different<sup>155</sup> in blood<sup>156</sup> –

*Hermia* O cross!<sup>157</sup> Too high to be enthralled<sup>158</sup> to low.<sup>159</sup>

*Lysander* Or else misgraffèd<sup>160</sup> in respect of years<sup>161</sup> –

*Hermia* O spite!<sup>162</sup> Too old to be engaged<sup>163</sup> to young.

*Lysander* Or else it stood<sup>164</sup> upon the choice of friends –

140 *Hermia* O hell! To choose love by<sup>165</sup> another's eyes.

*Lysander* Or if there were a sympathy<sup>166</sup> in choice,

War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,

Making it momentary<sup>167</sup> as a sound,

146 pour on

147 violent commotion/disturbance

148 ay me = oh/ah me

149 anything

150 talk, conversation

151 narrative, story

152 path\*

153 steadfast, constant, faithful, sincere\*

154 the love relationship

155 DifeRENT

156 descent, lineage, family

157 affliction, misfortune

158 enslaved

159 one of the parties is too exalted in rank/descent to be bound to someone  
so low in rank/descent

160 badly matched

161 age

162 outrage, insult\*

163 entangled, attached

164 it stood = the projected marriage rested/existed

165 under/because of the decisions/supervision of

166 affinity, attraction, harmony, concord

167 transitory, evanescent, momentary (MOmenTAny)

- Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
 Brief as the lightning in the collid<sup>168</sup> night 145  
 That, in a spleen,<sup>169</sup> unfolds<sup>170</sup> both heaven and earth,  
 And ere a man hath power to say “Behold!”  
 The jaws of darkness do devour it up.  
 So quick bright<sup>171</sup> things come to confusion.<sup>172</sup>
- Hermia* If then true lovers have been ever crossed,<sup>173</sup> 150  
 It stands as an edict<sup>174</sup> in destiny.  
 Then let us teach our trial<sup>175</sup> patience,<sup>176</sup>  
 Because it is a customary<sup>177</sup> cross,  
 As due<sup>178</sup> to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,  
 Wishes and tears, poor<sup>179</sup> fancy’s followers. 155
- Lysander* A good persuasion.<sup>180</sup> Therefore hear me, *Hermia*.  
 I have a widow aunt, a dowager  
 Of great revenue,<sup>181</sup> and she hath no child.

168 darkened, murky

169 impulse, whim, caprice, fit of temper

170 displays, lays open (to sight)

171 quick bright = quickly/lively shining/gleaming

172 ruin, destruction (conFYUziON)\*

173 ever crossed = always/eternally (adverb) thwarted/afflicted

174 rule, law (eeDICT)

175 testing, struggle, affliction

176 PAseeENCE

177 common, usual

178 as due = just as rightful/owed/belonging

179 poor fancy’s = humble/insignificant\* imagination’s

180 argument, conviction, opinion

181 reVENue (*A Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Samuel Johnson [London: William Ball, 1838], p. 998, col. 1, gives the pronunciation reVENue, and *An English Pronouncing Dictionary*, 10th ed., ed. Daniel Jones [London: Dent, 1949], p. 363, col. 1, gives the same pronunciation as a secondary choice, “chiefly heard in legal and parliamentary circles”; note that the word is spelled in the First Quarto reuennew, and, in assorted other surviving documents, reuennewe, reuenine, reueneu, reueu, reuenos (pl.), reueneu, reuennue, reuenuz (pl), reueneuise (pl), reueneued)



In number more than ever women spoke,  
 In that same place thou hast appointed<sup>198</sup> me,  
 Tomorrow truly<sup>199</sup> will I meet with thee.

*Lysander* Keep promise,<sup>200</sup> love. Look, here comes Helena.

## ENTER HELENA

*Hermia* God speed,<sup>201</sup> fair Helena. Whither away?<sup>202</sup> 180

*Helena* Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.

Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!

Your eyes are lode stars,<sup>203</sup> and your tongue's sweet air<sup>204</sup>

More tuneable<sup>205</sup> than lark to<sup>206</sup> shepherd's ear

When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear. 185

Sickness<sup>207</sup> is catching. O were favor<sup>208</sup> so,

Yours would I catch,<sup>209</sup> fair Hermia, ere I go.

My ear should<sup>210</sup> catch your voice, my eye your eye,

My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,<sup>211</sup> 190

The rest I'd give to be to you translated.<sup>212</sup>

198 fixed/arranged/prescribed/decreed for

199 faithfully, trustworthily\*

200 your promise

201 God speed = may God make things be well with you (a conventionally polite greeting or farewell)

202 are you going

203 lode stars = stars that show the way

204 breath, voice

205 melodious, harmonious, sweet-sounding

206 to a

207 (here, the sickness is love distress)

208 liking, preference\*

209 (First Quarto: Your words I catch; Second Folio (1632): Your words I'd catch; "yours would" is a common editorial emendation)

210 would

211 taken away, subtracted

212 conveyed, transferred

O teach me how you look,<sup>213</sup> and with what art<sup>214</sup>

You sway<sup>215</sup> the motion of Demetrius' heart.

*Hermia* I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.<sup>216</sup>

195 *Helena* O that<sup>217</sup> your frowns would teach my smiles such  
skill!<sup>218</sup>

*Hermia* I give him curses,<sup>219</sup> yet he gives me love.

*Helena* O that my prayers could such affection move!

*Hermia* The more I hate, the more he follows me.

*Helena* The more I love, the more he hateth me.

200 *Hermia* His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

*Helena* None but your beauty. Would that fault were mine.

*Hermia* Take comfort: he no more shall see my face.

Lysander and myself will fly<sup>220</sup> this place.

Before the time I did Lysander see,

205 Seemed Athens as<sup>221</sup> a paradise to me.

O then what graces<sup>222</sup> in my love do dwell,

That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell.

*Lysander* Helen, to you our minds we will unfold.

Tomorrow night, when Phoebe<sup>223</sup> doth behold

210 Her silver visage<sup>224</sup> in the wat'ry glass,<sup>225</sup>

213 use your eyes

214 skill, artifice, craft

215 swerve, move, affect

216 always, constantly (adverb)\*

217 if only

218 capability, cleverness, knowledge, understanding

219 negative comments (curse: then meant primarily invocations to or against  
the / a deity)

220 hurry from, flee\*

221 like

222 charms, pleasing qualities\*

223 (Diana, the moon goddess)

224 face\*

225 mirror

Decking<sup>226</sup> with liquid pearl the bladed<sup>227</sup> grass –  
 A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal –  
 Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.<sup>228</sup>

*Hermia* And in the wood, where often you and I  
 Upon faint<sup>229</sup> primrose beds<sup>230</sup> were wont<sup>231</sup> to lie, 215  
 Emptying our bosoms of their counsel<sup>232</sup> sweet,<sup>233</sup>  
 There my Lysander and myself shall meet,  
 And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,  
 To seek new friends and stranger companies.<sup>234</sup>  
 Farewell, sweet playfellow.<sup>235</sup> Pray thou for us. 220  
 And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius.  
 Keep word,<sup>236</sup> Lysander. We must starve our sight  
 From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.<sup>237</sup>  
*Lysander* I will, my Hermia.

EXIT HERMIA

Helena, adieu.

As you on him, Demetrius dote<sup>238</sup> on you. 225

EXIT LYSANDER

226 covering, clothing (verb)\*

227 having many blades

228 devised to steal = planned/determined\* to go secretly

229 pale (the primrose bears pale blossoms)

230 (1) sleeping/resting place, (2) plant/flower beds

231 accustomed, in the habit\*

232 exchange of opinions/plans/intentions/secrets\*

233 (First Quarto: swelled)

234 stranger companies = the society/companionship of strangers (stranger, here, is closer to an adjective than to a noun; First Quarto: strange companions)

235 companion

236 (in line 000, Lysander similarly tells her to keep her promise)

237 morrow deep midnight = tomorrow at solemn/important midnight (deep can also mean very late after)

238 may Demetrius be wildly/foolishly in love with

*Helena* How happy some o'er<sup>239</sup> other some<sup>240</sup> can be!  
 Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.  
 But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.  
 He will not know<sup>241</sup> what all but<sup>242</sup> he do know,  
 230 And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,  
 So<sup>243</sup> I, admiring of<sup>244</sup> his qualities.<sup>245</sup>  
 Things base and vile,<sup>246</sup> holding no quantity,<sup>247</sup>  
 Love can transpose<sup>248</sup> to form and dignity.<sup>249</sup>  
 Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.  
 235 And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted<sup>250</sup> blind.  
 Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste:<sup>251</sup>  
 Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy<sup>252</sup> haste.  
 And therefore is Love said to be a child,  
 Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.  
 240 As waggish<sup>253</sup> boys in game<sup>254</sup> themselves forswear,<sup>255</sup>  
 So the boy, Love, is perjured<sup>256</sup> everywhere.

239 more than (o'er: over)

240 some . . . some = some people . . . other people

241 will not know = (1) refuses/does not want to know, (2) (future tense)

242 except

243 so do

244 admiring of = wondering/marveling at

245 character, nature

246 base and vile = of little value and little appreciated/paltry

247 holding no quantity = (1) having/containing no duration, (2) out of proportion

248 change, transform, convert

249 form and dignity = beauty and worth/excellence/honor

250 painted blind = represented in drawings/paintings as being blind

251 a sense/feeling

252 figure unheedy = portray/represent inattentive/reckless

253 mischievous

254 sport, fun, amusement\*

255 themselves forswear = tell lies, swear falsely (themselves: here a reflexive syntactical marker)

256 breaks oaths, commits perjury

For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,  
 He hailed<sup>257</sup> down oaths that he was only mine.  
 And when this hail some heat<sup>258</sup> from<sup>259</sup> Hermia felt,  
 So he dissolved,<sup>260</sup> and showers of oaths did melt. 245  
 I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.  
 Then to the wood will he tomorrow night  
 Pursue her, and for this intelligence<sup>261</sup>  
 If I have thanks, it is<sup>262</sup> a dear<sup>263</sup> expense.  
 But herein mean<sup>264</sup> I to enrich<sup>265</sup> my pain, 250  
 To have his sight<sup>266</sup> thither and back again.

EXIT

257 poured, threw

258 fervor, ardor, passion

259 because of

260 melted

261 information (especially as conveyed by spies)

262 will be for him

263 dear expense = precious/lavish/strenuous/difficult disbursement

264 propose, intend

265 improve

266 his sight = the sight of him

## SCENE 2

*Athens. Quince's house*

ENTER QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE,  
SNOUT, AND STARVELING

*Quince* Is all our company<sup>1</sup> here?

*Bottom* You were best to call them generally,<sup>2</sup> man by man,  
according to the scrip.<sup>3</sup>

*Quince* Here is the scroll<sup>4</sup> of every man's name, which is thought  
5 fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude<sup>5</sup> before the  
Duke and the Duchess, on his wedding day at night.

*Bottom* First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on,<sup>6</sup>  
then read the names of the actors, and so grow to a point.<sup>7</sup>

*Quince* Marry,<sup>8</sup> our play is, "The most lamentable<sup>9</sup> comedy, and  
10 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,<sup>10</sup> spread yourselves.<sup>11</sup>

1 fellowship, companionship\*

2 individually (Bottom mangles the word "severally")

3 piece of paper

4 list, roll

5 (once descriptive of a between-acts humorous playlet – or mime performance – by Shakespeare's time the word was used for popular comedies, and at some point for stage drama generally)\*

6 treats on = deals with

7 grow to a point = come to a conclusion? a definite position? (the workmen-actors do not invariably speak with verbal precision)

8 an exclamation (originally an oath employing the Virgin Mary's name)\*

9 (1) mournful, (2) deplorable, pitiable, wretchedly bad

10 workmen qualified to be in business for themselves

11 make yourselves known

- Quince Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.
- Bottom Ready. Name what part I am for,<sup>12</sup> and proceed. 15
- Quince You, Nick Bottom, are set down<sup>13</sup> for Pyramus.
- Bottom What is<sup>14</sup> Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?
- Quince A lover, that kills himself most gallant<sup>15</sup> for love.
- Bottom That will ask<sup>16</sup> some tears in the true performing of it. If  
 I do it, let the audience look to<sup>17</sup> their eyes. I will move<sup>18</sup> 20  
 storms, I will condole<sup>19</sup> in some measure.<sup>20</sup> To<sup>21</sup> the rest –  
 yet my chief humor<sup>22</sup> is for a tyrant. I could play Eracles<sup>23</sup>  
 rarely,<sup>24</sup> or a part to tear a cat<sup>25</sup> in, to make all split.<sup>26</sup>  
*(he declaims)*
- The raging<sup>27</sup> rocks 25  
 And shivering shocks<sup>28</sup>  
 Shall break the locks  
 Of prison gates,

12 representing

13 set down = put/written down (“scheduled,” on the list from which Quince is reading)

14 what is = what is the nature/condition of

15 splendid, grand, courtier-like

16 call for

17 look to = attend to, take care/be careful of

18 start, bring, stir up, excite

19 lament, grieve

20 in some measure = somewhat, to an extent, in some degree

21 for, as for

22 disposition, temperament, style, liking

23 Hercules (mangled – though not Cockney-fashion, since “the correct use of *h* had not yet become a shibboleth of gentility”; Kökeritz, *Shakespeare’s Pronunciation*, 308)

24 unusually well, splendidly

25 tear a cat = swagger, rant

26 all split = the whole audience go to pieces (see *OED*, tear, 1d, illustration)

27 violent

28 sudden violent collisions/blows

- And Phibbus' car<sup>29</sup>  
 30 Shall shine from far  
 And make and mar<sup>30</sup>  
 The foolish Fates.  
 This was lofty.<sup>31</sup> Now name the rest of the players. This is  
 Eracles' vein,<sup>32</sup> a tyrant's vein. A lover is more condoling.<sup>33</sup>  
 35 *Quince* Francis Flute, the bellows mender.  
*Flute* Here, Peter Quince.  
*Quince* Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.<sup>34</sup>  
*Flute* What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?<sup>35</sup>  
*Quince* It is the lady that Pyramus must<sup>36</sup> love.  
 40 *Flute* Nay, faith, let me not play a woman. I have a beard  
 coming.<sup>37</sup>  
*Quince* That's all one.<sup>38</sup> You shall play it in a mask, and you may  
 speak as small<sup>39</sup> as you will.  
*Bottom* An<sup>40</sup> I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe, too. I'll  
 45 speak in a monstrous little voice:  
 "Thisne, Thisne."<sup>41</sup>

29 Phibbus' car = the chariot of Phoebus Apollo, the sun god

30 make and mar = create/cause total success or total failure ("make or break")

31 exalted, sublime

32 strain, style

33 comforting, sympathetic

34 take . . . on = perform, undertake, tackle

35 wandering knight = knight errant (errant = roaming, traveling)

36 is supposed/needs/ought/is fated to

37 (since Flute is a master workman, he cannot be a budding adolescent and must, accordingly, be for some reason testosterone-deficient)

38 all one = one and the same ("irrelevant")

39 gently, soft

40 if\*

41 (misprint for Thisbe? pet name of Thisbe?)

“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. 50

*Quince* Robin Starveling, the tailor.

*Starveling* Here, Peter Quince.

*Quince* Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe’s mother.<sup>42</sup>  
Tom Snout, the tinker.

*Snout* Here, Peter Quince. 55

*Quince* You, Pyramus’ father.<sup>43</sup> Myself, Thisbe’s father. Snug, the joiner, you the lion’s part. And I hope here is a play fitted.<sup>44</sup>

*Snug* Have you the lion’s part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.<sup>45</sup> 60

*Quince* You may do it extempore,<sup>46</sup> for it is nothing but roaring.

*Bottom* Let me play the lion, too. I will roar, that<sup>47</sup> 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.” 65

*Quince* An 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.<sup>48</sup>

42 (the mother does not have any part in the play)

43 you, Pyramus’ father = and you must play Pyramus’ father

44 proper, appropriate

45 of study = (1) reading, learning, (2) memorizing

46 without preparation, offhand

47 so that

48 (hang us all: to offend lordly persons could be sufficient cause for execution)

*All* That would hang us, every mother's son.<sup>49</sup>

70 *Bottom* I grant you, friends, if you should fright the ladies out of their wits,<sup>50</sup> they would have no more discretion<sup>51</sup> but to hang us. But I will aggravate<sup>52</sup> my voice so that I will roar you<sup>53</sup> as gently as any sucking<sup>54</sup> dove. I will roar you an 'twere<sup>55</sup> any nightingale.

75 *Quince* You can play no part but Pyramus. For Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man as<sup>56</sup> one shall see in a summer's day, a most lovely<sup>57</sup> gentleman-like man. Therefore you must needs<sup>58</sup> play Pyramus.

*Bottom* Well, I will undertake it. What beard<sup>59</sup> were I best to  
80 play it in?

*Quince* Why, what you will.

*Bottom* I will discharge<sup>60</sup> it in either your<sup>61</sup> straw color beard, your orange tawny<sup>62</sup> beard, your purple in grain<sup>63</sup> beard, or your French crown color<sup>64</sup> beard, your perfect<sup>65</sup> yellow.

49 every mother's son = each and all

50 causing the ladies to faint (the five wits = the five senses)

51 freedom of decision

52 (aggravate = magnify, worsen; Bottom uses aggravate instead of moderate or mitigate)

53 ("you" is syntactically meaningless in modern English, as here used)

54 fledgling, baby

55 an 'twere = as if it were

56 a proper man as = as proper (excellent, fine, admirable) a man as

57 loving, affectionate

58 of necessity

59 (false/artificial beard, held in place by string)

60 perform, speak

61 (your, repeated four times, is in modern English syntactically meaningless)

62 brown

63 in grain = dyed in grain/fast color dye

64 crown color = the color of a king's golden crown

65 full, deep

Quince Some of your French crowns<sup>66</sup> have no hair<sup>67</sup> at all, and 85  
 then you will play barefaced.<sup>68</sup> But<sup>69</sup> masters, here are your  
 parts, and I am to<sup>70</sup> entreat you, request you and desire you,  
 to con<sup>71</sup> 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<sup>72</sup> with 90  
 company,<sup>73</sup> and our devices<sup>74</sup> known. In the meantime, I will  
 draw<sup>75</sup> a bill of properties,<sup>76</sup> such as our play wants.<sup>77</sup> I pray  
 you, fail me not.

Bottom We will meet, and there we may rehearse most  
 obscenely<sup>78</sup> and courageously.<sup>79</sup> Take pains,<sup>80</sup> be perfect.<sup>81</sup> 95  
 Adieu.

66 a gold coin (but see note 68 on a possibly different meaning intended, here, for “crown”)

67 color? (that is, they are not in fact gold, and thus not yellow, as Bottom has just said they were?)

68 (literally, with a bare face, but the word also means shameless, audacious, impudent, which would be consistent with the anti-French sentiment of “French crowns [that] have no hair”; it is also possible, and has been suggested, that Quince means “crown” as heads, referring to the English-alleged prevalence of syphilitic baldness among Frenchmen: syphilis was called the French pox, in England, and in France was known as the English pox)

69 in any case (that is, aside from any discussion of colors)

70 I am to = it is my task to

71 know/learn

72 followed, pursued, haunted, hounded

73 an assemblage / collection / multitude of people

74 purposes, intentions, plans\*

75 compile, write

76 bill of properties = memorandum of needed things (costumes, furniture, etc.)

77 requires, needs

78 (Bottom-mangling of something like seemly: properly, decorously, suitably)

79 fearlessly, boldly

80 take pains = work hard, take the trouble

81 be perfect = know your part perfectly

ACT I • SCENE 2

*Quince* At the Duke's oak we meet.

*Bottom* Enough. Hold or cut bowstrings.<sup>82</sup>

EXEUNT

82 hold or cut bowstrings = stick to/stay with/continue it ("hold fast") or else give it up ("fish or cut bait")

# Act 2



## SCENE I

*A wood near Athens*

ENTER, FROM OPPOSITE SIDES, A FAIRY, AND PUCK

*Puck* How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

*Fairy* Over hill, over dale,<sup>1</sup>

Thorough<sup>2</sup> bush, thorough brier,

Over park,<sup>3</sup> over pale,<sup>4</sup>

Thorough flood,<sup>5</sup> thorough fire.<sup>6</sup>

5

I do wander everywhere,

Swifter than the moon's sphere.<sup>7</sup>

And I serve the fairy queen,

1 valley (not yet the poeticized word it has become)

2 THORough

3 enclosed woodland

4 fence

5 water, stream

6 (used broadly, as one of the four elements: earth, air, water, fire)

7 the transparent globe enclosing all planetary bodies, including stars, in Ptolemaic astronomy (SWIFTer THAN the MOON'S SPHERE: the pronunciation of moon can be lengthened, but it is not bisyllabic)

To dew<sup>8</sup> her orbs<sup>9</sup> upon the green.<sup>10</sup>  
 10 The cowslips<sup>11</sup> tall her pensioners<sup>12</sup> be,  
 In their gold coats spots you see.<sup>13</sup>  
 Those be rubies, fairy favors.<sup>14</sup>  
 In those freckles live<sup>15</sup> their savors.<sup>16</sup>  
 I must go seek some dewdrops here,  
 15 And hang a pearl<sup>17</sup> in every cowslip's ear.

Farewell, thou lob<sup>18</sup> of spirits. I'll be gone.  
 Our queen and all our elves come here anon.<sup>19</sup>  
*Puck* The king<sup>20</sup> doth keep his revels<sup>21</sup> here tonight.  
 Take heed<sup>22</sup> the queen come not within his sight.  
 20 For Oberon is passing fell<sup>23</sup> and wrath<sup>24</sup>  
 Because that she as her attendant hath<sup>25</sup>  
 A lovely boy, stol'n from an Indian king.

- 8 moisten with dew  
 9 circles ("fairy rings")  
 10 (1) plot of grass, (2) vegetation, verdure, greenery\*  
 11 yellow flowers  
 12 (1) gentlemen at arms, royal bodyguards serving in the palace,  
 (2) mercenaries, bodyguards  
 13 in THEIR gold COATS SPOTS you SEE  
 14 gifts\*  
 15 are found, exist  
 16 scent, perfume  
 17 (that is, a dewdrop – rounded and glistening like a pearl)  
 18 country bumpkin, clown, lout ("lump")  
 19 soon, directly, in a short while\*  
 20 (that is, king of the fairies: Oberon)  
 21 keep his revels = hold/celebrate his merrymaking/feast  
 22 take heed = be careful  
 23 passing fell = exceedingly/surpassingly\* angry/enraged  
 24 resentful, angry ("wroth")  
 25 because that she as her attendant hath = because she has as her servant

She never had so sweet a changeling.<sup>26</sup>  
 And jealous Oberon would have the child  
 Knight<sup>27</sup> of his train,<sup>28</sup> to trace<sup>29</sup> the forests wild.<sup>30</sup> 25  
 But she perforce<sup>31</sup> withholds the lovèd boy,  
 Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy.  
 And now they<sup>32</sup> never meet in grove<sup>33</sup> or green,  
 By<sup>34</sup> fountain clear, or spangled<sup>35</sup> starlight sheen,<sup>36</sup>  
 But they do square,<sup>37</sup> that<sup>38</sup> all their elves for fear 30  
 Creep into acorn cups<sup>39</sup> and hide them<sup>40</sup> there.  
*Fairy* Either I mistake<sup>41</sup> your shape and making<sup>42</sup> quite,<sup>43</sup>  
 Or else you are that shrewd and knavish<sup>44</sup> sprite<sup>45</sup>  
 Called Robin Goodfellow.<sup>46</sup> Are not you he<sup>47</sup>

26 child stolen by fairies (ordinarily, but not here, the ugly child the fairies substitute for the one stolen)

27 servant boy

28 retainers, attendants\*

29 tread, travel, traverse

30 not domesticated or cultivated

31 by force (French *par force*), of necessity\*

32 Oberon and Titania

33 (1) walks/avenues in a forest, (2) a small woodland\*

34 near, beside\*

35 spangle = round bits of metal, perforated for attaching to clothing, etc.; stars were referred to as spangles

36 brightness, gleaming

37 they never meet . . . but they square = every time they meet . . . they quarrel/fall out ("square off")

38 so that

39 hollow acorn shells

40 themselves

41 (verb) am wrong about

42 shape and making = appearance/look\* and form/build

43 completely, entirely

44 shrewd and knavish = malicious/mischievous\* and roguish/rascally

45 spirit\*

46 goodfellow = (1) reveler, convivial companion, (2) thief

47 called ROBIN GOOD felLOW are NOT you HE

35 That frights the maidens<sup>48</sup> of the villagery,<sup>49</sup>  
 Skim<sup>50</sup> milk, and sometimes labor<sup>51</sup> in the quern,<sup>52</sup>  
 And<sup>53</sup> bootless<sup>54</sup> make the breathless<sup>55</sup> housewife churn,<sup>56</sup>  
 And sometime make the drink<sup>57</sup> to bear no barm,<sup>58</sup>  
 Mislead night wanderers,<sup>59</sup> laughing at their harm?<sup>60</sup>  
 40 Those that Hobgoblin<sup>61</sup> call you, and sweet Puck,<sup>62</sup>  
 You do their work, and they shall have good luck.  
 Are not you he?

*Puck*                    Thou speak'st aright,<sup>63</sup>

48 maiden = young unmarried woman/girl

49 villages generally

50 you who skim . . . labor . . . make . . . make . . . mislead

51 (*OED*, labor, verb, 3, identifies the specific meanings rubbing, pounding, beating)

52 grinding apparatus, hand mill (exactly what mischief Puck creates in the quern is not clear, but the word is exclusively pronounced KWERN: the word churn is exclusively pronounced TCHURN; there is no *OED* identification of these two words, and there are many combinations – for example, quernmill, quernstone – conclusively identifying quern as a hand mill/grinding apparatus)

53 and also (further separating what Puck “labors” at and what he “makes,” the First Quarto has a comma after quern)

54 unsuccessfully, uselessly, futilely (*OED*, bootless, 4, identifies such quasi-adverbial usages)

55 panting

56 labor at churning (verb: women work at churning, not at the churn per se)

57 alcoholic beverage (usually beer, which was made at home)

58 foam, froth (produced by and indicative of yeast-impelled fermentation; since the verb is bear – support, carry – barm cannot here mean, as has been suggested, either the yeast itself or its working)

59 WANDrers

60 injury, pain, distress

61 bog(e)y, terrifying apparition (Hob = familiar/rustic version of the names Robert and Robin)

62 (from about A.D. 1000 to 1500, puck/pouke was regarded as devilish; thereafter he mutated into the tricky goblin/sprite known as Puck, Hobgoblin, or Robin Goodfellow)

63 correctly, justly

I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
 I jest to Oberon and make him smile  
 When I a fat and bean-fed<sup>64</sup> horse beguile,<sup>65</sup> 45  
 Neighing in likeness of<sup>66</sup> a filly<sup>67</sup> foal,  
 And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl<sup>68</sup>  
 In very<sup>69</sup> likeness of a roasted crab,<sup>70</sup>  
 And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,<sup>71</sup>  
 And on her withered dewlap<sup>72</sup> pour the ale. 50  
 The wisest aunt,<sup>73</sup> telling the saddest<sup>74</sup> tale,  
 Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me.  
 Then slip I from her bum,<sup>75</sup> down topples she,  
 And "tailor"<sup>76</sup> cries, and falls into a cough,  
 And then the whole quire<sup>77</sup> hold their hips and loffe,<sup>78</sup> 55  
 And waxen<sup>79</sup> in their mirth and neeze<sup>80</sup> and swear  
 A merrier hour was never wasted<sup>81</sup> there.

64 fat and bean-fed: fat because fed on beans in addition to/rather than straw/hay

65 divert, lead astray

66 in likeness of = like, in imitation of

67 young female horse

68 gossip's bowl = female tattler/spreader of tales' drinking vessel

69 true, real ("faithful")\*

70 wild/crab apple

71 move jerkily up and down

72 withered dewlap = shriveled folds of flesh hanging from the neck

73 older woman

74 gravest, most serious/dignified

75 buttocks, rear end

76 (perhaps drawn from taylard, or the state of having a tail, and signifying here something like "O my tail"?)

77 church choir?

78 laugh (and THEN the WHOLE quire HOLD their HIPS and LOFFE)

79 increase

80 sneeze, snort

81 (1) spent, (2) squandered

But room,<sup>82</sup> fairy! Here comes Oberon.

*Fairy* And here my mistress. Would that he<sup>83</sup> were gone!

ENTER, FROM ONE SIDE, OBERON, WITH HIS TRAIN,  
AND FROM THE OTHER SIDE TITANIA, WITH HERS

60 *Oberon* Ill<sup>84</sup> met by moonlight, proud<sup>85</sup> Titania.

*Titania* What, jealous<sup>86</sup> Oberon? Fairies, skip hence.<sup>87</sup>

I have forsworn<sup>88</sup> his bed and company.

*Oberon* Tarry, rash wanton.<sup>89</sup> Am not I thy lord?

*Titania* Then I must be thy lady.<sup>90</sup> But I know

65 When<sup>91</sup> thou hast stol'n away from fairy land,

And in the shape of Corin<sup>92</sup> sat all day,

Playing on pipes<sup>93</sup> of corn<sup>94</sup> and versing<sup>95</sup> love

To amorous Phillida.<sup>96</sup> Why art thou here,

Come from the farthest steep<sup>97</sup> of India,

70 But<sup>98</sup> that, forsooth,<sup>99</sup> the bouncing<sup>100</sup> Amazon,<sup>101</sup>

82 make room, clear the way

83 Oberon

84 badly, wrongfully, hostilely

85 haughty, arrogant

86 (1) angry, wrathful, (2) covetous, envious, greedy, grudging

87 skip hence = hurry/leap away/at a distance

88 abandoned, renounced

89 tarry, rash wanton = wait, \* hasty/reckless/impetuous undisciplined/  
uncontrolled/rebellious\* one

90 lady love, woman to whom you owe chivalric devotion

91 the times when

92 (typical male name, in the pastoral tradition)

93 (any flutelike musical instrument)

94 grain stalk (in British usage, corn = wheat\*)

95 reciting poems of/about

96 (typical female name, in the pastoral tradition)

97 heights, hills

98 except, for any reason other than

99 truly, in truth

100 ungainly (that is, masculine-like)

101 Hippolyta

Your buskined<sup>102</sup> mistress and your warrior love,  
 To Theseus must<sup>103</sup> be wedded, and you come  
 To give<sup>104</sup> their bed joy and prosperity.

*Oberon* How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,  
 Glance at<sup>105</sup> my credit<sup>106</sup> with Hippolyta, 75  
 Knowing I know thy love<sup>107</sup> to Theseus?  
 Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering<sup>108</sup> night  
 From Perigenia,<sup>109</sup> whom he ravishèd,  
 And make him with fair Aegle<sup>110</sup> break his faith  
 With Ariadne and Antiopa?<sup>111</sup> 80

*Titania* These are the forgeries of jealousy.  
 And<sup>112</sup> never, since the middle summer's spring<sup>113</sup>  
 Met we<sup>114</sup> on hill, in dale, forest or mead,<sup>115</sup>  
 By pavèd fountain<sup>116</sup> or by rushy brook,<sup>117</sup>  
 Or in the beachèd margent<sup>118</sup> of the sea, 85  
 To dance our ringlets<sup>119</sup> to the whistling wind,

102 wearing a kind of half-boot

103 is to be/going to be

104 bestow upon, grant

105 glance at = allude/refer to/hit at, in passing/obliquely

106 reputation, credibility, influence, trust

107 affectionate solicitude/tenderness/attachment

108 feebly/faintly/intermittently shining\*

109 PERiDJEENya (daughter of a bandit killed by Theseus)

110 EEGle (a nymph)

111 with ARiyADne AND anTIYoPA (Ariadne = daughter of King Minos of  
 Crete; Antiopa = princess of Boeotia)

112 and in addition

113 middle summer's spring = the starting/rising of midsummer

114 Titania and her followers

115 meadow

116 pavèd fountain = clear-flowing stream with a pebbly bed

117 rushy brook = brook lined/covered with rushes/reeds

118 beachèd margent = beached margin/edge

119 circular dance/fairy ring

But with thy brawls<sup>120</sup> thou hast disturbed our sport.<sup>121</sup>  
 Therefore the winds, piping<sup>122</sup> to us in vain,  
 As<sup>123</sup> in revenge have sucked up from the sea  
 90 Contagious fogs<sup>124</sup> which, falling in<sup>125</sup> the land,  
 Have every pelting<sup>126</sup> river made so proud  
 That they have overborne<sup>127</sup> their continents.<sup>128</sup>  
 The ox hath therefore stretched<sup>129</sup> his yoke in vain,  
 The ploughman lost<sup>130</sup> his sweat, and the green corn  
 95 Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.<sup>131</sup>  
 The fold<sup>132</sup> stands empty in the drownèd field,  
 And crows are fatted with the murrion flock.<sup>133</sup>  
 The nine men's morris<sup>134</sup> is filled up<sup>135</sup> with mud,  
 And the quaint mazes<sup>136</sup> in the wanton green  
 100 For lack of tread<sup>137</sup> are undistinguishable.<sup>138</sup>

120 quarrels, squabbles

121 amusement, entertainment\*

122 whistling, playing (as on a flutelike instrument)

123 as if

124 contagious fogs = infectious/contagion-carrying thick mists/watery vapors

125 into, on

126 insignificant, petty, worthless

127 overcome ("overflowed")

128 containing agents, banks

129 strained to its full capacity

130 has wasted

131 attained a beard = grown/achieved/obtained its hairlike tufts

132 animal pen/enclosure

133 with the murrion flock = by/on the animals killed by pestilence/plague ("murrain")

134 positions cut in grass for a game played with pegs ("men")

135 filled up = covered over

136 quaint mazes = skilled/ingenious labyrinths

137 treading, footsteps

138 indistinct

The human mortals want their winter cheer.<sup>139</sup>  
 No night is now with hymn or carol<sup>140</sup> blest.  
 Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,<sup>141</sup>  
 Pale in her anger, washes<sup>142</sup> all the air  
 That<sup>143</sup> rheumatic<sup>144</sup> diseases do abound. 105  
 And thorough<sup>145</sup> this distemperature<sup>146</sup> we see  
 The seasons alter. Hoary-headed<sup>147</sup> frosts  
 Fall in the fresh lap<sup>148</sup> of the crimson rose,  
 And on old Hiems'<sup>149</sup> thin and icy crown<sup>150</sup>  
 An odorous chaplet<sup>151</sup> of sweet summer buds 110  
 Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,  
 The childing<sup>152</sup> autumn, angry winter, change  
 Their wonted<sup>153</sup> liveries. And the mazèd<sup>154</sup> world,  
 By their increase,<sup>155</sup> now knows not which is which.  
 And this same progeny<sup>156</sup> of evils comes 115

139 mirth, gaiety, joy (not all editors agree, but First Quarto "here" appears, in context, to be a printer's error)

140 joyous song

141 tides

142 bathes, wets, moistens

143 so that

144 watery secretions (RHEUmATIC)

145 through, by means of (THORa)

146 derangement, disturbance, disordered condition, excess

147 white/gray topped

148 fresh lap = newly blossomed folds/flaps

149 winter's

150 thin and icy crown = spare/lean and ice-covered head

151 odorous chaplet = fragrant/scented wreath/garland

152 fertile, fruitful

153 usual/customary

154 bewildered, confused, dazed, terrified ("amazed")

155 their increase = the seasons' (1) increments/additions/augmentations/  
enlargements, (2) fruit/offspring

156 (1) descendants, offspring, children, issue, (2) results, outcome

From our debate,<sup>157</sup> from our dissension.<sup>158</sup>

We are their parents and original.<sup>159</sup>

*Oberon* Do you amend<sup>160</sup> it, then. It lies in<sup>161</sup> you.

Why should Titania cross<sup>162</sup> her Oberon?

120 I do but beg a little changeling boy

To be my henchman.<sup>163</sup>

*Titania* Set your heart at rest:

The fairy land<sup>164</sup> buys not the child of<sup>165</sup> me.

His mother was a votress<sup>166</sup> of my order,<sup>167</sup>

And in the spicèd<sup>168</sup> Indian air, by night,

125 Full often hath she gossiped by my side,

And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,

Marking th'embarkèd traders<sup>169</sup> on the flood.<sup>170</sup>

When<sup>171</sup> we have laughed to see the sails conceive<sup>172</sup>

And grow big-bellied with the wanton<sup>173</sup> wind,

157 strife, quarreling

158 discord, disagreement (disSENsiON)

159 source, origin

160 correct, rectify, improve\*

161 lies in = depends/rests on/upon

162 thwart, oppose

163 groom, page, squire

164 the fairy land = the whole/entire fairy land

165 from

166 person bound by a vow/oath to some group/form of worship

167 group, company, society

168 aromatic, fragrant

169 marking th'embarkèd traders = observing/noting the passing (just setting out? freighted?) trading ships/merchant vessels

170 water (though a newly embarked ship would usually be sailing on the tide)

171 on which occasions

172 become pregnant (that is, swell out as the wind blows)

173 lascivious (not as common as the word's other meanings, in Shakespeare's time, but cited as early as 1391 and found elsewhere in Shakespeare's work)

Which she, with pretty<sup>174</sup> and with swimming gait<sup>175</sup> 130  
 Following<sup>176</sup> – her womb then rich<sup>177</sup> with my  
 young squire –  
 Would imitate, and sail upon the land  
 To fetch me trifles, and return again  
 As<sup>178</sup> from a voyage, rich with merchandise.  
 But she, being mortal, of that boy did die, 135  
 And for her sake do I rear up her boy,  
 And for her sake I will not part with him.

*Oberon* How long within<sup>179</sup> this wood intend you stay?  
*Titania* Perchance till after Theseus' wedding day.  
 If you will<sup>180</sup> patiently dance in our round,<sup>181</sup> 140  
 And see our moonlight revels, go with us.  
 If not, shun me, and I will spare<sup>182</sup> your haunts.

*Oberon* Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.  
*Titania* Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!  
 We shall chide downright,<sup>183</sup> if I longer stay. 145

## EXIT TITANIA WITH HER TRAIN

*Oberon* Well, go thy way.<sup>184</sup> Thou shalt not from<sup>185</sup> this grove

174 clever, artful, ingenious, admirable, fine\*

175 swimming gait = walking as easily/smoothly as if swimming

176 afterwards

177 great, large, ample

178 as if

179 inside\*

180 wish to

181 round dance, circle\* (if YOU will PATientLY dance IN our ROUND)

182 keep clear of ("refrain from visiting")

183 brawl/wrangle out and out/thoroughly

184 go thy way = go on your own road/path

185 have gone from (that is, he will act at once)

Till<sup>186</sup> I torment thee for this injury.<sup>187</sup>  
 My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rst  
 Since once<sup>188</sup> I sat upon<sup>189</sup> a promontory,  
 150 And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
 Uttering such dulcet<sup>190</sup> and harmonious breath<sup>191</sup>  
 That the rude<sup>192</sup> sea grew civil<sup>193</sup> at her song,  
 And certain<sup>194</sup> stars shot madly from their spheres,  
 To hear the sea-maid's music?

*Puck* I remember.

155 *Oberon* That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,  
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth,<sup>195</sup>  
 Cupid all armed.<sup>196</sup> A certain<sup>197</sup> aim he took  
 At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,<sup>198</sup>  
 And loosed his love-shaft<sup>199</sup> smartly<sup>200</sup> from his bow  
 160 As it should<sup>201</sup> pierce a hundred thousand hearts.  
 But I might<sup>202</sup> see young Cupid's fiery<sup>203</sup> shaft

186 before

187 insult, affront\*

188 when once

189 on

190 sweet, agreeable, soothing

191 sounds

192 barbarous, uncivilized, unmannerly\*

193 orderly, refined, polite\*

194 fixed

195 FLYing beTWEEN the COLD moon AND the EARTH

196 ready for "war," armored

197 precise, exact, unerring

198 fair vestal thronèd by the west = lovely virgin sitting on a western throne  
 (that is, Queen Elizabeth I)

199 loosed his love-shaft = released his love-creating arrow

200 vigorously

201 as it should = as if it were to

202 could

203 glowing, flashing

Quenched<sup>204</sup> in the chaste<sup>205</sup> beams of the watery moon,  
 And the imperial votress passèd<sup>206</sup> on,<sup>207</sup>  
 In maiden meditation, fancy free.  
 Yet marked I where the bolt<sup>208</sup> of Cupid fell. 165  
 It fell upon a little western flower,  
 Before milk white, now purple with love's wound,  
 And maidens call it "love-in-idleness."<sup>209</sup>  
 Fetch me that flower. The herb I showed thee once.  
 The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid 170  
 Will make or man or woman<sup>210</sup> madly dote  
 Upon the next live creature that it<sup>211</sup> sees.  
 Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again  
 Ere the leviathan<sup>212</sup> can swim a league.  
*Puck* I'll put a girdle<sup>213</sup> round about the earth 175  
 In forty minutes.

## EXIT

*Oberon* Having once<sup>214</sup> this juice,  
 I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,  
 And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.  
 The next thing then she, waking, looks upon,

204 extinguished

205 celibate, sexually pure, virtuous

206 proceeded

207 AND the imPERyalVOTress PASsed ON

208 projectile, arrow

209 pansies

210 or man or woman = either man or woman

211 the eye/the person

212 enormous sea animal of biblical mention, usually identified as the whale  
(leVAYaTHAN)

213 belt ("line")

214 having once = once I have

180 Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,  
 On meddling<sup>215</sup> monkey, or on busy<sup>216</sup> ape,<sup>217</sup>  
 She shall pursue it with the soul<sup>218</sup> of love.  
 And ere I take this charm from off her sight,  
 As I can take it with another herb,  
 185 I'll make her render up her page to me.  
 But who comes here? I am invisible,  
 And I will overhear their conference.

ENTER DEMETRIUS, WITH HELENA FOLLOWING HIM

*Demetrius* I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.  
 Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?  
 190 The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me.  
 Thou told'st me they were stol'n unto this wood,  
 And here am I, and wode<sup>219</sup> within this wood,  
 Because I cannot meet my Hermia.  
 Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.  
 195 *Helena* You draw<sup>220</sup> me, you hard-hearted adamant.<sup>221</sup>  
 But yet you draw not iron, for my heart  
 Is true<sup>222</sup> as steel. Leave<sup>223</sup> you your power to draw,  
 And I shall have no power to follow you.  
*Demetrius* Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?<sup>224</sup>

215 interfering

216 constantly in motion

217 (by Shakespeare's time, apes were known to be distinct from monkeys)

218 the soul = all the emotions/passions

219 insane

220 pull, lead, allure, attract (like a magnet)

221 mythical substance, hardest of anything known

222 firm, steadfast, reliable

223 relinquish, give up, abandon

224 (1) courteously, kindly, (2) beautifully, nobly

- Or rather do I not in plainest truth 200  
 Tell you I do not, nor I cannot love you?
- Helena* And even, for that, do I love you the more.  
 I am your spaniel.<sup>225</sup> And, Demetrius,  
 The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.  
 Use<sup>226</sup> me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me, 205  
 Neglect me, lose me – only give me leave,  
 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 usèd as you use your dog? 210
- 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<sup>227</sup> your modesty too much,  
 To leave the city and commit yourself 215  
 Into the hands of one that loves you not –  
 To trust the opportunity<sup>228</sup> of night  
 And the ill counsel<sup>229</sup> of a desert<sup>230</sup> place  
 With the rich worth<sup>231</sup> of your virginity.
- Helena* Your virtue is my privilege,<sup>232</sup> for that<sup>233</sup> 220  
 It is not night when I do see your face.

225 cringing, fawning

226 treat\*

227 hurt, harm, call into question, discredit

228 convenience/advantageousness for doing things

229 ill counsel = immoral/depraved/wicked plans/purposes/intentions/  
 deliberations/secrets

230 lonely, uninhabited

231 value

232 immunity, special position/advantage, security

233 for that = because

Therefore I think I am not in the night,  
 Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,  
 For you, in my respect,<sup>234</sup> are all the world.

225 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,<sup>235</sup>  
 And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

*Helena* The wildest<sup>236</sup> hath not such a heart as you.  
 230 Run when you will. The story shall be changed:<sup>237</sup>  
 Apollo flies,<sup>238</sup> and Daphne holds the chase;<sup>239</sup>  
 The dove<sup>240</sup> pursues the griffin;<sup>241</sup> the mild hind<sup>242</sup>  
 Makes speed to catch the tiger – bootless speed,  
 When cowardice pursues and valor flies.

235 *Demetrius* I will not stay<sup>243</sup> thy questions. Let me go –  
 Or if thou follow me, do not believe  
 But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

*Helena* Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field,  
 You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius.  
 240 Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex.  
 We cannot fight for love, as men may do.  
 We should<sup>244</sup> be wooed and were not made to woo.

234 opinion, regard, esteem

235 bushes, bushwood, briars

236 wildest beast

237 shall be changed = must be transmuted/turned to something else

238 Apollo flies = Apollo, who had been pursuing Daphne, runs away/flees

239 Daphne (DAFnee, who had been running away) holds the chase = Daphne maintains/keeps up the pursuit

240 gentle innocent

241 mythical beast, with the head and wings of an eagle, the body and legs of a lion

242 mild hind = tame/gentle female deer

243 endure/wait for? stop?

244 ought to

## EXIT DEMETRIUS

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

## EXIT HELENA

*Oberon* Fare thee well, nymph. Ere he do leave this grove, 245  
Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love.

## ENTER PUCK

Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

*Puck* Ay, there it is.

*Oberon* I pray thee, give it me.  
I know a bank<sup>245</sup> where the wild thyme<sup>246</sup> blows,  
Where oxlips<sup>247</sup> and the nodding violet grows, 250  
Quite over-canopied<sup>248</sup> with luscious woodbine,<sup>249</sup>  
With sweet musk roses<sup>250</sup> and with eglantine.<sup>251</sup>  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the<sup>252</sup> night,  
Lulled<sup>253</sup> in these flowers with dances and delight.  
And there the snake throws<sup>254</sup> her enameled<sup>255</sup> skin, 255  
Weed<sup>256</sup> wide enough to wrap a fairy in.<sup>257</sup>

245 raised/sloping ground\*

246 herbal shrub with aromatic leaves

247 flowering herb, related to primrose and cowslip

248 over canopied = covered over

249 luscious woodbine = sweet/pleasant vine (Virginia creeper, honeysuckle)\*

250 musk roses = rambling white-flowered roses

251 sweetbriar

252 of the = at

253 calmed, quieted

254 casts, discards

255 glossy, ornamented

256 article of clothing, garment

257 weed WIDE eNOUGH to WRAP a FAIry IN

And with the juice of this I'll streak<sup>258</sup> her eyes,  
 And make her full of hateful fantasies.<sup>259</sup>  
 Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove.<sup>260</sup>  
 260 A sweet Athenian lady is in love  
 With a disdainful<sup>261</sup> youth. Anoint<sup>262</sup> his eyes.  
 But do it when the next thing he espies<sup>263</sup>  
 May<sup>264</sup> be the lady. Thou shalt know the man  
 By the Athenian garments he hath on.  
 265 Effect<sup>265</sup> it with some care, that he may prove  
 More fond on<sup>266</sup> her than she upon<sup>267</sup> her love.<sup>268</sup>  
 And look<sup>269</sup> thou meet me ere the first cock crow.<sup>270</sup>  
*Puck* Fear not, my lord, your servant shall do so.

## EXEUNT

258 rub, smear

259 hateful fantasies = repulsive/obnoxious/odious\* hallucinations/mental images/figments of the imagination

260 take THOU some OF it AND seek THROUGH this GROVE (n.b.: prosodic scanning is often *not* the same as speaking/reading; there is an ongoing and important tension between the two approaches)

261 contemptuous, scornful

262 smear, rub

263 sees, perceives

264 can

265 accomplish, bring about\*

266 fond on = infatuated with/foolishly in love\* with

267 of

268 her love = him

269 make sure, take care

270 (fairies practice white, as contrasted with black magic, being beneficent, not evil; but they too are subject to – albeit not quite so rigorously – the natural limits imposed on witches, demons, et al., and necessarily observe the basic, natural distinction between darkness and light, night and day)

## SCENE 2

*Another part of the wood*

ENTER TITANIA, WITH HER TRAIN

*Titania* Come, now a roundel<sup>1</sup> and a fairy song.  
 Then for<sup>2</sup> the third part of a minute, hence,  
 Some to kill cankers<sup>3</sup> in the musk rose buds,  
 Some war with rermice<sup>4</sup> for their leathern<sup>5</sup> wings,<sup>6</sup>  
 To make my small elves<sup>7</sup> coats, and some keep back<sup>8</sup> 5  
 The clamorous<sup>9</sup> owl that nightly<sup>10</sup> hoots and wonders<sup>11</sup>  
 At our quaint spirits.<sup>12</sup> Sing me now asleep.  
 Then to<sup>13</sup> your offices<sup>14</sup> and let me rest.

THE FAIRIES SING

You spotted snakes with double<sup>15</sup> tongue,  
 Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen, 10  
 Newts and blind worms<sup>16</sup> do no wrong,

- 1 round dance  
 2 before  
 3 caterpillars  
 4 bats  
 5 leatherlike  
 6 some WAR with RErMiCE for their LEAthern WINGS  
 7 small elves: fairies are shaped more or less like humans, but elves are dwarflike  
 8 keep back = restrain, hold back  
 9 noisy  
 10 every night  
 11 marvels, is astonished by  
 12 quaint spirits = (1) clever/ingenious, (2) unfamiliar/odd/curious songs (OED, spirit, 15d)  
 13 go and do  
 14 duties, responsibilities\*  
 15 forked  
 16 reptiles, then confused with adders ("slow-worms")

Come not near our fairy queen.

Philomel,<sup>17</sup> with melody

Sing in our sweet lullaby,

15 Lulla, lulla, lullaby,<sup>18</sup> Lulla, lulla, lullaby,

Never harm, nor<sup>19</sup> spell nor charm,<sup>20</sup>

Come our lovely lady nigh.<sup>21</sup>

So good night, with lullaby.

Weaving<sup>22</sup> spiders, come not here.

20 Hence, you long-legged spinners,<sup>23</sup> hence!

Beetles black approach not near.

Worm nor snail do no offense.<sup>24</sup>

Philomel, with melody,

Sing in our sweet lullaby,

25 Lulla, lulla, lullaby. Lulla, lulla, lullaby,

Never harm, nor spell, nor charm,

Come our lovely lady nigh.

So goodnight, with lullaby.

*Fairy* Hence, away! Now all is well.

30 One aloof<sup>25</sup> stand sentinel.

EXEUNT FAIRIES. TITANIA SLEEPS

17 the nightingale (FiloMEL)

18 LULaBEE

19 nor . . . nor = neither . . . nor

20 spell . . . charm = magic incantations

21 near

22 web making

23 spiders

24 harm, injury, damage

25 at some distance

ENTER OBERON AND SQUEEZES THE JUICE  
ON TITANIA'S EYELIDS

*Oberon* What thou see'st, when thou dost wake,<sup>26</sup>  
 Do it<sup>27</sup> for thy true love take.  
 Love and languish<sup>28</sup> for his sake.  
 Be it<sup>29</sup> ounce,<sup>30</sup> or cat, or bear,  
 Pard,<sup>31</sup> or boar with bristled hair,<sup>32</sup> 35  
 In thy eye that<sup>33</sup> shall appear,  
 When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.<sup>34</sup>  
 Wake, when some vile<sup>35</sup> thing is near.

EXIT

ENTER LYSANDER AND HERMIA

*Lysander* Fair love, you faint<sup>36</sup> with wand'ring in the wood,  
 And to speak troth,<sup>37</sup> I have forgot our way.<sup>38</sup> 40  
 We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,  
 And tarry for the comfort of the day.

26 WHAT thou SEE'ST, when THOU dost WAKE (songs usually use lines of shorter metrical length)

27 whatever you see

28 droop, pine

29 be it = whether it is

30 lynx (and other small feline animals)

31 leopard, panther

32 bristled hair = hair that is stiff, prickly, rough

33 in thy eye that shall appear = whatever you see

34 darling, dear one

35 disgusting, base, despicable, repulsive

36 lose heart, grow weak (verb)

37 truth

38 path, road

*Hermia* Be it so, Lysander. Find you out<sup>39</sup> a bed,<sup>40</sup>

For I upon this bank will rest my head.

45 *Lysander* One turf<sup>41</sup> shall serve as pillow for us both:

One heart, one bed, two bosoms<sup>42</sup> and one troth.<sup>43</sup>

*Hermia* Nay, good Lysander. For my sake, my dear,

Lie further off yet,<sup>44</sup> do not lie so near.

*Lysander* O take the sense,<sup>45</sup> sweet, of my innocence.<sup>46</sup>

50 Love takes<sup>47</sup> the meaning, in love's conference.<sup>48</sup>

I mean that my heart unto yours is knit,<sup>49</sup>

So that but one heart we can make of it.

Two bosoms interchainèd<sup>50</sup> with an oath.

So then two bosoms and a single troth.<sup>51</sup>

55 Then by your side no bed-room me deny.

For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.<sup>52</sup>

*Hermia* Lysander riddles<sup>53</sup> very prettily.

Now much beshrew my manners, and my pride,<sup>54</sup>

39 find you out = locate/obtain yourself

40 be it SO lySANDer FIND you OUT a BED

41 bit of grassy ground

42 breast (of both men and women: neither bosom nor breast then referred only to women)

43 (the word's basic meaning, truth, is here extended to cover an agreement/pledge to marry)

44 further off yet = still further off

45 take the sense = understand the meaning

46 moral purity

47 captures, seizes, gains possession of

48 speech, talk, discourse

49 knotted, fastened together\*

50 linked

51 (here, too, the word's basic meaning is extended to faith/trust)

52 speak a falsehood

53 speaks enigmatically/puzzlingly ("in riddles," here in puns)

54 much beshrew my manners and my pride = hang (a ladylike version of "damn")\* my behavior and self-esteem

If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied.  
 But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy 60  
 Lie further off, in human modesty.<sup>55</sup>  
 Such separation as may well be said  
 Becomes a virtuous bachelor, and a maid,  
 So far be distant, and good night, sweet friend.  
 Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end. 65  
*Lysander* Amen, amen, to that fair prayer, say I,  
 And then end life when I end loyalty!<sup>56</sup>  
 Here is my bed. Sleep give thee all his rest.  
*Hermia* With half<sup>57</sup> that wish the<sup>58</sup> wisher's eyes be pressed.

THEY SLEEP

ENTER PUCK

*Puck* Through the forest have I gone, 70  
 But Athenian<sup>59</sup> found I none  
 On whose eyes I might approve<sup>60</sup>  
 This flower's force<sup>61</sup> in stirring<sup>62</sup> love.  
 Night and silence. – Who is here?  
 Weeds of Athens he doth wear. 75  
 This is he, my master said,  
 Despised<sup>63</sup> the Athenian maid.

55 human modesty = humanly proper self-control/reserve/deferential feelings

56 faithfulness to one's word

57 (that is, the "all" should be divided into two equal parts, one half for each of them)

58 let/may the

59 ATHenIYan

60 demonstrate

61 strength, power\*

62 stirring up (verb)

63 scorned, looked down on\*

And here the maiden, sleeping sound,  
 On the dank<sup>64</sup> and dirty ground.  
 80 Pretty soul, she durst not lie  
 Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.<sup>65</sup>  
 Churl,<sup>66</sup> upon thy eyes I throw  
 All the power this charm doth owe.<sup>67</sup>  
 When thou wak'st, let love forbid  
 85 Sleep his seat<sup>68</sup> on thy eyelid.  
 So<sup>69</sup> 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<sup>70</sup> thee, hence! And do not haunt me<sup>71</sup> thus.  
 90 *Helena* O wilt thou darkling<sup>72</sup> leave me? Do not so.  
*Demetrius* Stay, on thy peril.<sup>73</sup> I alone<sup>74</sup> will go.

EXIT

*Helena* O, I am out of breath in this fond<sup>75</sup> chase:

64 damp, wet

65 kill-courtesy = boor, lout (NEAR this LACKlove THIS kill COURteSY)

66 peasant, rustic, base fellow

67 own, possess

68 forbid sleep his seat = command sleep to give up his place (that is, Lysander will not be able to sleep, because of love)

69 thus

70 command, order

71 haunt me = run after/be so much around me

72 in darkness

73 on thy peril = at your risk

74 by myself

75 infatuated, foolish

The more my prayer,<sup>76</sup> the lesser is my grace.<sup>77</sup>  
 Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies,  
 For she hath blessed<sup>78</sup> and attractive<sup>79</sup> eyes. 95  
 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 though Demetrius 100  
 Do, as<sup>80</sup> a monster, fly my presence thus.  
 What wicked<sup>81</sup> and dissembling glass<sup>82</sup> of mine  
 Made me compare<sup>83</sup> with Hermia's spher<sup>y</sup><sup>84</sup> eyne?<sup>85</sup>  
 But who is here? Lysander, on the ground?  
 Dead, or asleep? I see no blood, no wound 105  
 Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.  
*Lysander (waking)* And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake,  
 Transparent<sup>86</sup> Helena! Nature shows<sup>87</sup> art,<sup>88</sup>  
 That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.  
 Where is Demetrius? O, how fit a word<sup>89</sup> 110

76 my prayer = I entreat/supplicate/appeal

77 reward

78 adorable

79 drawing toward oneself as if by magnetic powers

80 as if I were

81 hateful, disastrous, perverted, malicious

82 dissembling glass = deceiving/hypocritical mirror

83 be compared to, set in rivalry with\*

84 like the heavenly spheres

85 made ME compARE with HERMya's SPHERy EYNE

86 diaphanous (that is, penetrated by light)

87 (verb) displays, exhibits

88 skill, workmanship, artifice (as opposed to Nature's usual inherent/invariable procedures)

89 where IS deMETRus O how FIT a WORD

Is that vile name to perish on my sword!

*Helena* Do not say so, Lysander, say not so.

What though he love your Hermia? Lord, what though?<sup>90</sup>

Yet Hermia still loves you. Then be content.

115 *Lysander* Content with Hermia? No. I do repent

The tedious<sup>91</sup> minutes I with her have spent.

Not Hermia but Helena I love.

Who will not change a raven<sup>92</sup> for a dove?<sup>93</sup>

The will of man is by his reason swayed,<sup>94</sup>

120 And reason says you are the worthier maid.

Things growing are not ripe, until their season.<sup>95</sup>

So I, being young, till now ripe not to<sup>96</sup> reason.

And touching<sup>97</sup> now<sup>98</sup> the point<sup>99</sup> of human skill,

Reason becomes<sup>100</sup> the marshal to<sup>101</sup> my will,

125 And leads me to your eyes, where I o'erlook<sup>102</sup>

Love's stories<sup>103</sup> written in love's richest book.<sup>104</sup>

90 what though? = what difference does it make that he does?

91 wearisome, long, vexatious

92 a bird that is black

93 a bird that in its noblest form is white as snow

94 moved, bent, influenced

95 time

96 ripe not to = not yet ready for

97 reaching, attaining

98 as opposed to when he was young

99 height, highest part

100 thus becomes

101 marshal to = officer in charge of

102 perceive, read through, examine

103 histories, true accounts

104 richest book = most exalted/abundant/valuable source of instruction (that is, her eyes, which are the road to her heart)

*Helena* Wherefore<sup>105</sup> was I to this keen<sup>106</sup> 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 130  
 Deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye,  
 But you must flout<sup>107</sup> my insufficiency?<sup>108</sup>  
 Good troth, you do me wrong, good sooth, you do,  
 In such disdainful manner me to woo.  
 But fare you well. Perforce I must confess 135  
 I thought you lord<sup>109</sup> of more true gentleness.  
 O that a lady, of<sup>110</sup> one man refused,  
 Should of another therefore be abused!<sup>111</sup>

## EXIT

*Lysander* She sees not<sup>112</sup> Hermia. Hermia, sleep thou there,  
 And never mayst thou come Lysander near! 140  
 For as a surfeit of the sweetest things  
 The deepest loathing to the stomach brings,  
 Or as the heresies that men do leave<sup>113</sup>  
 Are hated most of<sup>114</sup> those they did deceive,  
 So thou, my surfeit and my heresy, 145

105 for what purpose, why\* (accented on either syllable, it is here pronounced whereFORE)

106 harsh, cruel

107 scoff, jeer at, mock

108 INSuffISHenSIGH

109 master, possessor

110 by

111 wronged, imposed on

112 sees not = does not see (has not seen)

113 abandon, quit, forsake

114 by

Of<sup>115</sup> all be hated, but the most of me.  
 And, all my powers,<sup>116</sup> address<sup>117</sup> your love and might  
 To honor Helen and to be her knight.

EXIT

*Hermia (awaking)* Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best  
 150 To pluck<sup>118</sup> this crawling serpent from my breast!  
 Ay me, for pity.<sup>119</sup> What a dream was here.  
 Lysander, look how I do quake<sup>120</sup> with fear.  
 Methought a serpent eat<sup>121</sup> my heart away,  
 And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.<sup>122</sup>  
 155 Lysander? What, removed?<sup>123</sup> Lysander? Lord,<sup>124</sup>  
 What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?  
 Alack,<sup>125</sup> where are you? Speak, an if<sup>126</sup> you hear.  
 Speak, of all loves!<sup>127</sup> I swoon almost<sup>128</sup> with fear.  
 No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.  
 160 Either death or you I'll find immediately.<sup>129</sup>

EXIT

TITANIA SLEEPS ON

- 115 by  
 116 qualities, capacities (“faculties”)  
 117 raise up, prepare, make ready  
 118 pull off  
 119 for pity = for goodness sake  
 120 tremble, shake  
 121 ate (ET)  
 122 violence, pillage  
 123 retired  
 124 good Lord  
 125 exclamation of surprise and distress  
 126 an if = if  
 127 of all loves = by/in the name of all true love (?)  
 128 swoon almost = almost swoon  
 129 either DEATH or YOU i'll FIND imMEEDyetLIE

# Act 3



## SCENE I

*The wood, Titania lying asleep*

ENTER QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE,  
SNOUT, AND STARVELING

*Bottom* Are we all met?<sup>1</sup>

*Quince* Pat,<sup>2</sup> pat. And here's a marvelous<sup>3</sup> convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake<sup>4</sup> our tiring house,<sup>5</sup> and we will do it in action, as we will do it before the Duke.

5

*Bottom* Peter Quince?

*Quince* What sayest thou,<sup>6</sup> bully<sup>7</sup> Bottom?

*Bottom* There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe

1 Are we all met = have we all come, are we all here

2 promptly, on time, exactly\*

3 (adverb)

4 hawthorn brake = thicket/clump of small, flowering shrubs\*

5 tiring house = dressing room

6 sayest thou = have you got to say

7 worthy, admirable

that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill  
 10 himself, which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

*Snout* By'r lakin,<sup>8</sup> a parlous<sup>9</sup> fear.

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

*Bottom* Not a whit.<sup>10</sup> I have a device<sup>11</sup> to make all well.

15 Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to<sup>12</sup> say we  
 will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not  
 killed indeed.<sup>13</sup> And for the more better assurance, tell them  
 that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver.  
 This will put them out<sup>14</sup> of fear.

20 *Quince* Well, we will have such a prologue, and it shall be  
 written in eight and six.<sup>15</sup>

*Bottom* No, make it two more. Let it be written in eight and  
 eight.<sup>16</sup>

*Snout* Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

25 *Starveling* I fear it, I promise you.

*Bottom* Masters, you ought to consider with<sup>17</sup> yourselves to<sup>18</sup>  
 bring in – God shield<sup>19</sup> us! – a lion among ladies, is a most

8 by'r lakin = by our little Lady (the Virgin Mary)

9 risky, awkward, dangerous

10 bit (the least/smallest particle)

11 plan, way, invention

12 seem to = (1) vouchsafe, confirm, (2) properly/fittingly

13 really, in fact/truth (“in deed”)

14 put them out = cause them to be/make them free of

15 ballad meter: lines of 8 syllables (4 metric feet) followed by lines of 6 syllables  
 (3 metric feet)

16 iambic tetrameter

17 for

18 that to

19 protect

dreadful thing. For there is not a more fearful wildfowl<sup>20</sup> than your lion living.<sup>21</sup> And we ought to look to 't.<sup>22</sup>

*Snout* Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion. 30

*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<sup>23</sup> – “Ladies” – or “Fair ladies, I would wish you” – or “I would request you” – or “I would entreat you not to fear, not to tremble. My life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life.”<sup>24</sup> No, I am no such thing, I am a man as other men are.” And there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner. 35

*Quince* Well. It shall be so. But there is<sup>25</sup> two hard things: that is, 40 to bring the moonlight into a chamber,<sup>26</sup> 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!<sup>27</sup> Look in the almanac. Find out moonshine, find out moonshine. 45

*Quince* Yes, it doth shine that night.

*Bottom* Why, then may you leave a casement<sup>28</sup> of the great chamber window, where we play, open, and the moon may shine in at the casement.

*Quince* Ay. Or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and 50

20 (as he has done before, and will do again, Bottom mangles the language)

21 (1) when it is still living, (2) anywhere among living creatures

22 look to 't = beware, be careful

23 effect (not defect) = purpose, significance

24 it were pity of my life = it would be regrettable/shameful for my life/me

25 (there is: Elizabethan grammatical usage was flexible)

26 room

27 (calendars often listed astronomical data, thus calendar = almanac)

28 window frame/sash (sometimes hinged)

a lantern,<sup>29</sup> and say he comes to disfigure,<sup>30</sup> or to present,<sup>31</sup> 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<sup>32</sup> of a wall.

55 *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,<sup>33</sup> or some rough-cast<sup>34</sup> about him, to signify wall, or let him hold his fingers thus. And through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.

60 *Quince* If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. Pyramus, you begin. When you have spoken your speech, enter<sup>35</sup> into that brake, and so every one according to his cue.

ENTER PUCK BEHIND

*Puck* What hempen homespuns<sup>36</sup> have we swaggering<sup>37</sup>  
65 here,  
So near the cradle<sup>38</sup> of the Fairy Queen?  
What, a play toward?<sup>39</sup> I'll be an auditor – 40  
An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

29 lantern\* (a description drawn from that of the Man in the Moon, seen as he gathered firewood)

30 figure = represent, portray; disfigure = deform, destroy

31 (verb) represent\*

32 fissure, crack\*

33 clay, mud

34 mixture of lime and gravel

35 go

36 hempen homespuns = rustics (wearing garments made of coarse homespun hemp)

37 behaving insolently, acting superior

38 sleeping place, bed

39 approaching, about to be, coming

40 WHAT a PLAY to WARD i'll BE an AUDitor (?)

*Quince* Speak, Pyramus. Thisbe, stand forth.

*Bottom* Thisbe, the flowers of odious<sup>41</sup> savors<sup>42</sup> sweet – 70

*Quince* (*correcting him*) Odorous,<sup>43</sup> odorous.

*Bottom* – odorous savors  
sweet.

So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.

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

And by and by<sup>44</sup> I will to thee appear.

EXIT BOTTOM

*Puck* A stranger Pyramus than e'er played,<sup>45</sup> here. 75

EXIT PUCK

*Flute* Must<sup>46</sup> I speak now?

*Quince* Ay, marry, must you. For you must understand he<sup>47</sup> goes  
but<sup>48</sup> to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.

*Flute* Most radiant Pyramus, most lily white of hue,  
Of color like the red rose on triumphant<sup>49</sup> brier, 80  
Most brisky juvenal<sup>50</sup> and eke<sup>51</sup> most lovely Jew,<sup>52</sup>  
As true as truest horse that yet would never tire,<sup>53</sup>

41 odious = repulsive, offensive

42 scent, perfume

43 sweet smelling, fragrant

44 by and by = immediately, at once

45 e'er played = was ever\* acted/performed/staged

46 should\*

47 Bottom, playing Pyramus

48 only

49 conquering (that is, the rose has succeeded in growing on/over the brier)

50 brisky juvenal = actively/sprightly juvenile/youth

51 also (archaic even in Shakespeare's time: used satirically)

52 (used [1] for the rhyme and [2] satirically: Jews being regarded negatively, the word *lovely* makes no great sense)

53 (again, used for the rhyme: being a faithful horse has little or nothing to do with endurance)

I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's<sup>54</sup> tomb.

85 *Quince* (*correcting him*) "Ninus' tomb," man. Why, you must not speak that yet. That you answer<sup>55</sup> to Pyramus. You speak<sup>56</sup> all your part at once, cues and all.

(*calling*) Pyramus, enter! Your cue is past – it is "never tire."

*Flute* O, as true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.

ENTER PUCK, AND BOTTOM, NOW WITH AN ASS'S HEAD

*Bottom* If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine.<sup>57</sup>

90 *Quince* O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted.<sup>58</sup> Pray masters! Fly masters! Help!

EXEUNT QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT, AND STARVELING

*Puck* I'll follow you,<sup>59</sup> I'll lead you about a round,  
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.  
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,  
95 A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire,  
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,  
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.<sup>60</sup>

EXIT PUCK

*Bottom* Why do they run away? This is a knavery<sup>61</sup> of them, to make me afeard.

54 (satirical: ninny = simpleton, fool; Ninus = husband of Semiramis and founder of Nineveh)

55 should say in answer to

56 are speaking

57 (*Bottom's* language-mangling: if I were fair = if it is true that I am handsome; I were only thine = I would still be only yours)

58 beset by spirits/specters/imaginary beings\*

59 the five fleeing men

60 like HORSE hound HOG bear FIRE at EVry TURN (this particular scansion is strictly by convention: see Raffel, *From Stress to Stress*, xvii–xviii)

61 trickery, roguery\*

ENTER SNOUT

*Snout* O Bottom, thou art changed. What do I see on thee? 100

*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 translated.<sup>62</sup>

EXIT QUINCE

*Bottom* I see their knavery. This is to make an ass of me, to fright  
me, if they could. But I will not stir from this place, do what 105  
they can. I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, that<sup>63</sup>  
they shall hear I am not afraid.

SINGS

The ousel<sup>64</sup> cock so black of hue,  
With orange<sup>65</sup> tawny bill,  
The throstle<sup>66</sup> with his note<sup>67</sup> so true, 110  
The wren with little quill<sup>68</sup> –

*Titania* (*waking*) What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?

*Bottom* (*singing*)

The finch, the sparrow and the lark,  
The plainsong<sup>69</sup> cuckoo gray, 115

62 transformed\*

63 so that

64 blackbird

65 orangelike (bisyllabic)

66 thrush

67 song

68 voice / song? feathers, plumage?

69 producing simple melodies

Whose note full many a man doth mark,<sup>70</sup>

And dares not answer nay –

for, indeed, who would set his wit to<sup>71</sup> so foolish a bird?

Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry “cuckoo”<sup>72</sup>

120 never so?<sup>73</sup>

*Titania* I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.

Mine ear is much enamored of thy note.

So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape,

And thy fair virtue’s force<sup>74</sup> perforce doth move me

125 On the first view to say, to swear,<sup>75</sup> I love thee.

*Bottom* Methinks, mistress,<sup>76</sup> 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<sup>77</sup> neighbors will not make them<sup>78</sup> friends. Nay, I can

130 gleek<sup>79</sup> upon occasion.

*Titania* Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

*Bottom* Not so, neither. But if I had<sup>80</sup> wit enough to get out of

this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.<sup>81</sup>

*Titania* Out of this wood do not desire to go.

135 Thou shalt<sup>82</sup> remain here, whether thou wilt or no.

70 notice, observe\*

71 wit to = mental capacity\* against

72 cuckold

73 so much/often

74 vigor, strength, energy

75 (to swear – and most solemnly – meant a great deal more than it does today)

76 (a form of address, more like Ma’am or Madam\*)

77 respectable, honorable\*

78 (that is, truth, reason, and love)

79 play word games

80 if I had = granted that/even though/as sure as I have

81 devices, stratagems

82 must

I am a spirit of no common rate.<sup>83</sup>  
 The summer, still,<sup>84</sup> doth tend<sup>85</sup> upon my state,<sup>86</sup>  
 And I do love thee. Therefore, go with me.  
 I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee.  
 And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,  
 And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep.  
 And I will purge<sup>87</sup> thy mortal grossness<sup>88</sup> so,  
 That thou shalt like an airy<sup>89</sup> spirit go.<sup>90</sup>  
 Peaseblossom!<sup>91</sup> Cobweb! Moth! and Mustardseed!

140

ENTER PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH,  
 AND MUSTARDSEED

*Peaseblossom* Ready.

*Cobweb* And I.

*Moth* And I.

*Mustardseed* And I.

*All* Where shall<sup>92</sup> we go? 145

*Titania* Be kind<sup>93</sup> and courteous to this gentleman,  
 Hop in<sup>94</sup> his walks and gambol in his eyes,<sup>95</sup>  
 Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,<sup>96</sup>

83 standing, rank

84 always, forever

85 attends, follows

86 condition, state of health/welfare

87 cleanse, purify

88 density, solidity, materiality

89 ethereal

90 live and move

91 the flowers of peas and other related vegetables

92 must

93 proper

94 during, on

95 gambol in his eyes = dance/spring in his sight/where he can see you

96 apricocks and dewberries = apricots and blackberries/gooseberries

150 With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries,  
 The honey bags steal from the humble bees,<sup>97</sup>  
 And for night-tapers<sup>98</sup> crop<sup>99</sup> their waxen thighs  
 And light them at<sup>100</sup> the fiery glow worm's eyes,  
 To have<sup>101</sup> my love to bed and to arise,  
 And pluck the wings from painted<sup>102</sup> butterflies  
 155 To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.  
 Nod<sup>103</sup> to him, elves, and do him courtesies.<sup>104</sup>

*Peaseblossom* Hail, mortal!

*Cobweb* Hail!

*Moth* Hail!

*Mustardseed* Hail!

*Bottom* I cry your worships mercy,<sup>105</sup> heartily.<sup>106</sup>

(*to Cobweb*) I beseech your worship's name?<sup>107</sup>

160 *Cobweb* Cobweb.

*Bottom* I shall desire you of more acquaintance,<sup>108</sup> good  
 Master Cobweb. If I cut my finger, I shall make bold<sup>109</sup> with  
 you. (*to Peaseblossom*) Your name, honest gentleman?

*Peaseblossom* Peaseblossom.

97 steal the honey bags (storage sacs for honey) from the humble bees

98 nighttime candles

99 cut/lop off

100 by contact with

101 lead, convey

102 brightly colored

103 (as a salutation)

104 CORteSIZE

105 cry your worships mercy = beg your pardon, distinguished/honorable personages

106 with genuine sincerity/cordiality

107 entreat/implore/earnestly request

108 desire you of more acquaintance = want better/further acquaintance with you

109 make bold = take liberties, presume (cobwebs have long been – and still are – used to staunch bleeding)

- Bottom* I pray you, commend me<sup>110</sup> to Mistress Squash, 165  
 your mother, and to Master Peascod,<sup>111</sup> your father. Good  
 Master Peaseblossom, I shall desire you of more acquaintance,  
 too. (*to Mustardseed*) Your name, I beseech you, sir?
- Mustardseed* Mustardseed.
- Bottom* Good Master Mustardseed, I know your 170  
 patience<sup>112</sup> well. That same<sup>113</sup> cowardly<sup>114</sup> giant-like  
 ox-beef<sup>115</sup> hath devoured<sup>116</sup> many a gentleman of your  
 house.<sup>117</sup> I promise you your kindred had<sup>118</sup> made my eyes  
 water, ere now. I desire your more acquaintance, good Master  
 Mustardseed. 175
- Titania* Come, wait upon him. Lead him to my bower.  
 The moon, methinks, looks with a wat'ry eye,  
 And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,<sup>119</sup>  
 Lamenting some enforced chastity.<sup>120</sup>  
 Tie up my lover's tongue,<sup>121</sup> bring him silently.<sup>122</sup> 180

## EXEUNT

- 110 commend me = convey my greetings to (conventionally – and here  
 comically – polite)
- 111 pea pod
- 112 calm composure, forbearance (a comic reference to mustard's proverbial  
 pungency)
- 113 very
- 114 cowardly giant-like: cowardly because a mustard seed is so much the smaller  
 of the two
- 115 ox meat
- 116 devoured: beef being eaten with mustard
- 117 family, lineage
- 118 have
- 119 and when the Moon weeps, every little flower weeps also (the Moon was  
 considered the source of dew; she was also the goddess of chastity)
- 120 enforced chastity = violated virginity, forced rape (CHASTiTIE)
- 121 (Titania has been made foolish by Oberon's magic, but she has managed to  
 notice how fond Bottom is of the sound of his own voice)
- 122 tie UP my LOver's TONGUE bring him SilentLIE

## SCENE 2

*Another part of the wood*

ENTER OBERON

*Oberon* I wonder if Titania be awaked,  
 Then what it was that next<sup>1</sup> came in her eye,  
 Which she must dote on in extremity.<sup>2</sup>

ENTER PUCK

Here comes my messenger. How now, mad<sup>3</sup> spirit?  
 5 What night-rule<sup>4</sup> now about this haunted grove?

*Puck* My mistress with a monster is in love,  
 Near to her close and consecrated bower.<sup>5</sup>  
 While she was in her dull<sup>6</sup> and sleeping hour,  
 A crew of patches,<sup>7</sup> rude mechanicals,<sup>8</sup>  
 10 That work for bread<sup>9</sup> upon Athenian stalls,<sup>10</sup>  
 Were met together to rehearse a play  
 Intended for great Theseus' nuptial-day.  
 The shallowest thick-skin<sup>11</sup> of that barren sort,<sup>12</sup>  
 Who Pyramus presented in their sport,

1 immediately following

2 in extremity = with inordinate/extraordinary intensity (exTREMiTIE)

3 wild

4 nighttime conduct/behavior

5 close and consecrated bower = secluded/secret/private and sanctified/  
hallowed boudoir/bedroom

6 inactive, sluggish

7 clowns, fools

8 rude mechanicals = uneducated/ignorant artisans\*

9 for bread = for their livelihood

10 upon Athenian stalls = in the shops/stores of Athens

11 shallowest thick-skin = most superficial unrefined/obtuse fellow

12 barren sort = meager/arid/dull rank/kind

Forsook his scene<sup>13</sup> and entered in a brake, 15  
 When I did him at this advantage take.<sup>14</sup>  
 An ass's nole<sup>15</sup> I fixèd<sup>16</sup> on his head.  
 Anon his Thisbe must be answerèd,  
 And forth my mimic<sup>17</sup> comes. When they him spy,<sup>18</sup>  
 As<sup>19</sup> wild geese that the creeping fowler<sup>20</sup> eye, 20  
 Or russet-pated choughs,<sup>21</sup> many in sort,<sup>22</sup>  
 Rising and cawing at the gun's report,  
 Sever<sup>23</sup> themselves and madly sweep<sup>24</sup> the sky.  
 So, at his<sup>25</sup> sight, away his fellows fly,  
 And, at our<sup>26</sup> stamp, here o'er and o'er one<sup>27</sup> falls. 25  
 He murder cries,<sup>28</sup> and help from Athens calls.  
 Their sense<sup>29</sup> thus weak, lost with their fears thus<sup>30</sup> strong,  
 Made senseless<sup>31</sup> things begin to do them wrong,  
 For briers and thorns at their apparel snatch.

13 forsook his scene = broke off/left his stage-performance/play

14 at this advantage take = in this favorable time/occasion/opportunity catch/  
lay hold of\*

15 noddle, pate ("top of the head")

16 fastened, attached

17 buffoon, droll/grotesque actor

18 see, behold

19 like

20 bird hunter

21 russet-pated choughs = reddish brown-headed crows (CHUFFS)

22 many in sort = a large flock

23 disunite, scatter

24 pass swiftly across

25 Bottom's

26 my (Puck's)

27 one of them

28 murder cries = cries murder

29 perceptive faculties

30 in this degree/manner

31 inanimate

- 30 Some sleeves, some hats, from yielders<sup>32</sup> all things catch.  
 I led them on in this distracted<sup>33</sup> fear,  
 And left sweet Pyramus translated there.  
 When in that moment, so it came to pass,  
 Titania waked, and straightway loved an ass.
- 35 *Oberon* This falls out<sup>34</sup> better than I could devise.<sup>35</sup>  
 But hast thou yet latched<sup>36</sup> the Athenian's eyes  
 With the love juice, as I did bid thee do?
- Puck* I took him sleeping – that is finished, too –  
 And the Athenian woman by his side,
- 40 That, when he waked, of force<sup>37</sup> she must be eyed.<sup>38</sup>

## ENTER HERMIA AND DEMETRIUS

- Oberon* Stand close: this is the same Athenian.<sup>39</sup>
- Puck* This is the woman, but not this the man.
- Demetrius* O why rebuke<sup>40</sup> you him that loves you so?  
 Lay breath so bitter<sup>41</sup> on your bitter foe.
- 45 *Hermia* Now I but chide.<sup>42</sup> But I should use<sup>43</sup> thee worse,  
 For thou, I fear, hast given me cause to curse.<sup>44</sup>  
 If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,

32 he who thus surrenders

33 confused, perplexed

34 falls out = happens, comes to pass, proves

35 plan, invent, contrive

36 wet, moistened

37 necessity

38 seen

39 athEENiyAN

40 (1) reprove/chide/blame/shame severely, (2) repress, check, despise

41 unpleasant, grievous

42 but chide = only loudly express dissatisfaction/scold\*

43 should use = ought to speak to/treat

44 invoke the wrath of God/divine vengeance

Being o'er shoes<sup>45</sup> in blood, plunge in the deep<sup>46</sup>  
And kill me too.

The sun was not so true unto the day 50

As he to me. Would he have stolen away

From sleeping Hermia? I'll believe as soon

This whole<sup>47</sup> earth may be bored<sup>48</sup> and that the moon

May through the center creep, and so displease<sup>49</sup>

Her brother's<sup>50</sup> noontide with th'Antipodes.<sup>51</sup> 55

It cannot be but<sup>52</sup> thou hast murdered him:

So should a murderer look, so dead,<sup>53</sup> so grim.<sup>54</sup>

*Demetrius* So should the murdered look, and so should I,

Pierced through the heart with your stern cruelty.<sup>55</sup>

Yet you, the murderer,<sup>56</sup> look as bright, as clear, 60

As yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere.

*Hermia* What's this to<sup>57</sup> my Lysander? Where is he?

Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?

*Demetrius* I had rather give his carcass to my hounds.

45 shoe deep (it is the "v" which has been elided, so "o'er" remains bisyllabic:  
Oer)

46 in the deep = to the depths

47 (1) entire, (2) unbroken, intact

48 pierced, run through

49 displease . . . with = offend/vex by bringing in night/darkness (it is the  
Sun's noontide which is displeased, not the Sun himself)

50 brother = fellow creature, one of the same employment/profession,  
comrade (a reference to the Sun)

51 people who live on exactly opposite sides of the earth (anTIpoDEEZ)

52 cannot be but = can only be that

53 benumbed, pale, lifeless

54 cruel, harsh

55 CRUelTIE

56 (possibly bisyllabic – or close to bisyllabic)

57 what's this to = what has this to do with

- 65 *Hermia* Out dog, out cur! Thou driv'st me past the bounds<sup>58</sup>  
 Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him, then?  
 Henceforth be never numbered<sup>59</sup> among men.  
 O, once<sup>60</sup> tell true. Tell true, even<sup>61</sup> for my sake!  
 Durst thou have looked upon him, being<sup>62</sup> awake?  
 70 And hast thou killed him sleeping? O brave touch!<sup>63</sup>  
 Could not a worm,<sup>64</sup> an adder, do so<sup>65</sup> much?  
 An adder did<sup>66</sup> it. For with doubler tongue  
 Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung.
- Demetrius* You spend<sup>67</sup> your passion on a misprised mood.<sup>68</sup>  
 75 I am not guilty of Lysander's blood.  
 Nor is he dead, for aught<sup>69</sup> that I can tell.
- Hermia* I pray thee, tell me then that he is well.
- Demetrius* An if I could, what should I get therefore?<sup>70</sup>
- Hermia* A privilege<sup>71</sup> never to see me more.<sup>72</sup>  
 80 And from thy hated presence part I so.  
 See me no more, whether he be dead or no.<sup>73</sup>

## EXIT HERMIA

58 limits

59 counted

60 (1) just, (2) once and for all

61 just

62 you (Demetrius) being

63 brave touch = daring/courageous/splendid/fine act/deed/blow/stroke

64 snake, reptile

65 as

66 did do

67 (1) expend, employ, (2) exhaust, waste, wear out

68 misprised mood = mistaken\* thought/feeling

69 anything

70 for that

71 right, permission, license

72 aPRiViLEDGE NEver to SEE me MORE

73 see ME no MORE whether HE be DEAD or NO

*Demetrius* There is no following<sup>74</sup> her in this fierce vein.<sup>75</sup>

Here therefore for a while I will remain.

So sorrow's heaviness<sup>76</sup> doth heavier grow.

For debt<sup>77</sup> that bankrupt<sup>78</sup> sleep doth sorrow owe,

Which now in some slight measure<sup>79</sup> it<sup>80</sup> will pay,

If for his tender<sup>81</sup> here I make some stay.<sup>82</sup>

85

DEMETRIUS LIES DOWN AND SLEEPS

*Oberon* What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite,

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

Of thy misprision must perforce ensue<sup>83</sup>

Some true love turned,<sup>84</sup> and not a false turned true.

90

*Puck* Then fate o'errules,<sup>85</sup> that<sup>86</sup> one man holding<sup>87</sup>  
troth,

A million fail,<sup>88</sup> confounding<sup>89</sup> oath on oath.

*Oberon* About the wood go<sup>90</sup> swifter than the wind,<sup>91</sup>

74 pursuing, chasing after

75 mood, disposition, humor

76 burden, oppression, displeasure, melancholy

77 the debt

78 exhausted

79 quantity, degree, duration

80 sleep

81 his tender = sleep's offer\* of payment to sorrow (to forestall a bankruptcy lawsuit)

82 stop, pause (noun)

83 follow (of THY misPREEzhun MUST perFORCE enSYUE)

84 reversed

85 prevails, governs

86 so that for

87 keeping

88 are deficient/lacking, fall short, break down, disappoint

89 destroying, breaking

90 you must go

91 (rhymes with find, kind, bind, etc.)

- 95 And Helena of Athens look thou find.  
 All fancy-sick<sup>92</sup> she is, and pale of cheer,<sup>93</sup>  
 With sighs<sup>94</sup> of love that costs the fresh blood dear.<sup>95</sup>  
 By some illusion<sup>96</sup> see thou<sup>97</sup> bring her here.  
 I'll charm his eyes against<sup>98</sup> she do appear.
- 100 *Puck* I go, I go, look how I go,  
 Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.<sup>99</sup>

EXIT PUCK

UBERON, CHANTING, PUTS LOVE JUICE IN DEMETRIUS' EYES

- Oberon* Flower of this purple dye,<sup>100</sup>  
 Hit with Cupid's archery,  
 Sink in apple<sup>101</sup> of his eye.
- 105 When his love he doth espy,  
 Let her shine as gloriously<sup>102</sup>  
 As the Venus of the sky.  
 When thou wak'st, if she be by,  
 Beg of her for remedy.<sup>103</sup>

ENTER PUCK

- 92 lovesick  
 93 face, countenance  
 94 (sighs, for love or any other reason, were long thought to produce negative physical consequences)  
 95 a high price\* (adverb)  
 96 deception, delusion  
 97 see thou = make sure that you  
 98 in preparation for when  
 99 (Tartar bows were stronger)  
 100 (magical incantations often have, as here, only a single rhyme: A A A A A A A)  
 101 pupil  
 102 GLORyusLIE  
 103 cure

- Puck* Captain<sup>104</sup> of our fairy band, 110  
 Helena is here at hand,  
 And the youth, mistook by me,  
 Pleading for a lover's fee.<sup>105</sup>  
 Shall we their fond pageant<sup>106</sup> see?  
 Lord, what fools these mortals be! 115
- Oberon* Stand aside.<sup>107</sup> The noise they make  
 Will cause Demetrius to awake.
- Puck* Then will two at once woo one:  
 That must needs be sport alone.<sup>108</sup>  
 And those things do best please me 120  
 That befall prepost'rously.<sup>109</sup>

## ENTER LYSANDER AND HELENA

- Lysander* Why should you think that I should<sup>110</sup> woo in  
 scorn?  
 Scorn and derision<sup>111</sup> never come in<sup>112</sup> tears.  
 Look when I vow,<sup>113</sup> I weep. And vows so born  
 In their nativity<sup>114</sup> all truth appears. 125  
 How can these things in me seem scorn to you,

104 head, chief

105 payment, reward

106 scene, drama

107 to the far side of the stage (where actors could be seen/heard by the audience, but not by actors elsewhere on the stage)

108 having no equal

109 nonsensically, irrationally, perversely, monstrously

110 would, would wish to

111 mockery, ridicule\*

112 with, together with

113 solemnly promise/declare

114 birth

Bearing the badge<sup>115</sup> of faith to prove them true?

*Helena* You do advance<sup>116</sup> your cunning, more and more,  
When truth kills truth, O devilish holy fray!<sup>117</sup>

130 These vows are Hermia's.<sup>118</sup> Will you give her o'er?<sup>119</sup>  
Weigh oath with<sup>120</sup> oath, and you will nothing weigh.  
Your vows to her and me, put in two scales,<sup>121</sup>  
Will even<sup>122</sup> weigh, and both as light as tales.<sup>123</sup>

*Lysander* I had no judgment,<sup>124</sup> when to her I swore.

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

*Lysander* Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you.

*Demetrius* (*waking*) O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect,<sup>125</sup>  
divine,

To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne!

Crystal is muddy.<sup>126</sup> O how ripe in show<sup>127</sup>

140 Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!

That<sup>128</sup> pure congealèd<sup>129</sup> white, high Taurus snow,<sup>130</sup>

115 mark, emblem

116 accelerate, improve

117 combat, fighting\*

118 are Hermia's = belong to Hermia

119 give her o'er = surrender/give up/abandon her

120 together with/against

121 pans (scales commonly balanced a known weight in one pan against an unknown weight in the other pan)

122 evenly, the same

123 idle stories, lies

124 faculty of judging, discernment ("maturity")

125 (having begun as "parfit," the word may very well be pronounced, here, perfect)

126 unclear, turgid, dull

127 ripe in show = like ripe fruit ("red and full") in appearance

128 so that

129 frozen

130 Taurus snow = snow on Mt. Taurus (in southern Turkey)

Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow  
 When thou hold'st up thy hand. O let me kiss  
 This princess of pure white, this seal<sup>131</sup> of bliss.  
*Helena* O spite! O hell!<sup>132</sup> I see you all are bent<sup>133</sup> 145  
 To set against<sup>134</sup> me for your merriment.  
 If you<sup>135</sup> were civil, and knew courtesy,  
 You would not do me thus much injury.  
 Can you not<sup>136</sup> hate me, as I know you do,  
 But you must<sup>137</sup> join in souls<sup>138</sup> to mock me too? 150  
 If you<sup>139</sup> were men, as men you are in show,  
 You would not use a gentle lady so,  
 To vow, and swear, and superpraise<sup>140</sup> my parts,<sup>141</sup>  
 When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.  
 You both are rivals, and love Hermia. 155  
 And now both rivals, to mock<sup>142</sup> Helena.  
 A trim exploit,<sup>143</sup> a manly enterprise,  
 To conjure tears up,<sup>144</sup> in a poor maid's eyes,  
 With your derision. None of noble sort

131 pledge (a woman giving her hand = promising to marry)

132 (not a curse/imprecation, but an invocation of the infernal nature/origin of the torments being inflicted on her)

133 determined

134 set against = be hostile to/attack

135 Demetrius

136 can you not = can't you (is it not possible for you)

137 but you must = without your having to

138 join in souls = join in fellowship/together

139 Demetrius and Lysander

140 overpraise

141 qualities, abilities, talents, character

142 to mock = in mocking

143 trim exploit = fine/excellent/proper enterprise/deed

144 conjure . . . up = magically produce

- 160 Would so offend a virgin, and extort<sup>145</sup>  
 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.<sup>146</sup>  
 And here, with all good will, with all my heart,  
 165 In Hermia's love I yield you up my part.<sup>147</sup>  
 And yours of Helena to me bequeath,<sup>148</sup>  
 Whom I do love, and will do till my death.<sup>149</sup>  
*Helena* Never did mockers waste more idle<sup>150</sup> breath.  
*Demetrius* Lysander, keep thy Hermia. I will none.<sup>151</sup>  
 170 If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.  
 My heart to her but as guest-wise sojourned,<sup>152</sup>  
 And now to Helen is it home returned,  
 There to remain.  
*Lysander* Helen, it is not so.  
*Demetrius* Disparage<sup>153</sup> not the faith thou dost not know,  
 175 Lest, to thy peril, thou aby<sup>154</sup> it dear.<sup>155</sup>  
 Look where thy love comes; yonder is thy dear.<sup>156</sup>

145 intimidate, torture, abuse (verb)

146 forYOU love HERmia THIS you KNOW i KNOW

147 share

148 transfer, give (andYOURS of HEleNA to ME beQUEATH – but see note 150)

149 (death and bequeath are either an eye-rhyme – that is, spelling rhymes, but not sound – or more probably, since this is a triple rhyme, and breath = breth, bequeath is pronounced beeQUETH)

150 useless, vacant, frivolous

151 will none = want none of her (“do not want her”)

152 but as guest-wise sojourned = visited/lodged, temporarily, only as a guest (my HEART to HER but AS guestWISE soJOURNED)

153 discredit, degrade, dishonor

154 redeem, pay/atone for, purchase\*

155 (adverb)

156 (identical rhyme was not frowned upon; further, these identically spelled

## ENTER HERMIA

- Hermia* Dark night, that from the eye his function<sup>157</sup> takes,  
 The ear more quick of apprehension<sup>158</sup> makes.  
 Wherein<sup>159</sup> it doth impair<sup>160</sup> the seeing sense,  
 It pays<sup>161</sup> the hearing double recompense.<sup>162</sup> 180  
 Thou art not by mine eye, Lysander, found:  
 Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound.  
 But why unkindly<sup>163</sup> didst thou leave me so?
- Lysander* Why should he<sup>164</sup> stay, whom love doth press<sup>165</sup> to go?
- Hermia* What love could press Lysander from my side? 185
- Lysander* Lysander's love, that would not let him bide:<sup>166</sup>  
 Fair Helena, who more engilds<sup>167</sup> the night  
 Than all yon fiery oes<sup>168</sup> and eyes<sup>169</sup> of light.  
 Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know  
 The hate I bear thee made me leave thee so? 190
- Hermia* You speak not as you think. It cannot be.
- Helena* Lo, she is one of this confederacy.<sup>170</sup>

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and sounded words are syntactically different, one an adverb, the other a noun)

157 his function = its operation

158 perception

159 when ("in the respect in which")

160 weaken

161 gives, rewards, returns

162 compensation, satisfaction, restitution

163 (1) improperly, unnaturally, (2) unpleasantly

164 anyone

165 force, drive

166 remain

167 brightens with gold light

168 orbs ("spangles")

169 stars

170 conspiracy, compact, league

Now I perceive they have conjoined<sup>171</sup> all three  
 To fashion<sup>172</sup> this false<sup>173</sup> sport, in spite of me.  
 195 Injurious<sup>174</sup> Hermia, most ungrateful maid,<sup>175</sup>  
 Have you conspired, have you with these contrived<sup>176</sup>  
 To bait<sup>177</sup> me with this foul derision?  
 Is all the counsel that we two have shared,  
 The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent  
 200 When we have chid the hasty-footed<sup>178</sup> time  
 For parting us – O, is all forgot?<sup>179</sup>  
 All school days' friendship, childhood innocence?  
 We, Hermia, like two artificial<sup>180</sup> gods,  
 Have with our needles<sup>181</sup> created both<sup>182</sup> one flower,  
 205 Both on one sampler,<sup>183</sup> sitting on one cushion,  
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key,  
 As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,  
 Had been incorporate.<sup>184</sup> So we grew together,<sup>185</sup>

171 combined, united

172 shape, form (verb)

173 lying, treacherous, deceitful

174 offensive, insulting

175 inDJURyus HERmia MOST unGRATEful MAID (more weakly accented syllables, like the last two in Hermia, are amenable to metrical ellision: HERMya)

176 plotted, planned, concocted

177 harass, persecute, torment

178 hasty footed = swiftly walking

179 for PARTing US O is ALL forGOT (syntactic pause, like that after “us,” can act as a metrical pause)

180 (1) make believe, fictitious, (2) artful, skillful

181 sewing needles

182 together

183 (1) embroidered canvas, (2) model, pattern

184 united

185 had BEEN inCORPrate SO we GREW toGETHer

Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,  
 But yet an union in partition,<sup>186</sup> 210  
 Two lovely berries moulded<sup>187</sup> on one stem:  
 So<sup>188</sup> with two seeming<sup>189</sup> bodies, but one heart,  
 Two of the first,<sup>190</sup> like coats<sup>191</sup> in heraldry,  
 Due<sup>192</sup> but to one and crownèd with one crest.<sup>193</sup>  
 And will you rent<sup>194</sup> our ancient<sup>195</sup> love asunder,<sup>196</sup> 215  
 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<sup>197</sup> at your passionate<sup>198</sup> words. 220  
 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<sup>199</sup> me with his foot, 225  
 To call me goddess, nymph, divine and rare,  
 Precious, celestial? Wherefore speaks he this

186 parTIsiON

187 shaped, formed (as if in a mold)

188 thus

189 apparent

190 (the first color noted in technical heraldic descriptions)

191 coats of arms

192 belonging/owing to

193 (figure/device on a wreath, once worn on a knight's helmet, and in heraldic coat of arms set above both helmet and shield)

194 tear, pull asunder ("rend")

195 bygone, former

196 apart

197 bewildered, perplexed, astonished

198 hot-tempered, angry, vehement

199 kick, thrust

- To her he hates? And wherefore doth Lysander  
 Deny your love, so rich within his soul,  
 230 And tender me, forsooth,<sup>200</sup> affection,<sup>201</sup>  
 But<sup>202</sup> by your setting on,<sup>203</sup> by your consent?  
 What though I be not so in grace as you,<sup>204</sup>  
 So hung upon<sup>205</sup> with love, so fortunate?<sup>206</sup>  
 (But miserable<sup>207</sup> most, to love unloved)  
 235 This you should pity rather than despise.  
*Hermia* I understand not what you mean by this.  
*Helena* Ay, do, persevere,<sup>208</sup> counterfeit<sup>209</sup> sad<sup>210</sup> looks,  
 Make mouths<sup>211</sup> upon me when I turn my back,  
 Wink each at other, hold the sweet jest up.<sup>212</sup>  
 240 This sport, well carried,<sup>213</sup> shall be chronicled.<sup>214</sup>  
 If you have any pity, grace, or manners,  
 You would not make me such an argument.<sup>215</sup>  
 But fare ye well. 'Tis partly my own fault,  
 Which death or absence soon shall remedy.  
 245 *Lysander* Stay, gentle Helena. Hear my excuse.

200 indeed

201 affECsiON

202 except

203 setting on = instigation, urging

204 so in grace as you = as graceful/charming/attractive as you are

205 hung upon = furnished, decorated

206 lucky, favored

207 MIZeRAbel

208 go on, keep it up, continue (perSEver)

209 pretend, forge, falsify (verb)

210 dignified, grave, somber

211 derisive/scornful faces

212 hold . . . up = sustain, maintain

213 conducted

214 written down and preserved, like historical chronicles, through the ages

215 speech

My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!

*Helena* O excellent!

*Hermia* Sweet, do not scorn her so.

*Demetrius* If she cannot entreat, I can compel.

*Lysander* Thou canst compel no more than she entreat.

Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers. 250

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.

*Lysander* If thou say so, withdraw,<sup>216</sup> and prove it too. 255

*Demetrius* Quick, come!

*Hermia* Lysander, whereto tends<sup>217</sup> all this?

*Lysander* Away, you Ethiop!<sup>218</sup>

*Demetrius* No, no. He'll<sup>219</sup>

Seem<sup>220</sup> to break loose. (*to Lysander*) Take on<sup>221</sup> as you  
would<sup>222</sup> follow,

But yet come not. You are a tame<sup>223</sup> man, go!<sup>224</sup>

*Lysander* (*to Hermia*) Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, 260  
let loose,

Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent.

*Hermia* Why are you grown so rude? What change is this?

216 come aside, retire (away from the presence of women: “step outside”)

217 leads, moves, is heading

218 (black = dirty, foul, baleful, wicked)

219 (an unusual but feasible iambic pentameter line, possibly scanned: aWAY  
you EETHiOPE no NO HE'LL)

220 only seem/appear

221 take on = pretend, behave

222 wish to

223 meek, docile

224 off/out with you!

Sweet love –

*Lysander* Thy love! Out, tawny Tartar, out!  
Out, loathèd medicine!<sup>225</sup> Hated potion,<sup>226</sup> hence!<sup>227</sup>

*Hermia* Do you not jest?

265 *Helena* Yes, sooth, and so do you.

*Lysander* Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.

*Demetrius* I would I had your bond,<sup>228</sup> for I perceive  
A weak bond<sup>229</sup> holds you. I'll not trust your word.

*Lysander* (to *Demetrius*) What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill  
her dead?

270 Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.

*Hermia* What, can you do me greater harm than hate?  
Hate me! Wherefore?<sup>230</sup> O me, what news,<sup>231</sup> my love?  
Am not I *Hermia*? Are not you *Lysander*?  
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.<sup>232</sup>

275 Since night<sup>233</sup> you loved me, yet since night you left me.  
Why, then you left me – O, the gods forbid! –  
In earnest, shall I say?

*Lysander* Ay, by my life.

And never did desire to see thee more.

Therefore be out of hope, of question, of doubt.

280 Be certain. Nothing truer. 'Tis no jest

225 drug, poison

226 a dose (portion) of poison

227 outLOATHed MEDicine HATED POtion HENCE

228 written, signed, and legally enforceable agreement (ordinarily for payment  
of money)

229 *Hermia*

230 whereFORE

231 new information/tidings

232 formerly, before

233 since night = when it grew dark, earlier tonight

That I do hate thee, and love Helena.

*Hermia* O me (*to Helena*), you juggler,<sup>234</sup> you canker blossom,<sup>235</sup>

You thief of love! What, have you come by night  
And stolen my love's heart from him?

*Helena* Fine, I'faith!<sup>236</sup>

Have you no modesty, no maiden shame, 285  
No touch of bashfulness?<sup>237</sup> What, will you tear  
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?

Fie, fie, you counterfeit, you puppet,<sup>238</sup> you!

*Hermia* Puppet? Why so!<sup>239</sup> Ay, that way goes the game.

Now I perceive<sup>240</sup> that she hath made compare 290

Between our statures,<sup>241</sup> she hath urged<sup>242</sup> her height,

And with her personage,<sup>243</sup> 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?<sup>244</sup> 295

How low am I, thou painted maypole?<sup>245</sup> Speak,

How low am I? I am not yet so low

But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

*Helena* I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,

234 jester, buffoon, trickster (JUGeLER)

235 flower-consuming worm/caterpillar

236 fine, I'faith = come to an end/be finished/stop!

237 shyness, sensitive modesty

238 (1) dressed-up doll, (2) marionette

239 why so = aha, so that's how it is!

240 understand, comprehend

241 heights

242 advocated, pleaded, pressed

243 appearance, body image, height

244 little, short

245 painted maypole = facially artificially colored skinny person

300 Let her not hurt me. I was never curst,<sup>246</sup>  
 I have no gift at all in shrewishness.<sup>247</sup>  
 I am a right<sup>248</sup> maid, for my cowardice.  
 Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,  
 Because she is something lower than myself,  
 That I can match her.

305 *Hermia* Lower? Hark, again.

*Helena* Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me,  
 I evermore<sup>249</sup> did love you, Hermia,  
 Did ever keep your counsels, never wronged you,  
 Save that, in love unto<sup>250</sup> Demetrius,  
 310 I told him of your stealth<sup>251</sup> unto<sup>252</sup> this wood.  
 He followed you; for love I followed him.  
 But he hath chid<sup>253</sup> me hence and threatened me  
 To strike me, spurn me, nay, to kill me, too.  
 And now, so<sup>254</sup> you will let me quiet<sup>255</sup> go,  
 315 To Athens will I bear my folly back,  
 And follow you no further. Let me go.  
 You see how simple<sup>256</sup> and how fond I am.

*Hermia* Why, get you gone. Who is't that hinders<sup>257</sup> you?

*Helena* A foolish heart, that I leave here behind.

246 detestable, abominable, virulent, shrewish

247 being ill-tempered/ill-natured/scolding

248 upright, good, proper

249 always

250 with, for

251 furtive/secret going

252 to, into

253 driven me away, with his scolding

254 if thus/therefore, accordingly

255 peacefully, soundlessly

256 harmless, innocent, honest

257 prevents, delays, obstructs

- Hermia* What, with Lysander?
- Helena* With Demetrius. 320
- Lysander* Be not afraid. She shall not harm thee, Helena.
- Demetrius* No sir. She shall not, though you take her part.
- Helena* O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd.<sup>258</sup>  
 She was a vixen<sup>259</sup> when she went to school.  
 And though she be but little, she is fierce. 325
- Hermia* Little again? Nothing but low and little?  
 Why will you suffer<sup>260</sup> her to flout me thus?  
 Let me come to her.
- Lysander* Get you gone, you dwarf,  
 You minimus,<sup>261</sup> of hindering knot-grass made,<sup>262</sup>  
 You bead,<sup>263</sup> you acorn.<sup>264</sup>
- Demetrius* You are too officious,<sup>265</sup> 330  
 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<sup>266</sup> show of love to her,  
 Thou shalt aby it.
- Lysander* Now she<sup>267</sup> holds me not. 335

258 keen and shrewd = fierce and malicious

259 woman who is ill-tempered/quarrelsome/shrewish/fierce-tongued

260 tolerate, allow

261 smallest of small/insignificant creatures

262 of hindering knot-grass made = made of a knotty-stemmed creeping  
 weed, the flowers of which, steeped in boiling water, were thought to  
 hinder/stunt growth (hindering: an adjective, here)

263 small perforated ball

264 oval nut, seed fruit of the oak tree

265 attentive, eager to please, zealous, meddlesome

266 never so little = the very faintest degree/amount of

267 Hermia

Now follow, if thou dar'st, to try<sup>268</sup> whose right,  
Of thine or mine,<sup>269</sup> is most<sup>270</sup> in Helena.

*Demetrius* Follow? Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl.<sup>271</sup>

EXEUNT LYSANDER AND DEMETRIUS

*Hermia* You, mistress, all this coil<sup>272</sup> is long<sup>273</sup> of you.  
Nay, go not back.

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

EXIT HELENA

*Hermia* I am amazed, and know not what to say.

EXIT HERMIA

345 *Oberon* This is thy negligence. Still<sup>274</sup> thou mistak'st,  
Or else committ'st<sup>275</sup> thy knaveries willfully.<sup>276</sup>

*Puck* Believe me, king of shadows,<sup>277</sup> I mistook.  
Did not you tell me I should know the man  
By the Athenian garments he had on?

268 find out, test, determine\*

269 of thine or mine = yours or mine

270 the greatest

271 cheek by jowl = side by side

272 fuss, confusion, disturbance

273 on account/because of, owing to

274 constantly, continuously, ever, always

275 you perform

276 or ELSE coMITT'ST thy KNAveries WILfully

277 unreal appearances, spirits

And so far<sup>278</sup> blameless proves<sup>279</sup> my enterprise<sup>280</sup> 350  
 That I have 'nointed<sup>281</sup> an Athenian's eyes.  
 And so far am I glad it so<sup>282</sup> did sort<sup>283</sup>  
 As this their jangling<sup>284</sup> I esteem<sup>285</sup> a sport.  
*Oberon* Thou see'st, these lovers seek a place to fight.  
 Hie<sup>286</sup> therefore, Robin, overcast<sup>287</sup> the night, 355  
 The starry welkin<sup>288</sup> cover thou anon,  
 With drooping<sup>289</sup> fog as black as Acheron,<sup>290</sup>  
 And lead these testy<sup>291</sup> rivals so astray  
 As one come not within another's way.  
 Like to<sup>292</sup> Lysander sometime frame thy tongue.<sup>293</sup> 360  
 Then stir Demetrius up with bitter wrong.<sup>294</sup>  
 And sometime rail<sup>295</sup> thou like Demetrius.  
 And from each other look thou lead them thus,  
 Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep,

278 so far = to that extent

279 is demonstrated/established/shown

280 action, undertaking

281 anointed

282 thus

283 turn out

284 wrangling, quarreling, noisy argument

285 think highly of, account

286 hurry

287 darken

288 arch/vault of heaven ("sky")

289 hanging, descending, sinking

290 hell, the infernal regions

291 irritable, peevish, short-tempered

292 like to = just like

293 frame thy tongue = produce/make your voice/speech

294 unfairness, mischief, transgression

295 rage

- 365 With leaden legs and batty<sup>296</sup> wings, doth creep.  
 Then crush<sup>297</sup> this herb into Lysander's eye,  
 Whose liquor<sup>298</sup> hath this virtuous property,<sup>299</sup>  
 To take from thence all error with his<sup>300</sup> might,  
 And make his<sup>301</sup> eyeballs roll with wonted sight.<sup>302</sup>
- 370 When they next wake, all this derision  
 Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,<sup>303</sup>  
 And back to Athens shall the lovers wend,<sup>304</sup>  
 With league<sup>305</sup> whose date<sup>306</sup> till death shall never end.  
 Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
- 375 I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy,  
 And then I will her charmed<sup>307</sup> eye release  
 From monster's view,<sup>308</sup> and all things shall be peace.<sup>309</sup>
- Puck* My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,  
 For night's swift dragons<sup>310</sup> cut<sup>311</sup> the clouds full fast,  
 380 And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,<sup>312</sup>

296 batlike

297 squeeze

298 liquid ("fluid")

299 virtuous property = natural/inherent power/quality (PROperTIE)

300 its

301 Lysander's

302 roll with wonted sight = move/turn with their usual/customary faculty of seeing/eyesight

303 (the rhyme here is deRIZeeON/VIZeeON)

304 return, go off, depart

305 alliance, covenant ("marriage")

306 duration, term

307 enchanted, bewitched

308 monster's view = the seeing/beholding, visual appearance of a monster

309 peaceful (adjective)

310 night's swift dragons = the dragons that pull so rapidly the chariot of Night

311 cut through, break up, dissolve

312 Aurora's harbinger = the dawn's forerunner (the morning star)

At whose approach, ghosts wand'ring here and there  
Troop<sup>313</sup> home to churchyards. Damnèd spirits all,<sup>314</sup>  
That in crossways<sup>315</sup> and floods<sup>316</sup> have burial,<sup>317</sup>  
Already to their wormy<sup>318</sup> beds are gone.

For fear lest day should look their shames<sup>319</sup> upon, 385  
They willfully<sup>320</sup> themselves exile<sup>321</sup> from light,  
And must for aye consort<sup>322</sup> with black-browed<sup>323</sup> night.

*Oberon* But we are spirits of another sort.

I with the morning's love<sup>324</sup> have oft made sport,  
And, like a forester,<sup>325</sup> the groves may tread<sup>326</sup> 390  
Even till<sup>327</sup> the eastern gate,<sup>328</sup> all fiery red,<sup>329</sup>  
Opening on Neptune<sup>330</sup> with fair blessèd beams,  
Turns into yellow gold his<sup>331</sup> salt green streams.

313 go in company

314 damnèd spirits all = the damned spirits whose bodies do not lie in  
churchyards (consecrated ground)

315 crossroads (where suicides were buried)

316 streams, lakes, seas (the dead having drowned and their bodies still lying  
underwater)

317 (burial after a fashion, but not the true, good burial)

318 worm-eaten

319 disgrace, baseness, wickedness

320 voluntarily, deliberately, submissively

321 egZILE (verb)

322 associate, keep company

323 black-browed = frowning, scowling

324 warm affection, kindness (that is, he takes pleasure in the coming of the  
warm sun, and its joyous light)

325 one who supervises/maintains forests/woodlands

326 walk along/in

327 until, the time when

328 (1) entrance, (2) road, path

329 blazing red with dawn (even TILL the EASTern GATE all FIERY RED)

330 opening on Neptune = spreading/expanding/widening out onto the sea/  
ocean

331 the sea's/ocean's

But notwithstanding,<sup>332</sup> haste,<sup>333</sup> make no delay:  
 395 We may effect this business, yet ere day.

EXIT OBERON

*Puck* Up and down, up and down,  
 I will lead them up and down.  
 I am feared in field and town:  
 Goblin, lead them up and down.

ENTER LYSANDER

400 Here comes one.

*Lysander* Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now.

*Puck* Here, villain,<sup>334</sup> drawn<sup>335</sup> and ready. Where art thou?

*Lysander* I will be with thee straight.<sup>336</sup>

*Puck* Follow me, then,  
 To plainer<sup>337</sup> ground.

EXIT LYSANDER

ENTER DEMETRIUS

*Demetrius* Lysander, speak again.

405 Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled?

Speak! In<sup>338</sup> some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

*Puck* Thou coward, art thou bragging to the stars,  
 Telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars,

332 nevertheless

333 (verb)

334 low-born, base-minded, unprincipled scoundrel

335 my sword drawn from its scabbard

336 directly, immediately

337 flatter, smoother

338 are you in

And wilt not come? Come, recreant,<sup>339</sup> come,<sup>340</sup> thou child,  
 I'll whip thee with a rod.<sup>341</sup> He<sup>342</sup> is defiled<sup>343</sup> 410  
 That draws a sword on thee.

*Demetrius* Yea,<sup>344</sup> art thou there?

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

EXEUNT PUCK AND DEMETRIUS

ENTER LYSANDER

*Lysander* He goes before me and still dares me on.  
 When I come where he calls, then he is gone.  
 The villain is much lighter heeled than I: 415  
 I followed fast, but faster he did fly,  
 That fallen<sup>345</sup> am I in dark uneven<sup>346</sup> way,  
 And here will rest me.

HE LIES DOWN

Come, thou gentle day,  
 For if but once thou show me thy gray light,  
 I'll find Demetrius, and revenge this spite. 420

HE SLEEPS

ENTER PUCK AND DEMETRIUS

339 coward, faint-hearted

340 come RECreant COME

341 stick

342 any man

343 dishonored, tainted, made dirty

344 all right, yes

345 that fallen = so that come / caught by chance

346 rugged, irregular

*Puck* Ho, ho, ho! Coward, why com'st thou not?<sup>347</sup>

*Demetrius* Abide<sup>348</sup> me, if thou dar'st, for well I wot<sup>349</sup>

Thou runn'st before me, shifting every place,<sup>350</sup>

And dar'st not stand, nor look me in the face.

Where art thou now?

425 *Puck* Come hither. I am here.

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

Now, go thy way. Faintness constraineth<sup>351</sup> me

To measure out my length<sup>352</sup> on this cold bed.<sup>353</sup>

HE LIES DOWN

430 By day's approach look to be visited.<sup>354</sup>

HE SLEEPS

ENTER HELENA

*Helena* O weary night, O long and tedious night,

Abate<sup>355</sup> thy hours, shine comforts<sup>356</sup> from the east,

That I may back<sup>357</sup> to Athens, by daylight,

From these that my poor company detest.

435 And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye,

347 HO ho HO COWard why COMST thou NOT

348 wait for

349 know

350 shifting every place = constantly changing your location

351 faintness constraineth = exhaustion forces/compels

352 measure out my length = fall prostrate, lie face down

353 (the ground)

354 look to be visited = expect that you (Lysander) will be dealt with/tested

355 reduce, diminish, lessen

356 encouragement, aid, relief

357 go back, return

Steal me awhile from mine own company.

SHE LIES DOWN AND SLEEPS

*Puck* Yet but<sup>358</sup> three? Come one more,  
Two of both kinds make up four.  
Here she comes, curst<sup>359</sup> and sad.

ENTER HERMIA

Cupid is a knavish lad, 440  
Thus to make poor females mad.

*Hermia* Never so weary, never so in woe,  
Bedabbled<sup>360</sup> with the dew and torn with briers.  
I can no further crawl, no further go.  
My legs can keep no pace<sup>361</sup> with my desires. 445  
Here will I rest me till the break of day.

SHE LIES DOWN

Heavens shield Lysander, if they mean a fray!<sup>362</sup>

SHE SLEEPS

*Puck* On the ground  
Sleep sound.  
I'll apply 450  
To your eye,  
Gentle lover, remedy.

358 yet but = still only

359 blasted, confused, put to shame

360 wet/made untidy with dirty liquid

361 speed/rate of stepping/walking/going

362 HEAVens SHIELD lysANDer if they MEAN a FRAY

## HE SQUEEZES JUICE ON LYSANDER'S EYES

When thou wak'st  
 Thou tak'st  
 455 True delight  
 In the sight  
 Of thy former lady's eye.  
 And the country<sup>363</sup> proverb known,<sup>364</sup>  
 That every man should take his own,  
 460 In your waking shall be shown.  
 Jack shall have Jill.  
 Nought shall go ill.  
 The man shall have his mare again,<sup>365</sup> and all shall be well.

EXIT PUCK

363 rural, rustic

364 familiar, generally recognized

365 (*OED*, mare, 1b, cites as a proverbial phrase a pair of lines by Alexander Scott, dated 1562: "The heidismen hes 'cor mundam' in thair mouth, / Bot nevir wt mynd to gif the man his meir" [The headmen/chiefs/leaders have the world's heart/soul in their mouth/on their tongues, but are not smart enough to give the man his mare])

# Act 4



## SCENE I

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, AND HERMIA,  
STILL SLEEPING

ENTER TITANIA AND BOTTOM; PEASEBLOSSOM,  
COBWEB, MOTH, MUSTARDSEED, AND OTHER FAIRIES;  
AND OBERON BEHIND, UNSEEN

*Titania* Come sit thee down upon this flowery bed,  
While I thy amiable<sup>1</sup> cheeks do coy,<sup>2</sup>  
And stick musk roses in thy sleek<sup>3</sup> smooth head,  
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.<sup>4</sup>

*Bottom* Where's Peaseblossom?

5

*Peaseblossom* Ready.

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

*Cobweb* Ready.

1 lovable, lovely (AIMiyABel)

2 stroke, caress

3 having close-lying hair

4 source of joy

10 *Bottom* Mounsieur Cobweb, good mounsieur, get you  
 your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped  
 humblebee<sup>5</sup> on the top of a thistle.<sup>6</sup> And good mounsieur,  
 bring me the honey bag.<sup>7</sup> Do not fret yourself too much in  
 the action,<sup>8</sup> mounsieur. And good mounsieur, have a care  
 15 the honey bag break not. I would be loath to have you  
 overflown<sup>9</sup> with a honey bag, signior. Where's Mounsieur  
 Mustardseed?

*Mustardseed* Ready.

*Bottom* Give me your neaf,<sup>10</sup> Mounsieur Mustardseed.  
 20 Pray you, leave your courtesy,<sup>11</sup> good mounsieur.

*Mustardseed* What's your will?

*Bottom* Nothing, good mounsieur, but to help Cavalery<sup>12</sup>  
 Cobweb to scratch. I must to<sup>13</sup> the barber's, mounsieur, for  
 methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face, and I am such  
 25 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's have the  
 tongs and the bones.<sup>14</sup>

*Titania* Or say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat.

5 red-hipped humblebee = a large bee with red hips (up to his hips in the red clover which, because of their size, only this species of bee can obtain?)

6 purple-flowered prickly plant

7 (not a bag, but an enlarged alimentary canal in which the bee stores up honey)

8 the action = so doing

9 covered, overspread

10 give me your neaf = lend me the use of your clenched hand, fist

11 leave your courtesy = quit/stop your bowing/obeisance

12 Cavalery = gentleman, knight (Italian *cavaliere*)

13 go to

14 tongs . . . bones = percussion instruments (the former = tongs struck by a smaller bit of metal, the latter = clappers, usually wood, held between the fingers and rattled against one another)

*Bottom* Truly, a peck<sup>15</sup> of provender.<sup>16</sup> I could munch your  
 good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to<sup>17</sup> a bottle<sup>18</sup>  
 of hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow.<sup>19</sup> 30

*Titania* I have a venturesome<sup>20</sup> fairy that shall seek  
 The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee new<sup>21</sup> nuts.<sup>22</sup>

*Bottom* I had rather have a handful or two of dried peas. But I  
 pray you, let none of your people stir<sup>23</sup> me. I have an  
 exposition<sup>24</sup> of sleep come upon me. 35

*Titania* Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.  
 Fairies, begone, and be all ways away.<sup>25</sup>

## EXEUNT FAIRIES

So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle 40  
 Gently entwist. The female ivy so  
 Enrings<sup>26</sup> the barky fingers<sup>27</sup> of the elm.  
 O how I love thee! How I dote on thee!

## THEY SLEEP

## ENTER PUCK

15 one quarter of a bushel (used for dry foods, usually grain)

16 food, usually fodder (corn, oats)

17 for

18 bundle

19 equal, match

20 daring, bold, adventuresome

21 from the new crop, fresh, not stale

22 the SQUIRELz HOARD AND fetch THEE new NUTS

23 move, shake, disturb

24 (a mangling of "disposition")

25 all ways away = at a distance in every direction

26 encircles, rings around

27 barky fingers = bark-covered foliage/branches/twigs

*Oberon* Welcome, good Robin. See'st thou this sweet sight?

- 45 Her dotage<sup>28</sup> now I do begin to pity.  
 For meeting her of late behind the wood,  
 Seeking sweet favors from this hateful fool,  
 I did upbraid<sup>29</sup> her, and fall out with her,  
 For she his hairy temples then had rounded<sup>30</sup>  
 50 With coronet<sup>31</sup> of fresh and fragrant flowers.<sup>32</sup>  
 And that same dew, which sometime on the buds  
 Was wont to swell like round and orient<sup>33</sup> pearls,  
 Stood now within the pretty flowerets' eyes  
 Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.<sup>34</sup>  
 55 When I had at my pleasure<sup>35</sup> taunted her,  
 And she, in mild terms, begged my patience,<sup>36</sup>  
 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.  
 60 And now<sup>37</sup> I have the boy, I will undo  
 This hateful imperfection of<sup>38</sup> her eyes.  
 And gentle Puck, take this transformèd scalp<sup>39</sup>  
 From off the head of this Athenian swain,<sup>40</sup>

28 folly, infatuation

29 reproach, reprove

30 encircled, surrounded

31 a wreath/garland

32 with CORoNET of FRESH and FRAgant FLOWers

33 oriental

34 disgrace bewail = dishonor/degradation lament/mourn (for having to ornament so repulsive a head)

35 at my pleasure = at will/as I pleased/to my satisfaction

36 indulgence, toleration

37 now that

38 imperfection of = blemish in

39 head

40 man of low degree, servant

That he awaking when the other<sup>41</sup> do  
 May all to Athens back again repair,<sup>42</sup> 65  
 And think no more of this night's accidents<sup>43</sup>  
 But as the fierce vexation<sup>44</sup> of a dream.  
 But first I will release the fairy queen.

## HE PUTS JUICE IN HER EYES

Be as thou wast wont to be.  
 See as thou wast wont to see. 70  
 Dian's bud, o'er Cupid's flower,  
 Hath such force and blessèd power.<sup>45</sup>  
 Now, my Titania, wake you, my sweet queen.  
*Titania (waking)* My Oberon, what visions have I seen!  
 Methought I was enamored of an ass. 75  
*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<sup>46</sup> the sense.<sup>47</sup> 80  
*Titania* Music, ho music, such as charmeth sleep.

## SUBDUED MUSIC

*Puck (to Bottom, as the ass' head is removed)* Now when thou

41 others

42 go, return

43 happenings

44 harassment, distress, annoyance

45 (not botanically accurate – but who cares?)

46 the four young lovers and Bottom

47 strike more dead . . . the sense = make these sleepers' sleep more like unbreakable death than ordinary sleep

wak'st, with thine own fool's eyes peep.<sup>48</sup>

*Oberon* Sound,<sup>49</sup> music! Come, my queen, take hands with me,

85 And rock the ground<sup>50</sup> whereon these sleepers be.

Now thou and I are new in amity,

And will tomorrow midnight solemnly<sup>51</sup>

Dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly,<sup>52</sup>

And bless it to all<sup>53</sup> fair prosperity.

90 There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be

Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity.

*Puck* Fairy king, attend, and mark.

I do hear the morning lark.

*Oberon* Then, my queen, in silence sad,<sup>54</sup>

95 Trip<sup>55</sup> we after<sup>56</sup> the night's shade.

We the globe can compass<sup>57</sup> soon,

Swifter than the wand'ring<sup>58</sup> moon.

*Titania* Come, my lord, and in our flight,

Tell me how it came this night,

100 That I sleeping here was found,

With these mortals on the ground.

EXEUNT

48 look, see

49 resound

50 rock the ground = shake the ground (by dancing)

51 ceremoniously

52 magnificently, splendidly, nobly

53 the greatest possible

54 orderly, dignified (spelled "sade," as it often was, the rhyme with "shade" becomes comprehensible)

55 prance, skip

56 behind, in pursuit of

57 go round

58 roaming, rambling, irregular

ENTER THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS, AND TRAIN,  
TO THE SOUND OF HORNS

*Theseus* Go, one of you, find out<sup>59</sup> the forester.  
For now our observation<sup>60</sup> is performed.  
And since we have the vaward<sup>61</sup> of the day,  
My love shall hear the music of my hounds. 105  
Uncouple<sup>62</sup> in the western valley, let them go.  
Dispatch,<sup>63</sup> I say, and find the forester.

EXIT ATTENDANT

We will, fair queen, up<sup>64</sup> to the mountain's top,  
And mark the musical confusion<sup>65</sup>  
Of hounds and echo in conjunction.<sup>66</sup> 110  
*Hippolyta* I was with Hercules and Cadmus<sup>67</sup> once,  
When in a wood of Crete they bayed<sup>68</sup> the bear,  
With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear  
Such gallant chiding,<sup>69</sup> for besides the groves,  
The skies, the fountains,<sup>70</sup> every region<sup>71</sup> near 115

59 find out = locate

60 observance of custom, law (in celebrating Midsummer's Eve)

61 vanguard, front rank

62 free the hounds from their leashes

63 hurry (verb)

64 go up

65 blending, intermixing, fusion (conFYUSiON)

66 conDJUNKsiyON

67 Hercules = son of Zeus and Alkmene; Cadmus = legendary founder of Thebes

68 pursued and trapped by hounds' baying/barking

69 gallant chiding = excellent/splendid/grand angry noise/brawling (used of foxhounds)

70 springs

71 tract of land ("place")

Seemed all one mutual cry.<sup>72</sup> I never heard  
So musical a discord,<sup>73</sup> such sweet thunder.<sup>74</sup>

*Theseus* My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,<sup>75</sup>

So flew, so sanded.<sup>76</sup> And their heads are hung

120 With ears that sweep away the morning dew,  
Crook-kneed, and dewlapped<sup>77</sup> like Thessalian<sup>78</sup> bulls –

Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,

Each under each.<sup>79</sup> A cry<sup>80</sup> more tuneable<sup>81</sup>

Was never holla'd<sup>82</sup> to, nor cheered with<sup>83</sup> horn,

125 In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.

Judge when you hear. (*seeing Hermia, Helena, Lysander,  
Demetrius, sleeping*)

But soft! What nymphs are these?

*Egeus* My lord, this is my daughter here asleep,

And this, Lysander; this Demetrius is;

130 This Helena, old Nedar's Helena.

I wonder of<sup>84</sup> their being here together.

*Theseus* No doubt they rose up early, to observe

72 mutual cry = reciprocal/common animal vocal utterance

73 diversity, mingling

74 loud/resounding noise

75 descent, race

76 so flew, so sanded = just-so large-jawed (like bloodhounds), just-so sand-colored

77 crook-kneed and dewlapped = crooked/bent-kneed and with loose skin hanging from their throats

78 Thessaly: rich agricultural region in northern Greece

79 (that is, in pitch)

80 pack

81 well-tuned, harmonious, melodious

82 to call to hounds

83 cheered with = encouraged/encited/animated by

84 wonder of = am astonished at/by

The rite of May. And hearing our intent,

Came here in grace<sup>85</sup> of our solemnity.

But speak, Egeus, is not this the day

135

That Hermia should<sup>86</sup> give answer of her choice?<sup>87</sup>

*Egeus* It is, my lord.

*Theseus* Go, bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns.

## SHOUTS AND HORNS WITHIN

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, AND HERMIA WAKE

Good morrow,<sup>88</sup> friends. Saint Valentine<sup>89</sup> is past.

Begin these woodbirds but to couple<sup>90</sup> now?

140

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, AND HERMIA KNEEL

*Lysander* Pardon,<sup>91</sup> my lord.

*Theseus* I pray you all, stand up.

I know you two are rival enemies.<sup>92</sup>

How comes this gentle concord<sup>93</sup> in the world,

That hatred is so far from jealousy<sup>94</sup>

To sleep by<sup>95</sup> hate, and fear no enmity?<sup>96</sup>

145

85 honor

86 must

87 that HERmya SHOULD give ANswer OF her CHOICE

88 good morrow = good morning

89 February = St. Valentine's Day (when birds were supposed to choose their mates)

90 join in marriage, link together, connect

91 we beg your pardon

92 rival enemies = competing adversaries/antagonists

93 harmony, agreement

94 anger, suspicion, mistrust

95 near, beside

96 ill will, hostility

*Lysander* My lord, I shall<sup>97</sup> reply amazedly,<sup>98</sup>

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,

150 And now do I bethink me, so it is –

I came with Hermia hither. Our intent

Was to be gone from Athens, where we might,

Without<sup>99</sup> the peril of the Athenian law –

*Egeus* Enough, enough, my lord. You have enough.

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

(*to Demetrius*) They would have stol'n away, they would,

Demetrius,

Thereby to have defeated<sup>100</sup> you and me:

You of your wife, and me of my consent,

Of my consent that she should be your wife.

160 *Demetrius* My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,

Of this their purpose hither<sup>101</sup> to this wood,

And I in fury hither followed them,

Fair Helena in fancy<sup>102</sup> following me.

But my good lord, I wot not by what power<sup>103</sup> –

165 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<sup>104</sup>

97 must

98 in bewilderment, consternation, astonishment

99 outside, beyond

100 frustrated, cheated

101 in coming here

102 amorous inclination, love

103 source of external influence/control

104 plaything, toy

Which in my childhood I did dote upon.  
 And all the faith, the virtue<sup>105</sup> of my heart,  
 The object and the pleasure of mine eye, 170  
 Is only Helena. To her, my lord,

Was I betrothed, ere I saw Hermia.

But, like a sickness, did I loathe this food.<sup>106</sup>

But, as in health, come to my natural taste,<sup>107</sup>  
 Now I do wish it, love it, long for it, 175

And will for evermore be true to it.

*Theseus* Fair lovers, you are fortunately met.

Of this discourse<sup>108</sup> we more will hear anon.

Egeus, I will overbear<sup>109</sup> your will:

For in the temple, by and by, with us 180

These couples shall eternally be knit.

And, for<sup>110</sup> the morning now is something worn,<sup>111</sup>

Our purposed<sup>112</sup> 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 THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS, AND TRAIN

*Demetrius* These things seem small and undistinguishable,

Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

105 worth

106 nourishment (used figuratively)

107 discernment, perception, judgment

108 narration, tale (noun)

109 put down, outweigh

110 because

111 something worn = somewhat/to a certain extent spent/exhausted

112 intended

*Hermia* Methinks I see these things with parted<sup>113</sup> eye,  
When every thing seems double.

190 *Helena* So methinks.

And I have found Demetrius like a jewel,  
Mine own, and not mine own.

*Demetrius* Are you sure

That we are awake?<sup>114</sup> It seems to me

That yet we sleep, we dream. Do not you think

195 The Duke was here, and bid us follow him?

*Hermia* Yea, and my father.

*Helena* And Hippolyta.

*Lysander* And he did bid us follow to the temple.

*Demetrius* Why, then we are awake. Let's follow him,  
And by<sup>115</sup> the way let us recount<sup>116</sup> our dreams.

## EXEUNT

200 *Bottom* (*waking*) When my cue comes, call me, and I will  
answer. My next<sup>117</sup> is, "Most fair Pyramus." Heigh-ho! Peter  
Quince? Flute, the bellowsmender? Snout, the tinker?  
Starveling? God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep! I  
have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit  
205 of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go  
about to expound<sup>118</sup> this dream. Methought I was – there is  
no man can tell what. Methought I was – and methought I

113 divided ("double vision")

114 THAT we ARE aWAKE

115 along

116 narrate, give a full account of

117 next line

118 explain, interpret

had – but man is but a patch'd fool,<sup>119</sup> if he will offer<sup>120</sup> to  
 say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard,  
 the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, 210  
 his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report,<sup>121</sup> what my  
 dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad<sup>122</sup> of this  
 dream. It shall be called "Bottom's Dream," because it hath no  
 bottom.<sup>123</sup> And I will sing it in the latter end<sup>124</sup> of a play,  
 before the Duke. Peradventure,<sup>125</sup> to make it the more 215  
 gracious,<sup>126</sup> I shall sing it at her<sup>127</sup> death.

EXIT

119 patched fool = a fool/clown wearing a coat made of patches (particolored bits of cloth)

120 propose, volunteer, try

121 (a mangling of the Bible, 1 Cor. 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him")

122 printed sheet of a song, set to a familiar melody, celebrating/attacking someone/something

123 hath no bottom = is unfathomable/inexhaustible

124 latter end = concluding part

125 perchance, perhaps

126 acceptable, pleasing, likely to find favor

127 Thisbe's (in the workmen's play)

## SCENE 2

*Athens. Quince's house*

ENTER QUINCE, FLUTE, SNOUT, AND STARVELING

*Quince* Have you sent<sup>1</sup> to Bottom's house? Is he come home yet?

*Starveling* He cannot be heard of.<sup>2</sup> Out of doubt he is transported.<sup>3</sup>

5 *Flute* If he come not, then the play is marred.<sup>4</sup> It goes not forward,<sup>5</sup> doth it?

*Quince* It is not possible. You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge<sup>6</sup> Pyramus but he.

*Flute* No, he hath simply the best wit of any handicraft  
10 man<sup>7</sup> in Athens.

*Quince* Yea, and the best person,<sup>8</sup> too, and he is a very paramour<sup>9</sup> for a sweet voice.

*Flute* You must say paragon.<sup>10</sup> A paramour is, God bless us, a thing of naught.<sup>11</sup>

ENTER SNUG, THE WOODWORKER

15 *Snug* Masters, the Duke is coming from the temple, and there

1 a message/messenger

2 cannot be heard of = nothing can be learned/there is no word/information about him

3 is transported = has been carried off (presumably by the fairies)

4 spoiled, useless

5 ahead

6 perform, acquit oneself of

7 handicraft man = artisan, skilled workman

8 appearance, figure, body

9 illicit/secret lover (a mangling that Quince promptly corrects)

10 model/pattern of excellence

11 wickedness, evil, moral wrong

is two or three lords and ladies more<sup>12</sup> married. If our sport had gone forward, we had all been made men.<sup>13</sup>

*Flute* O sweet bully Bottom! Thus hath he lost sixpence a day during his life.<sup>14</sup> He could not have 'scaped<sup>15</sup> sixpence a day. And<sup>16</sup> the Duke had not given him sixpence a day for playing Pyramus, I'll be hanged.<sup>17</sup> He would have deserved it. Sixpence a day in<sup>18</sup> Pyramus, or nothing.<sup>19</sup> 20

## ENTER BOTTOM

*Bottom* Where are these lads?<sup>20</sup> Where are these hearts?<sup>21</sup>

*Quince* Bottom! O most courageous<sup>22</sup> day! O most happy hour!

*Bottom* Masters, I am to discourse<sup>23</sup> wonders. But ask me not 25  
what. For if I tell you, I am no true Athenian. I will<sup>24</sup> tell you everything right as it fell out.

*Quince* Let us hear, sweet Bottom.

*Bottom* Not a word of<sup>25</sup> me. All that I will tell you is, that the

12 in addition

13 made men = men of assured success/prosperity

14 (that is, a pension would be given him as a reward: by the wage scales of the time, sixpence per day is roughly twice what most of these men regularly earned)

15 avoided

16 if

17 I'll be hanged = I'll be damned

18 sixpence a day in Pyramus = there is/ought to be sixpence a day in playing Pyramus

19 (Flute's angry, insistent vehemence suggests that he might have been drinking, especially since at this point, with Bottom apparently unavailable, the likelihood is that nothing will be received for playing Pyramus)

20 fellows

21 spirited/courageous fellows

22 brave, splendid

23 I am to discourse = I will speak/narrate/tell (verb)

24 will in the future

25 from

30 Duke hath dined.<sup>26</sup> Get your apparel<sup>27</sup> together, good strings  
 to<sup>28</sup> your beards, new ribbons to your pumps,<sup>29</sup> meet  
 presently<sup>30</sup> at the palace, every man look o'er his part. For the  
 short and the long is, our play is preferred.<sup>31</sup> In any case, let  
 Thisbe have clean linen,<sup>32</sup> and let not him that plays the lion  
 35 pare<sup>33</sup> his nails, for they shall<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

EXEUNT

26 (that is, it is now after dinnertime, and their play will called for)

27 clothing, costumes (perhaps props, as well)

28 for tying them on

29 (low-heeled shoes for dancing, acrobatics, etc., often decorated with ribbons)

30 promptly, directly, quickly

31 approved, desired, put forward

32 underwear

33 trim

34 must

35 away, go away = move, go along

# Act 5



## SCENE I

*Theseus' palace, Athens*

ENTER THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE,  
LORDS, AND ATTENDANTS

*Hippolyta* 'Tis strange my Theseus, that<sup>1</sup> these lovers speak of.

*Theseus* More strange than true. I never may<sup>2</sup> believe

These antique fables,<sup>3</sup> nor these fairy toys.<sup>4</sup>

Lovers and madmen have such seething<sup>5</sup> brains,

Such shaping<sup>6</sup> fantasies, that apprehend<sup>7</sup>

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

5

1 that which

2 can

3 antique fables = old/old-fashioned legendary/mythological fiction,  
falsehoods, nonsense

4 idle/fantastic tales

5 boiling, tumultuous, ceaselessly agitated

6 formative/creative

7 learn, perceive, understand, become conscious of

Are of imagination all compact.<sup>8</sup>  
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:  
 10 That is the madman. The lover, all<sup>9</sup> as frantic,<sup>10</sup>  
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.<sup>11</sup>  
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy,<sup>12</sup> rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.  
 And as imagination bodies forth<sup>13</sup>  
 15 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation,<sup>14</sup> and a name.  
 Such tricks<sup>15</sup> hath strong imagination,<sup>16</sup>  
 That<sup>17</sup> if it would but<sup>18</sup> apprehend some joy,  
 20 It comprehends<sup>19</sup> some bringer of that joy.  
 Or<sup>20</sup> in the night, imagining some fear,  
 How easy is a bush supposed a bear?  
*Hippolyta* But all the story of the night told over,<sup>21</sup>  
 And all their minds transfigured<sup>22</sup> so together,  
 25 More witnesseth<sup>23</sup> than fancy's images,

8 (1) composed, (2) linked closely together

9 every bit

10 wild, raging

11 brow of Egypt = dark/gypsy face

12 fine frenzy = pure/consummate/elevated delirium/mania

13 bodies forth = embodies, gives shape to

14 local habitation = spatial position, dwelling, residence

15 devices, stratagems

16 iMAGiNAsiON

17 so that

18 would but = only

19 grasps, understands

20 in the same way

21 (1) repeatedly, (2) as a whole, fully

22 altered, changed

23 testifies to, attests, provides evidence for

And grows to something of great constancy.<sup>24</sup>

But howsoever,<sup>25</sup> strange and admirable.<sup>26</sup>

*Theseus* Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.

ENTER LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HERMIA, AND HELENA

Joy,<sup>27</sup> gentle friends, joy and fresh<sup>28</sup> days of love

Accompany your hearts.

*Lysander* More than to us 30

Wait<sup>29</sup> in your royal walks,<sup>30</sup> your board,<sup>31</sup> your bed.

*Theseus* Come now.<sup>32</sup> What masques,<sup>33</sup> what dances shall we  
have,

To wear away this long age<sup>34</sup> of three hours,<sup>35</sup>

Between our after supper and bedtime?

Where is our usual<sup>36</sup> manager of mirth? 35

What revels<sup>37</sup> are in hand? Is there no play

To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?<sup>38</sup>

Call Philostrate.

*Philostrate* Here, mighty Theseus.

24 steadiness, firmness

25 in any case, at any rate

26 strange and admirable = alien/unknown and surprising/wonderful

27 may joy . . .

28 new, additional

29 more than to us wait = may more than we receive await you

30 garden paths

31 food, meals

32 now then

33 (1) masked balls, (2) court entertainments, consisting of music, dancing, and  
some dialogue

34 period, time

35 to WEAR aWAY this LONG age OF three HOURS

36 customary, ordinary, regular

37 festivity, merry making, entertainment

38 a relatively short time, but not precisely an hour

- 40 *Theseus* Say, what abridgment<sup>39</sup> have you for this evening?  
 What masque, what music? How shall we beguile<sup>40</sup>  
 The lazy<sup>41</sup> time, if not with some delight?
- Philostrate* (*gives him paper*) There is a brief,<sup>42</sup> how many sports  
 are ripe.  
 Make choice, of which your highness will<sup>43</sup> see first.
- 45 *Theseus* (*reads*) “The battle with the Centaurs,<sup>44</sup> to be sung  
 By an Athenian eunuch<sup>45</sup> to the harp?”  
 We’ll<sup>46</sup> none of that. That have I told my love,  
 In glory<sup>47</sup> of my kinsman Hercules.  
 “The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals,<sup>48</sup>  
 50 Tearing the Thracian singer<sup>49</sup> in their rage?”  
 That is an old device,<sup>50</sup> and it was played  
 When I from Thebes came last a<sup>51</sup> conqueror.  
 “The thrice three<sup>52</sup> Muses mourning for the death  
 Of Learning, late deceased in beggary?”<sup>53</sup>  
 55 That is some satire, keen and critical,<sup>54</sup>

39 method for shortening time

40 delude, foil, divert

41 slothful, slow moving

42 short list

43 wishes to

44 head, trunk, and arms of a man joined to a horse’s body and legs (Hercules killed the centaur Nessus, who tried to rape Hercules’ wife, but the dying centaur tricked Hercules’ wife into a scheme that later killed Hercules)

45 castrated male

46 we’ll = we’ll have

47 honor

48 tipsy Bacchanals = drunken worshippers of Bacchus, god of wine

49 Thracian singer = Orpheus

50 theatrical plot

51 came last a = came the last time as a

52 thrice three = nine

53 extreme poverty

54 keen and critical = harsh/clever and fault-finding

Not sorting with<sup>55</sup> a nuptial ceremony.

“A tedious<sup>56</sup> brief scene of young Pyramus  
And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth?”

Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?

That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow.

60

How shall we find the concord of this discord?

*Philostrate* A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,

Which is as brief as I have known a play.

But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,

Which makes it tedious. For in all the play,

65

There is not one word apt, one player fitted.<sup>57</sup>

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

70

The passion of loud laughter never shed.

*Theseus* What are they, that do play it?

*Philostrate* Hard-handed men, that work in Athens here,

Which never labored in their minds till now.

And now have toiled<sup>58</sup> their unbreathed<sup>59</sup> memories

75

With this same play, against your nuptial.

*Theseus* And we will hear it.

*Philostrate* No, my noble lord,

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

And it is nothing, nothing in the world,

80

55 sorting with = suitable for, befitting, in harmony with

56 (1) wearisome, (2) long

57 suitable, qualified, competent

58 fatigued, exhausted

59 unpracticed

Unless you can find sport in their intents,  
Extremely stretched<sup>60</sup> and conned<sup>61</sup> with cruel pain,  
To do you service.

*Theseus* I will hear that play,  
For never anything can be amiss<sup>62</sup>

85 When simpleness<sup>63</sup> and duty tender it.  
Go, bring them in, and take your places, ladies.

## EXIT PHILOSTRATE

*Hippolyta* I love not to see wretchedness<sup>64</sup> o'ercharged,<sup>65</sup>  
And duty in his service<sup>66</sup> perishing.<sup>67</sup>

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

90 *Hippolyta* He says they can do nothing in this kind.

*Theseus* The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.

Our sport shall be to take what they mistake.  
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect<sup>68</sup>  
Takes it in might, not merit.<sup>69</sup>

95 Where I have come, great clerks<sup>70</sup> have purposèd  
To greet me with premeditated<sup>71</sup> welcomes,

60 extended, strained

61 studied, memorized

62 wrong, faulty, deficient

63 plain/unassuming manners/disposition, innocence

64 poverty, inferiority

65 overburdened, overloaded, oppressed

66 his service = doing what it must do for its master

67 wasted, squandered

68 perspective, view, regard, consideration

69 in might, not merit = in terms of the capacities/capabilities on display, not  
the worth of what we see

70 churchmen, scholars

71 composed/written out in advance

Where<sup>72</sup> I have seen them shiver and look pale,  
 Make periods<sup>73</sup> in the midst of sentences,  
 Throttle<sup>74</sup> their practiced accent<sup>75</sup> in their fears,  
 And in conclusion<sup>76</sup> dumbly have broke off, 100  
 Not paying me a welcome. Trust<sup>77</sup> me, sweet,  
 Out of this silence, yet,<sup>78</sup> I picked<sup>79</sup> a welcome.  
 And in the modesty of fearful<sup>80</sup> duty  
 I read as much, as from the rattling<sup>81</sup> tongue  
 Of saucy and audacious<sup>82</sup> eloquence. 105  
 Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity  
 In least<sup>83</sup> speak most, to my capacity.<sup>84</sup>

ENTER PHILOSTRATE

*Philostrate* So please your Grace, the Prologue<sup>85</sup> is addressed.<sup>86</sup>  
*Theseus* Let him approach.

FLOURISH OF TRUMPETS

72 in the course of which

73 make periods = make pauses, stop

74 strangle, choke on

75 practiced accent = rehearsed speech

76 in conclusion = finally

77 believe

78 still

79 plucked, gathered, drew

80 frightened, awed

81 rapid-flowing

82 saucy and audacious = presumptuous/cheeky/insolent and confident/  
bold/shameless

83 saying less

84 power to understand/absorb/take in

85 (1) the introductory statement, (2) the person speaking it (the likelier  
meaning, here)

86 ready, prepared

## ENTER QUINCE (“PROLOGUE”)

- 110 *Quince* If we offend, it is with our good will.<sup>87</sup>  
 That<sup>88</sup> you should think, we come not to offend,  
 But<sup>89</sup> with good will. To show our simple skill,  
 That is the true beginning of our end.<sup>90</sup>  
 Consider<sup>91</sup> then, we come but in despite.<sup>92</sup>
- 115 We do not come, as minding<sup>93</sup> to content you,  
 Our true intent is.<sup>94</sup> All for your delight,  
 We are not here. That you should here repent you,<sup>95</sup>  
 The actors are at hand. And by their show<sup>96</sup>  
 You shall know all, that you are like to<sup>97</sup> know.
- 120 *Theseus* This fellow doth not stand upon points.<sup>98</sup>  
*Lysander* He hath rid<sup>99</sup> his prologue like a rough<sup>100</sup> colt. He

87 with our good will = (1) willingly, (2) we intend well

88 though

89 (1) yet, (2) except

90 (1) conclusion, (2) purpose, (3) death

91 (1) remember, (2) think

92 (1) disdain, scorn, contempt, defiance, (2) indignation, anger, annoyance,  
 (3) notwithstanding who and what we are

93 (1) caring, paying attention, (2) remembering, thinking of

94 (Quince is reciting the words as if reading them – and he has the  
 punctuation thoroughly fouled up: there should be no period after “is”; the  
 comma after “delight” should be a period; there should be no period after  
 “here”; the comma after “you” should be a period; the period after “hand”  
 should be a comma; and there should be no comma after “all”)

95 repent you = be sorry/regret that you are here

96 actions, appearance

97 like to = likely to (Quince is probably meant to say something more like  
 “that you might like to know”)

98 stand upon points = (1) worry about punctuation, (2) insist on details,  
 speak with great care, (3) heights, summits, (4) the squares of a  
 chessboard (?)

99 ridden

100 wild, unbroken

knows not the stop.<sup>101</sup> A good moral,<sup>102</sup> my lord. It is not  
enough to speak, but to speak<sup>103</sup> true.

*Hippolyta* Indeed he hath played on his prologue like a child on  
a recorder<sup>104</sup> – a sound, but not in government.<sup>105</sup> 125

*Theseus* His speech was like a tangled chain, nothing  
impaired,<sup>106</sup> but all disordered.<sup>107</sup> Who is next?

ENTER TRUMPETER, FOLLOWED BY BOTTOM (“PYRAMUS”)  
AND FLUTE (“THISBE”), SNOT (“WALL”), STARVELING  
 (“MOONSHINE”), AND SNUG (“LION”)

*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. 130  
This beauteous lady Thisbe is certain.<sup>108</sup>  
This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present  
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder.<sup>109</sup>  
And through Wall’s chink, poor souls, they are content  
To whisper. At the which let no man wonder. 135  
This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,  
Presenteth Moonshine.<sup>110</sup> For, if you will know,  
By moonshine did these lovers think<sup>111</sup> no scorn  
To meet at Ninus’ tomb, there, there to woo.

101 (1) stopping, (2) checking, (3) a period

102 moral teaching/exposition, practical lesson

103 to speak = we must speak

104 wooden flute, played in a vertical rather than a horizontal position

105 in government = under control

106 injured, damaged

107 confused, corrupted

108 without doubt, for sure (serTAIN)

109 separate (verb)

110 (1) moonlight, (2) appearance without substance, foolish talk

111 think it

- 140 This grisly beast, which Lion hight<sup>112</sup> by name,  
 The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,  
 Did scare away, or rather did affright.  
 And as she fled, her mantle she did fall,<sup>113</sup>  
 Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.  
 145 Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth, and tall,<sup>114</sup>  
 And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain.<sup>115</sup>  
 Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful<sup>116</sup> blade,  
 He bravely broached<sup>117</sup> his boiling bloody breast.  
 And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,  
 150 His<sup>118</sup> dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,  
 Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain,  
 At large<sup>119</sup> discourse, while here they do remain.

EXEUNT QUINCE, BOTTOM, SNUG, AND STARVELING

*Theseus* I wonder if the lion be to speak.

*Demetrius* No wonder,<sup>120</sup> my lord. One lion may, when many  
 asses do.

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

112 is called

113 drop

114 handsome, proper

115 (1) slaughtered, (2) stained (?)

116 disgraceful, scandalous

117 stabbed, pierced, thrust through

118 Pyramus'

119 at large = freely

120 no wonder = nothing to marvel at

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 sinister,<sup>121</sup>

Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.

*Theseus* Would you desire lime and hair to speak better? 165

*Demetrius* It is the wittiest partition<sup>122</sup> that ever I heard  
discourse, my lord.

## ENTER BOTTOM

*Theseus* Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence.

*Bottom* O grim-looking night, O night with hue so black,  
O night, which ever art when day is not. 170

O night, O night, alack, alack, alack,

I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot.

And thou, O wall, O sweet, O lovely wall,

That stand'st between her father's ground and mine,

Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall, 175

Show me thy chink, to blink<sup>123</sup> through with mine eyne!

## SNOUT STRETCHES OUT HIS FINGERS

Thanks, courteous Wall. Jove shield thee well, for this.

But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.

O wicked Wall, through whom I see no bliss,

Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me. 180

*Theseus* The wall, methinks, being sensible,<sup>124</sup> should curse  
again.<sup>125</sup>

121 right and sinister = right and left

122 wisest/most intelligent (1) structural division, (2) section of a book

123 look

124 capable of feeling and perceiving

125 back

*Bottom* No, in truth, sir, he should not. “Deceiving me” is  
 Thisbe’s cue. She is to enter now, and I am to spy her through  
 185 the wall. You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you. Yonder she  
 comes.

## ENTER FLUTE

*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,  
 190 Thy stones, with lime and hair knit up in thee.<sup>126</sup>

*Bottom* I see<sup>127</sup> a voice. Now will I to<sup>128</sup> the chink,  
 To spy and<sup>129</sup> I can hear my Thisbe’s face. Thisbe?  
 Thisbe?<sup>130</sup>

*Flute* My love thou art, my love I think.<sup>131</sup>

195 *Bottom* Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover’s grace.<sup>132</sup>  
 And like Limander<sup>133</sup> am I trusty still.<sup>134</sup>

*Flute* And I, like Helen,<sup>135</sup> till the Fates me kill.

*Bottom* Not Shafalus<sup>136</sup> to Procrus<sup>137</sup> was so true.

*Flute* As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you.

126 knit up in thee: Folio reading (First Quarto: knit now againe)

127 see . . . voice: Bottom-mangling of language (see *can* mean perceive mentally/internally – but in the very next line, hear . . . face eliminates all uncertainty)

128 go to

129 if

130 reiteration of the name occurs in the Folio, but not in the First Quarto

131 (this bad poetry rhymes, and bad rhyming poetry often chooses words only for their rhyme)

132 the favor that your lover brings you (?)

133 (mangling of Leander, as in Hero [female] and Leander)

134 always

135 (mangling of Hero)

136 (mangling of Cephalus [male])

137 (mangling of Procris [female])

*Bottom* O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall! 200  
*Flute* I kiss the wall's hole,<sup>138</sup> not your lips at all.  
*Bottom* Wilt thou at Ninny's<sup>139</sup> tomb meet me straightway?  
*Flute* 'Tide<sup>140</sup> life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

EXEUNT BOTTOM AND FLUTE

*Snout* Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so,  
 And, being done, thus Wall away doth go. 205

EXIT SNOUT

*Theseus* Now is the mural<sup>141</sup> down between the two  
 neighbors.  
*Demetrius* No remedy, my lord, when walls are so willful to<sup>142</sup>  
 hear without warning.<sup>143</sup>  
*Hippolyta* This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard. 210  
*Theseus* The best in this kind<sup>144</sup> are but shadows,<sup>145</sup> and the  
 worst are no worse,<sup>146</sup> 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 215  
 noble beasts in, a man and a lion.

138 (1) chink, (2) anus

139 (Ninus mangled, once again)

140 betide: happen, come

141 wall (in the 15th and 16th centuries, "mure" and "mural" are synonymous with "wall")

142 as to

143 (cautioning that they can hear – since, as has long been said, walls have ears . . .)

144 (that is, theatrical plays)

145 vain, unreal, ephemeral, feeble imitations

146 (that is, no worse than this: a left-handed compliment, this play then being at least no worse than other bad plays)

## ENTER SNUG AND STARVELING

- Snug* You, ladies, you (whose gentle hearts do fear  
The smallest monstrous<sup>147</sup> mouse that creeps on floor),  
May now, perchance, both quake and tremble here,  
220 When lion rough, in wildest rage, doth roar.  
Then know that I, as Snug the joiner, am  
A lion fell,<sup>148</sup> nor else no lion's dam,<sup>149</sup>  
For if I should as lion come in strife  
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.<sup>150</sup>
- 225 *Theseus* A very gentle<sup>151</sup> beast, and of a good conscience.<sup>152</sup>
- Demetrius* The very best at<sup>153</sup> a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.
- Lysander* This lion is a very fox for his valor.<sup>154</sup>
- Theseus* True. And a goose<sup>155</sup> for his discretion.<sup>156</sup>
- Demetrius* Not so, my lord. For his valor cannot carry his  
230 discretion. And the fox carries the goose.
- Theseus* His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valor. For  
the goose carries not the fox. It is well. Leave it to his  
discretion, and let us listen to the moon.
- Starveling* This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present —

147 gigantic, monster-sized

148 savage, fierce, cruel

149 I, who am Snug the joiner [woodworker], am here representing a cruel/  
fierce/savage lion, nor am I in any other way a lioness, either150 'twere pity on my life = it would be a cause for sorrow in my life (that is, he  
would be killed)

151 (see Finding List)

152 of a good conscience = moral, right-thinking

153 as, at being

154 courage, bravery (that is, he's *not* courageous: foxes were notorious for  
running from danger)

155 fool, simpleton

156 judgment, faculty of discernment, sagacity

- Demetrius* He should have worn the horns on his head.<sup>157</sup> 235
- Theseus* He is no crescent,<sup>158</sup> and his horns are invisible  
within the circumference.
- Starveling* This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present;  
Myself the man i' the moon do seem<sup>159</sup> to be.
- Theseus* This is the greatest error of all the rest. The man 240  
should be put into the lanthorn. How is it else the Man i' the  
Moon?
- Demetrius* He dares not come there for<sup>160</sup> the candle. For, you  
see, it is already in snuff.<sup>161</sup>
- Hippolyta* I am awear of this moon. Would he would 245  
change!<sup>162</sup>
- Theseus* It appears, by his<sup>163</sup> small light of discretion, that he is  
in the wane.<sup>164</sup> But yet, in courtesy, in all reason,<sup>165</sup> we must  
stay the time.
- Lysander* Proceed, Moon. 250
- Starveling* All that I have to say, is to tell you that the lanthorn 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 lanthorn, for all these  
are in the moon. But, silence. Here comes Thisbe. 255

157 (that is, he is a cuckold)

158 (that is, not a crescent or new moon, but a thick full one – though he is  
*Starveling*)

159 do seem = appear

160 because of

161 in snuff = the accumulated burned wick needs to be cleaned out

162 pass into a new phase (the moon is notoriously changeable)

163 (since his = its, the punning is intensified: the moon's light [illumination]  
and the man's light [brains])

164 he is in the wane = he/it (moon/man light/brain) is decreasing

165 reasonableness

## ENTER THISBE

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

*Snug* O –

SNUG ROARS. THISBE DROPS HER MANTLE AND RUNS OFF

*Demetrius* Well roared, Lion.

*Theseus* Well run, Thisbe.

260 *Hippolyta* Well shone, Moon. Truly, the moon shines with a  
good grace.<sup>166</sup>

THE LION WORRIES THISBE'S MANTLE, AND THEN EXITS

*Theseus* Well moused, Lion.

*Demetrius* And then came Pyramus –

*Lysander* And so the lion vanished.

## ENTER PYRAMUS

265 *Pyramus* Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny<sup>167</sup> beams.

I thank thee, Moon, for shining now so bright.

For by thy gracious, golden,<sup>168</sup> glittering gleams,

I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight.

But stay. O spite!

270 But mark, poor knight,

What dreadful dole<sup>169</sup> is here?

Eyes, do you see?

How can it be?

O dainty duck! O dear!

166 with a good grace = willingly, cheerfully

167 Bottom-mangling (sunny = cheerful, joyous, bright; but . . .)

168 (who has ever seen golden moonlight?)

169 crime, sorrow, fate, destiny

Thy mantle good, 275  
 What, stained with blood?  
 Approach, ye Furies fell!  
 O Fates, come, come,  
 Cut<sup>170</sup> thread and thrum,<sup>171</sup>  
 Quail,<sup>172</sup> crush, conclude, and quell!<sup>173</sup> 280  
*Theseus* This passion, and the death of a dear friend, would go  
 near<sup>174</sup> to make a man look sad.<sup>175</sup>  
*Hippolyta* Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.  
*Pyramus* O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame?<sup>176</sup>  
 Since lion vile hath here deflowered<sup>177</sup> my dear. 285  
 Which is – no, no – which was the fairest dame<sup>178</sup>  
 That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer.<sup>179</sup>  
 Come, tears, confound,<sup>180</sup>  
 Out, sword, and wound  
 The pap<sup>181</sup> of Pyramus; 290  
 Ay, that left pap,  
 Where heart doth hop.<sup>182</sup>

## HE STABS HIMSELF

170 (one Fate spins life's threads; the second draws it out; the third cuts it)

171 ends of warp threads left on a loom when the weaving net is cut off

172 destroy

173 kill

174 go near to = go close to, almost

175 weary, sorrowful

176 lions frame = make lions

177 ravaged, violated

178 lady (that is, a woman of high social status)

179 with cheer = cheerfully

180 destroy, silence (verb)

181 nipple

182 leap, spring

Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.

Now am I dead,

295 Now am I fled,<sup>183</sup>

My soul is in the sky.

Tongue,<sup>184</sup> lose thy light.

Moon take thy flight.

EXIT STARVELING (MOON)<sup>185</sup>

Now die, die, die, die, die.

HE DIES

300 *Demetrius* No die,<sup>186</sup> but an ace<sup>187</sup> for him, for he is but one.

*Lysander* Less than an ace man.<sup>188</sup> For he is dead, he is nothing.

*Theseus* With the help of a surgeon<sup>189</sup> he might yet recover,  
and prove<sup>190</sup> an ass.

*Hippolyta* How chance<sup>191</sup> Moonshine is gone before Thisbe  
305 comes back and finds her lover?

*Theseus* She will find him by starlight. Here she comes, and  
her passion<sup>192</sup> ends the play.

ENTER FLUTE

183 fled from this life ("dead")

184 Bottom-mangling: tongue substituted for eye (?)

185 (the joke being that the workmen are used to taking orders from Bottom,  
and Starveling so understands Bottom's rhetoric)

186 (singular of dice: one die, two dice)

187 die with one pip/point facing up, indicating the number 1

188 ace man = unlucky/misfortunate man

189 medical man, doctor

190 show himself to be

191 does it come about/happen (verb)

192 suffering

*Hippolyta* Methinks she should not use<sup>193</sup> a long one for such a  
Pyramus. I hope she will be brief.

*Demetrius* A mote<sup>194</sup> will turn the balance,<sup>195</sup> which Pyramus, 310  
which Thisbe, is the better – he for a man, God warrant<sup>196</sup>  
us, she for a woman, God bless us.

*Lysander* She hath spied him already with those sweet eyes.

*Demetrius* And thus she means,<sup>197</sup> videlicet<sup>198</sup> –

*Flute* Asleep, my love? 315

What, dead, my dove?

O Pyramus, arise,

Speak, speak. Quite dumb?

Dead, dead? A tomb

Must cover thy sweet eyes. 320

These lily lips,

This cherry nose,

These yellow cowslip cheeks,<sup>199</sup>

Are gone, are gone.

Lovers, make moan. 325

His eyes were green as leeks.<sup>200</sup>

O Sisters Three,<sup>201</sup>

Come, come to me,

193 observe, perform, engage in

194 particle of dust

195 turn the balance = make one of the scale's two pans dip, registering a weight differential

196 protect

197 complains, laments, mourns

198 in other words, namely (language used in legal documents, when introducing a formal protest)

199 (describing eyes and lips of a more feminine sort, nose and cheeks of an unwell kind)

200 (a kind of onion, and very green)

201 (that is, the Fates)

With hands as pale as milk.

330

Lay them<sup>202</sup> in gore,

Since you have shore<sup>203</sup>

With shears his thread of silk.<sup>204</sup>

Tongue, not a word.

Come trusty sword,

335

Come blade, my breast imbrue.<sup>205</sup>

SHE STABS HERSELF

And farewell friends.

Thus Thisbe ends.

Adieu, adieu, adieu.

SHE DIES

*Theseus* Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

340

*Demetrius* Ay, and Wall too.

*Bottom* No, I assure you. The wall is down, that parted their fathers. Will it please you to see the epilogue, or to hear<sup>206</sup> a Bergomask<sup>207</sup> dance between two of our company?

345

*Theseus* No epilogue, I pray you. For your play needs no excuse.<sup>208</sup> Never excuse.<sup>209</sup> For when the players are all dead, there needs none to be blamed. Marry, if he that writ it

202 lay them = place your (the Fates') hands

203 cut ("shorn")

204 thread of silk = silklke thread of life

205 pierce, thrust, plunge

206 (hear a dance?)

207 rustic / clownish dance of Italian origin

208 apology (dramatic epilogues were frequently apologetic / placating in tone)(ekSKYUWS)

209 ekSKYUWZ (verb)

had played Pyramus, and hanged himself in Thisbe's garter,<sup>210</sup>  
 it would have been a fine tragedy. And so it is, truly, and very  
 notably discharged. But come, your Bergomask. Let your  
 epilogue alone.<sup>211</sup>

350

## A DANCE. EXEUNT PLAYERS

The iron tongue<sup>212</sup> of midnight hath told<sup>213</sup> twelve.  
 Lovers, to bed, 'tis almost fairy time.  
 I fear we shall outsleep the coming morn,  
 As much as we this night have overwatched.<sup>214</sup>  
 This palpable gross<sup>215</sup> play hath well beguiled  
 The heavy gait<sup>216</sup> of night. Sweet friends, to bed.  
 A fortnight hold we<sup>217</sup> this solemnity,  
 In nightly revels and new jollity.

355

## ALL LEAVE THE STAGE

## ENTER PUCK

*Puck* Now the hungry lion roars.

And the wolf behowls the moon,

Whilst the heavy<sup>218</sup> ploughman snores,

All with weary task fordone.<sup>219</sup>

360

210 band worn around the leg, to hold up a stocking

211 let your epilogue alone = abstain from your epilogue

212 iron tongue = clapper of a bell, sounding out midnight

213 counted out

214 exhaust/weary oneself by staying awake too long

215 palpable gross = obviously/plainly coarse/rough/clumsy

216 heavy gait = solemn/ponderous/slow walk

217 hold we = we will keep/sustain

218 hard-working

219 exhausted

Now the wasted brands<sup>220</sup> do glow,  
 Whilst the screech owl, screeching loud,  
 365 Puts the wretch that lies in woe<sup>221</sup>  
 In remembrance of<sup>222</sup> a shroud.<sup>223</sup>  
 Now it is the time of night  
 That the graves, all gaping<sup>224</sup> wide,<sup>225</sup>  
 Every one lets forth his sprite,  
 370 In the churchway paths<sup>226</sup> to glide.<sup>227</sup>  
 And we fairies, that do run  
 By<sup>228</sup> the triple<sup>229</sup> Hecate's<sup>230</sup> team,<sup>231</sup>  
 From the presence of the sun,  
 Following darkness like a dream,  
 375 Now are frolic.<sup>232</sup> Not a mouse  
 Shall disturb this hallowed<sup>233</sup> house.  
 I am sent with broom before,<sup>234</sup>

220 wasted brands = fire-diminished pieces of wood, burning on the hearth

221 grief, misery, misfortune

222 in remembrance of = to thinking about

223 winding sheet, the cloth wrapped around a corpse (IN reMEMBRance OF a SHROUD)

224 opening

225 THAT the GRAVES all GAPing WIDE

226 churchway paths = public roads leading to a church (churchyards were burial grounds)

227 move smoothly/easily

228 beside, near

229 (1) Hecate/Proserpina in Hades, (2) Diana on earth, (3) Luna/Phoebe/Cynthia in the sky

230 HECates

231 draught animals, usually horses, harnessed together

232 mirthful, joyous

233 sanctified, consecrated, blessed

234 in advance

To sweep the dust behind<sup>235</sup> the door.

ENTER OBERON AND TITANIA, WITH THEIR TRAIN<sup>236</sup>

*Oberon* Through the house give<sup>237</sup> glimmering light,  
 By<sup>238</sup> the dead and drowsy fire, 380  
 Every elf and fairy sprite  
 Hop as light as bird from brier,  
 And this ditty<sup>239</sup> after me,  
 Sing and dance it trippingly.<sup>240</sup>

*Titania* First rehearse<sup>241</sup> your song by rote,<sup>242</sup> 385  
 To each word a warbling<sup>243</sup> note.  
 Hand in hand, with fairy grace,  
 Will we sing, and bless this place.

THEY SING AND DANCE

*Oberon* Now, until the break of day,  
 Through this house each fairy stray.<sup>244</sup> 390  
 To the best bride-bed will we,  
 Which by us shall blessed be.  
 And the issue,<sup>245</sup> there create,<sup>246</sup>

235 from behind (Puck/Robin Goodfellow was supposed to help with household chores)

236 (probably holding or wearing longish candles/tapers)

237 supply, furnish, spread, distribute

238 near, beside

239 song, ballad

240 light-footed, nimbly

241 recite, perform

242 by memory? all together?

243 melodic

244 roam, wander

245 offspring, descendants ("children")

246 created, conceived

Ever shall be fortunate.<sup>247</sup>  
 395 So shall all the couples three  
 Ever true in loving be.  
 And the blots<sup>248</sup> of Nature's hand  
 Shall not in their issue stand.<sup>249</sup>  
 Never mole, hare lip, nor scar,<sup>250</sup>  
 400 Nor mark prodigious,<sup>251</sup> such as are  
 Despised in nativity,  
 Shall upon their children be.  
 With<sup>252</sup> this field-dew consecrate,<sup>253</sup>  
 Every fairy take his gait,  
 405 And each several<sup>254</sup> chamber bless,<sup>255</sup>  
 Through this palace, with sweet peace,  
 And the owner of it blest<sup>256</sup>  
 Ever shall in safety rest.  
 Trip away, make no stay,  
 410 Meet me all by break of day.

EXEUNT OBERON, TITANIA, AND TRAIN

*Puck* If we shadows have offended,  
 Think but this, and all is mended:

247 prosperous, favored by fortune (FORtyunate)

248 stains, disfigurements

249 be, exist, be present

250 NEver MOLE hair LIP nor SCAR

251 ominous, portentous

252 (which the fairies are carrying)

253 field-dew consecrate (adjective) = consecrated/sanctified dew from fields/  
meadows

254 separate

255 AND each SEVral CHAMber BLESS

256 owner of it blest = the blessed possessor of each such room

That you have but<sup>257</sup> slumbered here,  
 While these visions did appear.  
 And this weak and idle theme,<sup>258</sup> 415  
 No more yielding but<sup>259</sup> a dream,  
 Gentles, do not reprehend.<sup>260</sup>  
 If you pardon, we will mend.<sup>261</sup>  
 And as I am an honest Puck,  
 If we have unearnèd<sup>262</sup> luck, 420  
 Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,<sup>263</sup>  
 We will make amends<sup>264</sup> ere long –  
 Else the Puck a liar call.  
 So good night unto you all.  
 Give me your hands, if we be friends,<sup>265</sup> 425  
 And Robin shall restore<sup>266</sup> amends.

FINIS<sup>267</sup>

257 only, just

258 subject

259 yielding but = fertile/productive than

260 censure, find fault with

261 (1) correct, remove defects (from the play), (2) improve (ourselves/our acting/performance)

262 unmerited, undeserved

263 hissing (the sound made by serpents and by disapproving audiences)

264 reparation, satisfaction

265 clap your hands for us, if you like what we have done

266 give back

267 the end



AN ESSAY BY HAROLD BLOOM



In the midst of the winter of 1595–96, Shakespeare visualized an ideal summer, and he composed *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, probably on commission for a noble marriage, where first it was played. He had written *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet* during 1595; just ahead would come *The Merchant of Venice* and Falstaff's advent in *Henry IV, Part One*. Nothing by Shakespeare before *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is its equal, and in some respects nothing by him afterward surpasses it. It is his first undoubted masterwork, without flaw, and one of his dozen or so plays of overwhelming originality and power. Unfortunately, every production of it that I have been able to attend has been a brutal disaster, with the exception of Peter Hall's motion picture of 1968, happily available on videotape. Only *The Tempest* is as much distorted in recent stagings as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been and is likely to go on being. The worst I recall are Peter Brook's (1970) and Alvin Epstein's (a Yale hilarity of 1975), but I cannot be the only lover of the play who rejects the prevailing notion that sexual violence and bestiality are at the center of this humane and wise drama.

Sexual politics is too much in fashion for me just to shudder

and pass by; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will reassert itself, at a better time than this, but I have much to say on behalf of Bottom, Shakespeare's most engaging character before Falstaff. Bottom, as the play's text comically makes clear, has considerably less sexual interest in Titania than she does in him, or than many recent critics and directors have in her. Shakespeare, here and elsewhere, is bawdy but not prurient; Bottom is amiably innocent, and not very bawdy. Sex-and-violence exalters really should look elsewhere; *Titus Andronicus* would be a fine start. If Shakespeare had desired to write an orgiastic ritual, with Bottom as "this Bacchic ass of Saturnalia and carnival" (Jan Kott), we would have a different comedy. What we do have is a gentle, mild, good-natured Bottom, who is rather more inclined to the company of the elves—Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed—than to the madly infatuated Titania. In an age of critical and theatrical absurdity, I may yet live to be told that Bottom's interest in the little folk represents a potential for child abuse, which would be no sillier than the ongoing accounts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

It is a curious link between *The Tempest*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that these are the three plays, out of thirty-nine, where Shakespeare does not follow a primary source. Even *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which has no definite source, takes a clear starting point from Ovid. *The Tempest* is essentially plotless, and almost nothing happens in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but Shakespeare uniquely took pains to work out a fairly elaborate and outrageous plot for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Inventing plot was not a Shakespearean gift; it was the one dramatic talent that nature had denied him. I think he prided himself of creating and intertwining the four different worlds of character in the *Dream*. Theseus and Hippolyta belong to ancient myth

and legend. The lovers—Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius—are of no definite time or place, since all young people in love notoriously dwell in a common element. The fairies—Titania, Oberon, Puck, and Bottom's four chums—emerge from literary folklore and its magic. And finally, the "mechanicals" are English rustic artisans—the sublime Bottom, Peter Quince, Flute, Snout, Snug, and Starveling—and so come out of Shakespeare's own countryside, where he grew up.

This *mélange* is so diverse that a defense of it becomes the hidden reference in the wonderfully absurd exchanges between Theseus and Hippolyta concerning the music of the hounds in act 4, scene 1, lines 103–27, which I will consider in some detail later. "So musical a discord, such sweet thunder" has been widely and correctly taken as this play's description of itself. G. K. Chesterton, who sometimes thought the *Dream* the greatest of all Shakespeare's plays, found its "supreme literary merit" to be "a merit of design."

As an epithalamium, the *Dream* ends with three weddings, and the reconciliation of Oberon and Titania. But we might not know that all this was an extended and elaborate marriage song if the scholars did not tell us, and from the title on we do know that it is (at least in part) a dream. Whose dream? One answer is: Bottom's dream or his weaving, because he *is* the protagonist (and the greatest glory) of the play. Puck's epilogue, however, calls it the audience's dream, and we do not know precisely how to receive Puck's apologia. Bottom is universal enough (like James Joyce's Poldy Bloom or Earwicker) to weave a common dream for all of us, except insofar as we are Pucks rather than Bottoms. How are we meant to understand the play's title? C. L. Barber pointed out Dr. Johnson's error in believing that "the rite of May" must take

place on May Day, since the young went Maying when the impulse moved them. We are neither at May Day nor at Midsummer Eve, and so the title probably should be read as *any* night at all in midsummer. There is a casual, throwaway gesture in the title: this could be anyone's dream or any night in midsummer, when the world is largest.

Bottom is Shakespeare's Everyman, a true original, a clown rather than a fool or jester. He is a wise clown, though he smilingly denies his palpable wisdom, as if his innocent vanity did not extend to such pretension. One delights in Falstaff (unless one is an academic moralist), but one loves Bottom, though necessarily he is the lesser figure of the two. No one in Shakespeare, not even Hamlet or Rosalind, Iago or Edmund, is more intelligent than Falstaff. Bottom is as shrewd as he is kind, but he is not a wit, and Falstaff is Monarch of Wit. Every exigency finds Bottom round and ready: his response is always admirable. The Puck-induced metamorphosis is a mere externality: the inner Bottom is unfazed and immutable. Shakespeare foregrounds Bottom by showing us that he is the favorite of his fellow mechanicals: they acclaim him as "bully Bottom," and we learn to agree with them.

Like Dogberry after him, Bottom is an ancestor of Richard Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop, and uses certain words without knowing what they signify. Though he is thus sometimes inaccurate at the circumference, he is always sound at the core, which is what Bottom the Weaver's name means, the center of the skein upon which the weaver's wool is wound. There are folkloric magical associations attendant upon weaving, and Puck's choice of Bottom for enchantment is therefore not as arbitrary as first it seems. Whether or not Bottom (very briefly) becomes the carnal lover of the Fairy Queen Shakespeare leaves ambiguous or elliptical,

probably because it is unimportant compared with Bottom's uniqueness in the *Dream*: he alone sees and converses with the fairy folk. The childlike fourfold of Peaseblossom, Moth, Cobweb, and Mustardseed are as charmed by Bottom as he is by them. They recognize themselves in the amiable weaver, and he beholds much that is already his own in them. "On the loftiest of the world's thrones we still are sitting on our own Bottom," Montaigne taught Shakespeare and the rest of us in his greatest essay, "Of Experience." Bottom the natural man is also the transcendental Bottom, who is just as happily at home with Cobweb and Peaseblossom as he is with Snug and Peter Quince. For him there is no musical discord or confusion in the overlapping realms of the *Dream*. It is absurd to condescend to Bottom: he is at once a sublime clown and a great visionary.

There is no darkness in Bottom, even when he is caught up in an enchanted condition. Puck, his antithesis, is an ambivalent figure, a mischief maker at best, and something weirder also, though the play (and Oberon) confine him to harmlessness, and indeed bring benignity out of his antics. Puck's alternate name in both the play and in popular lore is Robin Goodfellow, more a prankster than a wicked sprite, though to call him "Goodfellow" suggests a need to placate him. The word *puck* or *pook* originally meant a demon out for mischief or a wicked man, and Robin Goodfellow was once a popular name for the Devil. Yet throughout the *Dream* he plays Ariel to Oberon's Prospero, and so is under firmly benign control. At the end of the play, Bottom is restored to his external guise, the lovers pair off sensibly, and Oberon and Titania resume their union. "But we are spirits of another sort," Oberon remarks, and even Puck is therefore benevolent in the *Dream*.

The Puck–Bottom contrast helps define the world of the *Dream*. Bottom, the best sort of natural man, is subject to the pranks of Puck, helpless to avoid them, and unable to escape their influence without Oberon’s order of release: though the *Dream* is a romantic comedy, and not an allegory, part of its power is to suggest that Bottom and Puck are invariable components of the human. One of the etymological meanings of “bottom” is the ground or the earth, and perhaps people can be divided into the earthy and the puckish, and are so divided within themselves. And yet Bottom is human, and Puck is not; since he has no human feelings, Puck has no precise human meaning.

Bottom is an early Shakespearean instance of how meaning gets started, rather than merely repeated: as in the greater Falstaff, Shakespearean meaning comes from excess, overflow, florabundance. Bottom’s consciousness, unlike Falstaff’s and Hamlet’s, is not infinite; we learn its circumferences, and some of them are silly. But Bottom is heroically sound in the goodness of his heart, his bravery, his ability to remain himself in any circumstance, his refusal to panic or even be startled. Like Launce and the Bastard Faulconbridge, Bottom is a triumphant early instance of Shakespeare’s invention of the human. All of them are on the road to Falstaff, who will surpass them even in their exuberance of being, and vastly is beyond them as a source for meaning. Falstaff, the ultimate anarchist, is as dangerous as he is fascinating, both life-enhancing and potentially destructive. Bottom is a superb comic, and a very good man, as benign as any in Shakespeare.

Doubtless Shakespeare remembered that in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* Oberon was the benevolent father of Gloriana, who in the allegory of Spenser’s great epic represented Queen

Elizabeth herself. Scholars believe it likely that Elizabeth was present at the initial performance of the *Dream*, where necessarily she would have been the Guest of Honor at the wedding. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, like *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII*, abounds in pageantry. This aspect of the *Dream* is wonderfully analyzed in C. L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, and has little to do with my prime emphasis on the Shakespearean invention of character and personality. As an aristocratic entertainment, the *Dream* bestows relatively little of its energies upon making Theseus and Hippolyta, Oberon and Titania, and the four young lovers lost in the woods into idiosyncratic and distinct personages. Bottom and the uncanny Puck are protagonists, and are portrayed in detail. Everyone else—even the other colorful Mechanicals—are subdued to the emblematic quality that pageantry tends to require. Still, Shakespeare seems to have looked beyond the play's initial occasion to its other function as a work for the public stage, and there are small, sometimes very subtle touches of characterization that transcend the function of an aristocratic epithalamium. Hermia has considerably more personality than Helena, while Lysander and Demetrius are interchangeable, a Shakespearean irony that suggests the arbitrariness of young love, from the perspective of everyone except the lover. But then all love is ironical in the *Dream*: Hippolyta, though apparently resigned, is a captive bride, a partly tamed Amazon, while Oberon and Titania are so accustomed to mutual sexual betrayal that their actual rift has nothing to do with passion but concerns the protocol of just who has charge of a changeling human child, a little boy currently under Titania's care. Though the greatness of the *Dream* begins and ends in Bottom, who makes his first appearance in the play's second scene, and in Puck, who begins act

2, we are not transported by the sublime language unique to this drama until Oberon and Titania first confront each other:

*Oberon* Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

*Titania* What, jealous Oberon? Fairies, skip hence.

I have forsworn his bed and company.

*Oberon* Tarry, rash wanton. Am not I thy lord?

*Titania* Then I must be thy lady. But I know

When thou hast stol'n away from fairy land,

And in the shape of Corin sat all day

Playing on pipes of corn and versing love

To amorous Phillida. Why art thou here,

Come from the farthest step of India,

But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,

Your buskined mistress and your warrior love,

To Theseus must be wedded, and you come

To give their bed joy and prosperity.

*Oberon* How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,

Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,

Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?

Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night

From Perigenia, whom he ravishèd,

And make him with fair Aegle break his faith

With Ariadne and Antiopa?

[2.1.60–80]

In Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*, read by Shakespeare in Sir Thomas North's version, Theseus is credited with many "ravishments," cheerfully itemized here by Oberon, who assigns Titania the role of bawd, guiding the Athenian hero to his conquests, herself doubtless included. Though Titania will retort that "These are

the forgeries of jealousy," they are just as persuasive as her visions of Oberon "versing love / To amorous Phillida," and enjoying "the bouncing Amazon," Hippolyta. The Theseus of the *Dream* appears to have retired from his womanizings into rational respectability, with its attendant moral obtuseness. Hippolyta, though championed as a victim by feminist critics, shows little aversion to being wooed by the sword and seems content to dwindle into Athenian domesticity after her exploits with Oberon, though she retains a vision all her own, as will be seen. What Titania magnificently goes on to tell us is that discord between herself and Oberon is a disaster for both the natural and the human realm:

*Titania* These are the forgeries of jealousy.

And never, since the middle summer's spring,  
 Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,  
 By pavèd fountain or by rushy brook,  
 Or in the beachèd margent of the sea,  
 To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,  
 But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.  
 Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
 As in revenge have sucked up from the sea  
 Contagious fogs which, falling in the land,  
 Hath every pelting river made so proud  
 That they have overborne their continents.  
 The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,  
 The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn  
 Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard;  
 The fold stands empty in the drownèd field,  
 And crows are fatted with the murrion flock.  
 The nine men's morris is filled up with mud,

And the quaint mazes in the wanton green  
 For lack of tread are undistinguishable.  
 The human mortals want their winter cheer.  
 No night is now with hymn or carol blest.  
 Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
 Pale in her anger, washes all the air  
 That rheumatic diseases do abound.  
 And thorough this distemperature we see  
 The seasons alter. Hoary-headed frosts  
 Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose;  
 And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
 An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds  
 Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,  
 The chiding autumn, angry winter, change  
 Their wonted liveries. And the mazèd world,  
 By their increase, now knows not which is which.  
 And this same progeny of evils comes  
 From our debate, from our dissension.  
 We are their parents and original.

[2.1.81-117]

No previous poetry by Shakespeare achieved this extraordinary quality; he finds here one of his many authentic voices, the paean of natural lament. Power in the *Dream* is magical rather than political; Theseus is ignorant when he assigns power to the paternal, or to masculine sexuality. Our contemporary heirs of the materialist metaphysics of Iago, Thersites, and Edmund see Oberon as only another assertion of masculine authority, but they need to ponder Titania's lamentation. Oberon is superior in trickery, since he controls Puck, and he will win Titania back to

what he considers his kind of amity. But is that a reassertion of male dominance, or of something much subtler? The issue between the fairy queen and king is a custody dispute: "I do but beg a little changeling boy / To be my henchman"—that is, Oberon's page of honor in his court. Rather than the unbounded prurience that many critics insist upon, I see nothing but an innocent assertion of sovereignty in Oberon's whim, or in Titania's poignant and beautiful refusal to yield up the child:

Set your heart at rest:

The fairy land buys not the child of me.  
 His mother was a votress of my order,  
 And in the spicèd Indian air, by night,  
 Full often hath she gossiped by my side,  
 And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,  
 Marking th'embarked traders on the flood.  
 When we have laughed to see the sails conceive  
 And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind,  
 Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait  
 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 boy did die,  
 And for her sake do I rear up her boy,  
 And for her sake I will not part with him.

[2.1.121–137]

Ruth Nevo accurately observes that Titania has so assimilated her votaries to herself that the changeling child has become her own, in a relationship that firmly excludes Oberon. To make the

boy his henchman would be an assertion of adoption, like Prospero's initial stance toward Caliban, and Oberon will utilize Puck to achieve this object. But why should Oberon, who is not jealous of Theseus, and is willing to be cuckolded by Titania's enchantment, feel so fiercely in regard to the changeling's custody? Shakespeare will not tell us, and so we must interpret this ellipsis for ourselves.

One clear implication is that Oberon and Titania have no male child of their own; Oberon being immortal need not worry about an heir, but evidently he has paternal aspirations that his henchman Puck cannot satisfy. It may also be relevant that the changeling boy's father was an Indian king, and that tradition traces Oberon's royal lineage to an Indian emperor. What matters most appears to be Titania's refusal to allow Oberon any share in her adoption of the child. Perhaps David Wiles is correct in arguing that Oberon desires to parallel the pattern of Elizabethan aristocratic marriages, where the procreation of a male heir was the highest object, though Elizabeth herself as Virgin Queen undoes the tradition, and Elizabeth is the ultimate patroness of the *Dream*.

I think the quarrel between Titania and Oberon is subtler, and turns on the question of the links between mortals and immortals in the play. Theseus' and Hippolyta's amours with the fairies are safely in the past, and Oberon and Titania, however estranged from each other, have arrived in the wood near Athens to bless the wedding of their former lovers. Bottom, one of the least likely of mortals, will sojourn briefly among the fairies, but his metamorphosis, when it comes, is merely outward. The Indian child is a true changeling; he will live out his life among the immortals. That is anything but irrelevant to Oberon: he and his subjects have their mysteries, jealously guarded from mortals. To exclude



Fetch me that flower. The herb I show'd thee once.  
 The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid  
 Will make or man or woman madly dote  
 Upon the next live creature that it sees.  
 Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again  
 Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

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

*Oberon* Having once this juice,  
 I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,  
 And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.  
 The next thing then she, waking, looks upon,  
 Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,  
 On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,  
 She shall pursue it with the soul of love.  
 And ere I take this charm from off her sight,  
 As I can take it with another herb,  
 I'll make her render up her page to me.

[2.1.148-185]

The flower love-in-idleness is the pansy; the "fair vestal, throned by the west" is Queen Elizabeth I, and one function of this fairy vision is to constitute Shakespeare's largest and most direct tribute to his monarch during her lifetime. She passes on, and remains fancy free; the arrow of Cupid, unable to wound the Virgin Queen, instead converts the pansy into a universal love charm. It is as though Elizabeth's choice of chastity opens up a cosmos of erotic possibilities for others, but at the high cost of accident and arbitrariness replacing her reasoned choice. Love at first sight, exalted in *Romeo and Juliet*, is pictured here as calamity.

The ironic possibilities of the love elixir are first intimated when, in one of the play's most exquisite passages, Oberon plots the ensnarement of Titania:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
 Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
 Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
 With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.  
 There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,  
 Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight.  
 And there the snake throws her enameled skin,  
 Weed 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.

[2.1.249–258]

The contrast between those first six lines and the four that come after grants us an aesthetic *frisson*; the transition is from John Keats and Alfred, Lord Tennyson to Robert Browning and the early T. S. Eliot, as Oberon modulates from sensuous naturalism to grotesque gusto. Shakespeare thus prepares the way for the play's great turning point in act 3, scene 1, where Puck transforms Bottom, and Titania awakens with the great outcry, "What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?" The angel is the imperturbable Bottom, who is sublimely undismayed that his amiable countenance has metamorphosed into an ass head.

This wonderfully comic scene deserves pondering: Who among us could sustain so weird a calamity with so equable a spirit? One feels that Bottom could have undergone the fate of Franz Kafka's Gregor Samsa with only moderate chagrin. He enters almost on cue, chanting, "If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine," scattering

his fellows. Presumably discouraged at his inability to frighten Bottom, the frustrated Puck chases after the Mechanicals, taking on many fearsome guises. Our bully Bottom responds to Peter Quince's "Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated," by cheerfully singing a ditty hinting at cuckoldry, thus preparing us for a comic dialogue that even Shakespeare was never to surpass:

*Titania* I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.

Mine ear is much enamored of thy note.

So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape,

And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me

On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

*Bottom* Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that.

And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays. The more the pity, that some honest neighbors will not make them friends. Nay, I can glee 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.

*Titania* Out of this wood do not desire to go.

Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.

[3.1.132-146]

Even C. L. Barber somewhat underestimates Bottom, when he says that Titania and Bottom are "fancy against fact," since "enchantment against Truth" is more accurate. Bottom is unfailingly courteous, courageous, kind, and sweet-tempered, and he humors the beautiful queen whom he clearly knows to be quite mad. The ironies here are fully in Bottom's control, and are kept gentle by his tact. Nothing else in the *Dream* is as pithy an account of its

erotic confusions: "reason and love keep little company together nowadays." Bottom too can "gleek" (jest) upon occasion, which is the only other possibility, should poor Titania prove to be sane. Neither wise nor beautiful, Bottom sensibly wishes to get out of the wood, but he does not seem particularly alarmed when Titania tells him he is a prisoner. Her proud assertion of rank and self is hilarious in its absurd confidence that she can purge Bottom's "mortal grossness" and transform him into another "airy spirit," as though he could be another changeling like the Indian boy:

*Titania* I am a spirit of no common rate.

The summer, still, doth tend upon my state,

And I do love thee. Therefore, go with me.

I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee.

And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,

And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep.

And I will purge thy mortal grossness so,

That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.

Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustardseed!

[3.1.136-144]

Bottom, amiable enough to the infatuated Titania, is truly charmed by the four elves, and they by Bottom, who would be one of them even without benefit of Puckish translation:

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

*Peaseblossom* Hail, mortal!

*Cobweb* Hail!

*Moth* Hail!

*Mustardseed* Hail!

*Bottom* I cry your worships mercy, heartily. I beseech your  
 worship's name?

*Cobweb* Cobweb.

*Bottom* I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good  
 Master Cobweb. If I cut my finger, I shall make bold with  
 you. Your name, honest gentleman?

*Peaseblossom* Peaseblossom.

*Bottom* I pray you, commend me to Mistress Squash, your  
 mother, and to Master Peascod, 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 patience  
 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 water, ere now. I desire you of more acquaintance, good Master Mustardseed.

[3.1.145-175]

Though Titania will follow this colloquy of innocents by ordering the elves to lead Bottom to her bower, it remains ambiguous exactly what transpires there amidst the nodding violet, luscious woodbine, and sweet musk roses. If you are not Jan Kott or Peter Brook, does it matter? Does one remember the play for “orgiastic bestiality” or for Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed? Undoubtedly played by children then, as they are now, these elves are adept at stealing from honeybees and butterflies, a precarious art emblematic of the entire *Dream*. Bottom’s grave courtesy to them and their cheerful attentiveness to help help establish an affinity that suggests what is profoundly childlike (not childish, not bestial) about Bottom. The problem with reacting to resenters is that I sometimes hear the voice of my late mentor, Frederick A. Pottle, of Yale, admonishing me: “Mr. Bloom, stop beating dead woodchucks!” I will do so, and am content to cite William Empson on Kott: “I take my stand beside the other old buffers here. Kott is ridiculously indifferent to the Letter of the play and labors to befoul its spirit.”

Fairies in general (Puck in particular) are likely to miss one target and hit another. Instructed by Oberon to divert Demetrius’ passion from Hermia to Helena, Puck errs and transforms Lysander into Helena’s pursuer. When Puck gets it right at second try, the foursome become more absurd than ever, with Helena, believing herself mocked, fleeing both suitors, while Hermia languishes in a state of amazement. Act 3 concludes with all four ex-

hausted lovers being put to sleep by Puck, who carefully rearranges Lysander's affections to their original object, Hermia, while keeping Demetrius enthralled by Helena. This raises the happy irony that the play will never resolve: Does it make any difference at all who marries whom? Shakespeare's pragmatic answer is: Not much, whether in this comedy or another, since all marriages seem in Shakespeare to be headed for unhappiness. Shakespeare seems always to hold what I call the "black box" theory of object choice. The airliner goes down, and we seek out the black box to learn the cause of the catastrophe, but our black boxes are unfindable, and our marital disasters are as arbitrary as our successes. Perhaps this should be called "Puck's Law": Who can say whether Demetrius-Helena or Lysander-Hermia will prove the better match? Act 3 of the *Dream* brushes aside any such question, ending as it does with Puck singing:

Jack shall have Jill,  
Nought shall go ill.

[3.2.461-462]

Everyone should collect favorite acts in Shakespeare; one of mine would be act 4 of the *Dream*, where wonder crowds wonder and eloquence overflows, as Shakespeare manifests his creative exuberance without pause. The orgiastic reading is prophetically dismissed by the first scene, where Titania sits the amiable Bottom down upon a flowery bed, caresses his cheeks, sticks musk roses in his head, and kisses his ears. This scarcely arouses Bottom to lust:

*Bottom*       Where's Peaseblossom?  
*Peaseblossom* Ready.

*Bottom* Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's  
Mounsieur Cobweb?

*Cobweb* Ready.

*Bottom* Mounsieur Cobweb, good mounsieur, get you  
your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped  
humblebee on the top of a thistle. And good mounsieur,  
bring me the honey bag. Do not fret yourself too much in the  
action, mounsieur. And good mounsieur, have a care the  
honey bag break not. I would be loath to have you  
overflowen with a honey bag, signior. Where's Mounsieur  
Mustardseed?

*Mustardseed* Ready.

*Bottom* Give me your neaf, Mounsieur Mustardseed. Pray  
you, leave your courtesy, good mounsieur.

*Mustardseed* What's your will?

*Bottom* Nothing, good mounsieur, but to help Cavalery  
Cobweb to scratch. I must to the barber's, mounsieur, for  
methinks I am marvelous 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's have the  
tongs and the bones.

*Titania* Or say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat.

*Bottom* Truly, a peck of provender. I could munch your  
good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle of  
hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow.

[4.1.5-32]

What hath Puck wrought: for Titania, a considerable indignity, no doubt, but for Bottom a friendship with four elves. Since

Bottom is getting drowsy, we can understand his mixing up Cobweb with Peaseblossom, but he is otherwise much himself, even if his eating habits perforce are altered. He falls asleep, entwined with the rapt Titania, in a charmingly innocent embrace. Oberon informs us that, since she has surrendered the changeling boy to him, all is forgiven so that Puck can cure her enchantment, and in passing, Bottom's, though the weaver resolutely goes on sleeping. Shakespeare's touch here is astonishingly light; metamorphoses are represented by the dance of reconciliation that restores the marriage of Oberon and Titania:

Come, my queen, take hands with me,  
And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be.

[4.1.84-85]

The four lovers and Bottom stay fast asleep even as Theseus, Hippolyta, and their train make a boisterous entry with a dialogue that is Shakespeare's bravura defense of his art of fusion in this play:

*Theseus*    Go, one of you, find out the forester.  
For now our observation is perform'd.  
And since we have the vaward of the day,  
My love shall hear the music of my hounds.  
Uncouple in the western valley, let them go.  
Dispatch, I say, and find the forester.

EXIT 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 once,  
 When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear,  
 With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear  
 Such gallant chiding, 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 kind,  
 So flewed, so sanded. And their heads are hung  
 With ears that sweep away the morning dew,  
 Crook-kneed, and dewlapped like Thessalian bulls –  
 Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,  
 Each under each. A cry more tuneable  
 Was never holla'd to, nor cheered with horn,  
 In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.  
 Judge when you hear. But soft, what nymphs are these?

[4. I. 102–130]

The musical discord holds together four different modes of representation: Theseus and Hippolyta, from classical legend; the four young lovers, from every place and every time; Bottom and his fellow English rustics; the fairies, who in themselves are madly eclectic. Titania is Ovid's alternate name for Diana, while Oberon comes out of Celtic romance, and Puck or Robin Goodfellow is English folklore. In their delightfully insane dialogue, Theseus and Hippolyta join in celebrating the wonderful nonsense of the Spartan hounds, bred only for their baying, so that they are "slow in pursuit." Shakespeare celebrates the "sweet thunder" of his comic extravagance, which like Theseus' hounds is in no particular hurry to get anywhere, and which still has superb surprises for

us. I pass over the awakening of the four lovers (Demetrius now in love with Helena) to come at the finest speech Shakespeare had yet written, Bottom's sublime reverie upon waking up:

*Bottom* When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer. My next is, "Most fair Pyramus." Heigh-ho! Peter Quince? Flute, the bellowsmender? Snout, the tinker? Starveling? God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep! I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I was – and methought I had – but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called "Bottom's Dream," because it hath no bottom. And I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death.

[4.1.200–216]

"The Spirite searcheth . . . the botome of Goddes secretes," is the Geneva Bible's rendering of 1 Corinthians 2:9–10. Bottom's parody of 1 Corinthians 2:9 is audacious, and allows Shakespeare to anticipate William Blake's Romantic vision, with its repudiation of the Pauline split between flesh and spirit, though Bottom seems to have heard the text preached to him in the Bishops' Bible version: "The eye hath not seene, and the eare hath not heard, neyther have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath purposed. . . ."

For Bottom, “the eye . . . hath not heard, the ear . . . hath not seen, [the] hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report” the truths of his bottomless dream. Like William Blake after him, Bottom suggests an apocalyptic, unfallen man, whose awakened senses fuse in a synesthetic unity. It is difficult not to find in Bottom, in this his sublimest moment, an ancestor not just of Blake’s Albion but of Joyce’s Earwicker, the universal dreamer of *Finnegans Wake*. Bottom’s greatness—Shakespeare upon his heights—emerges most strongly in what could be called “Bottom’s Vision,” a mysterious triumph he is to enjoy before Theseus as audience, where the “play” cannot be the mere travesty, the play-within-the-play *Pyramus and Thisbe*:

I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called “Bottom’s Dream,” because it hath no bottom. And I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death.

Whose death? Since we do not know the visionary drama playing out in Bottom’s consciousness, we cannot answer the question, except to say that it is neither Titania nor Thisbe. When, in the next scene, sweet bully Bottom returns joyously to his friends, he will not speak in these tones. Shakespeare, though, has not forgotten this “more gracious” aspect of Bottom, and subtly opposes it to the famous speech of Theseus that opens act 5. Hippolyta muses on the strangeness of the story told by the four young lovers, and Theseus opposes his skepticism to her wonder.

*Theseus* More strange than true. I never may believe  
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
 The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact.  
 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?

[5.1.2-22]

Theseus himself could be called, not unkindly, "highly un-imaginative," but there are two voices here, and one perhaps is Shakespeare's own, half-distancing itself from its own art, though declining also to yield completely to the patronizing Theseus. When Shakespeare writes these lines, the lover sees Helen's beauty in a gypsy girl's brow, and yet the prophetic consciousness somewhere in Shakespeare anticipates Antony seeing Helen's beauty in Cleopatra. "Imagination," to Shakespeare's contemporaries, was "fantasy," a powerful but suspect faculty of the mind. Sir

Francis Bacon neatly stated this ambiguity: "Neither is the Imagination simply and only a messenger; but is invested with or at leastwise usurpeth no small authority in itself, besides the duty of the message."

"Usurpeth" is the key word there; the mind for Bacon is the legitimate authority, and imagination should be content to be the mind's messenger, and to assert no authority for itself. Theseus is more a Baconian than a Shakespearean, but Hippolyta breaks away from Theseus's dogmatism:

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.

[5.1.23-27]

You could give Hippolyta's lines a rather minimal interpretation, stressing that she herself distrusts "fancy's images," but that seems to me a woeful reading. For Theseus, poetry is a furor, and the poet a trickster; Hippolyta opens to a greater resonance, to transfiguration that affects more than one mind at once. The lovers are her metaphor for the Shakespearean audience, and it is ourselves, therefore, who grow into "something of great constancy," and so are re-formed, strangely and admirably. Hippolyta's majestic gravity is an implicit rebuke to Theseus' scoffing at the poet's "fine frenzy." Critics rightly have expanded their apprehension of Shakespeare's "story of the night" beyond the *Dream*, marvelous as the play is. "No, I assure you. The wall is down, that parted their fathers" is Bottom's final resonance in the play, and transcends Theseus' patronizing understanding. "The best in this

kind are but shadows,” Theseus says of all plays and playing—and while we might accept this from Macbeth, we cannot accept it from the dull Duke of Athens. Puck, in the Epilogue, only seems to agree with Theseus when he chants that “we shadows” are “but a dream,” since the dream is this great play itself. The poet who dreamed Bottom was about to achieve a great dream of reality, Sir John Falstaff, who would have no interest in humoring Theseus.

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## FINDING LIST



Repeated unfamiliar words and meanings, alphabetically arranged, with act, scene, and footnote number of first occurrence, and in the spelling (form) of that first occurrence

aby	3.2.154	certain	1.1.106
against	1.1.139	chide	3.2.42
amend	2.1.160	chink	3.1.32
an	1.2.40	civil	2.1.193
anon	2.1.19	companion	1.1.21
aye	1.1.79	company	1.2.1
bank	2.1.245	compare	2.2.84
befall	1.1.74	confusion	1.1.172
before	1.1.51	corn	2.1.94
belike	1.1.145	counsel	1.1.232
beshrew	2.2.55	course	1.1.152
blood	1.1.72	dear	3.2.95
bold	1.1.70	decking	1.1.226
bosom	1.1.31	derision	3.2.111
brake	3.1.4	despised	2.2.64
by	2.1.34	devices	1.2.74

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devised	1.1.228	knavery	3.1.61
do	1.1.107	knavish	2.1.44
dotes	1.1.123	knit	2.2.50
duty	1.1.141	lanthorn	3.1.29
e'er	3.1.45	lordship	1.1.95
effect	2.1.265	livery	1.1.78
ere	1.1.93	maiden	1.1.87
fair	1.1.3	mark	3.1.70
fancy/fantasy	1.1.39	marry	1.2.8
favor	1.1.208	mechanicals	3.2.8
favors	2.1.14	methinks	1.1.8
fly	1.1.220	misprised	3.2.68
fond	2.1.266	mistress	3.1.76
force	22.2.62	modesty	1.1.72
forth	1.1.188	must	3.1.46
fray	3.2.117	offices	2.2.14
game	1.1.254	passing	2.1.23
gentle	1.1.185	pat	3.1.2
glimmering	2.1.108	perforce	2.1.31
good	1.1.24	pomp	1.1.22
graces	1.1.222	poor	1.1.179
green	2.1.10	present	3.1.31
grove	2.1.33	pretty	2.1.174
hateful	2.1.259	round	2.1.181
haunted	3.1.58	rude	2.1.192
hold/held	1.1.65	shall	1.1.128
honest	3.1.77	spite	1.1.162
injury	2.1.187	sport	2.1.121
interlude	1.2.5	sprite	2.1.45
kind	1.1.61	stay	1.1.191

FINDING LIST

still	1.1.216	visage	1.1.224
take	3.2.14	wanting/wants	1.1.62
tarry	2.1.89	wanton	2.1.89
tender	3.2.81	wherefore	2.2.106
tinker	1.1.2	wit	3.1.71
train	2.1.28	within	2.1.179
translated	3.1.62	wont	1.1.231
true	1.1.153	woodbine	2.1.249
truly	1.1.199	worthy	1.1.60
try	3.2.268	would	1.1.66
use	2.1.226	yoke	1.1.97
very	2.1.69		