

## A Midsummer Night's Dream Introduction

Like all children, Shakespeare learned about the world around the kitchen table. As the son of a local politician and one-term mayor, warring neighbors often debated around his. Will would eat in nooks, read his books and listen. His young mind was fleshing-out scenes with conflict and characters before he knew what plays were; his impressions earning him sniggles and snorts from his friends. The constant counterpoint of argument became the natural way of thinking for Will. Besides, life itself was antithetical, so beautiful yet always ending in death - it was possibly Will who slaughtered the calves for his father's expensive gloves. Antithesis became instinctive to Will. He learned to see the other side to any argument; that is why he was so likeable. His ability to create and play with opposites also helped him produce richly funny and deeply profound drama.

Shakespeare's wealth and success were a direct result of the truth he wrote, even though many aspects of Elizabethan life could not be overtly expressed as they are so freely today. He left the subtext to his actors. The dripping slut beneath the Queen's robes or the milk-white coward ensconced in armor, were in the thoughts, gestures and the invention of words. Remembering that Elizabethans lived comparatively short and violent lives, drank way more than us, and had sex much more regularly, should get us digging for meanings and practicing color and nuance in our performances.

Will would listen to neighbors pacing and muttering in his hallways; everyone practicing their arguments and favorite bits before their audience. The court practised much harder for an audience with Elizabeth. How one coined one's thoughts in Shakespeare's day mattered. Perhaps soliloquies were instantly accepted because everyone practiced. It was worth the effort to be accurate, to be eloquent.

Now, deciding how Shakespearean words make it to the mouths of the characters is the actor's great challenge. Are they new thoughts, are the time-worn truths, are they simply playing with what is invented before, are they most likely a mix of practiced truths and newly-learned facts clashing and trying to resolves themselves? Are they sometimes brilliant; do they occasionally surprise the speaker, fill him with wonder? Are they fresh-minded, white-hot off the brain, as Michael Langham loved to express?

So, I shall search for argument and antithesis when imagining my perfect production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I shall not be encouraging extra silly biz; we have all seen a ton of that and have our favorite bits. This play is not just a summer laugh-machine; it is a rich play. It is also a deeply Elizabethan play, filled with antithesis. Like *Twelfth Night*, it is crammed with people deceiving themselves and others. Not only do I believe that a rich performance of *King Lear* will provoke much painful laughter, an accurate performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might sincerely question behaviors and morals.

Let's start with the lovers. Why do they always have to be pretty? Plus-sized girls and nerdy guys get married and re-produce. They are just as intent upon mating and marrying

as everyone else. The text describes Helena as tall and blond, while she thinks of herself as "ugly as a bear." Hermia is short and dark. Helena fears Hermia, so perhaps Hermia is quite muscular or stout. Let me be blunt - for my antithetical production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* my lovers will not be what society values as attractive. Helena might have a pretty face but will weigh over 200 lbs. Hermia will be short and look like she plays hooker on a women's rugby squad. Both girls come from rich families so their clothes fit them well. To me, both boys are completely untested - boastful yet nerdy - unimpressive specimen's (Correy and Trevor from The Traylor Park Boys) who would lose to the girls in a tag team wrestling match. They are completely driven by their ever-impending erections. If they wore Athenian smocks I would get props involved. I suggest that Theseus proves a very competent leader in getting them all married off.

If played desperately straight, will this seem as though unattractive people are being mocked? No more so than attractive couples would be mocked. They are four very young people vigorously discovering the opposite sex. They are being led by their loins as you, and I, and certainly Shakespeare, was. Will well knew about the power the little head over the big one. Had he avoided that scratchy romp with Anne, he might have lived a free man! I say the lovers are NOT pretty; the more unattractive, the better. Play it all dead straight and see what happens!

To save wages or fill egos, the roles of Theseus, Hippolyta, Titania and Oberon are often double-cast, meaning two actors play four parts. I do not think this serves the play. Theseus is a mature and reasoned caucasian ruler. Hippolyta is Queen of the Amazons - a dark-skinned warrior tribe of women, who would shear off a breast for an unimpeded bowstring release. My Hippolyta would be six feet, five inches tall and look like she holds the Olympic Javelin Record. Since she has just been conquered and brought back to Athens one might wonder how willing a bride she will be?

I also imagine Oberon as a tall dark-skinned Olympian, perhaps a decathlete. We might well understand Oberon and Hippolyta having a tempestuous affair, as the text suggests. Titania, being an archetypical Shakespearean heroine, filled with love and motivated by empathy, might also be attracted to Theseus. If they both have white skin, then we have visually and temperamentally, two antithetical pairs. Despite the supposedly happy ending of the play, Theseus and Hippolyta have married for political expediency and Oberon has cruelly stolen the changeling child from Titania. *The Day after A Midsummer Night's Dream* might be an even more interesting and antithetical play had Shakespeare the inclination and license to write it.

I'll never forget the 1971 Ashland, Oregon mechanicals. I actually hauled myself over two elderly patrons to get to the aisle to stretch out. My stomach was cramping so fiercely from laughter, I feared for my well-being. These men were salt-of-the-earth workmen. They were very comfortable with each other, had been doing small shows for years, and were quite excited about even the possibility of performing *Pyramus and Thisbe* for the Duke and Duchess, on their wedding night. They played it ALL dead straight, and I am sure caused heart attacks during their run. There should have been a warning.

This production produced one of the greatest moments of Shakespearean antithesis I have ever witnessed. With the help of fortune and opportunity Bottom managed to get himself in such a

physically precarious position for his last *die*, that he had no choice but to fall several feet right on his big belly and his astonished face. Such triumph and such pain all together. That performance gave me a horrendous stomach ache that lasted the two-day drive back to Vancouver, and despite my youth and resilience of 19 years, could be assuaged by neither hamburgers nor milk shakes.

The fairy world is complex. My woods would be where I live on the west coast, with blackberries everywhere - delicious fruit guarded by sharp thorns that dutifully draw blood. While Titania and Oberon may be assumed to be quasi-immortal, their followers are not. When afraid, they creep into acorn cups. Their quarrel over the changeling is causing death and pain amongst humans and their animals. When Bottom mischievously sends Cobweb on a suicide mission to get a honey bag from a bee, Cobweb doesn't leave. When Mustardseed then next expresses his fear by bowing excessively, Bottom invites Cobweb back to assist Mustardseed with scratching. If Bottom is wielding his new power a little carelessly and Cobweb is terrified of getting stuck to death, a real, antithetical world comes to life. Titania and Oberon may seem powerful, but they fight over a child, and do not know what is going to happen next.

The most fortuitous aspect of the vacuumed SOL version, in my opinion, is the large cut in the forest scene between the four lovers. Uncut, this scene goes on at such length directors are almost forced to occupy the three characters who are not speaking with gratuitous physical shenanigans. A scene that Elizabethan audiences would have been trained to linguistically appreciate quickly turns to farce under the impatience of modern directors and audiences. With that one troublesome section now dramatically compact we can treat all of the characters as realistic and deeply human.

Actors who let iambic pentameter verse rule them in performance are amateurs. Even if they are being paid, they are still amateurs. Shakespearean acting is not characterized by recitation but invention. All the great actors invent their words, imagining how Shakespeare himself one day invented them, maybe experiencing the same emotion of wonder Shakespeare must have experienced at his own invention. Verse is usually just extended, invented thought. Besides, if one speaks in a predictable rhythm an audience becomes quickly bored; they know what to expect - more rhythm! If an actor speaks with invention everyone can be surprised, even the character and actor! So we shall speculate as to why everyone chooses the exact words they do, but the answer shall never be to maintain a rhythm... except with the mechanicals, and they use rhythm remorselessly.

I once had a drama teacher brag to me of her production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and she stressed that Oberon's sword-dance was the highlight of the show. The main goal of any Shakespearean director should not be to directorially stamp a production with something arbitrary, but to help each actor create a truthful and unique performance for each role. Let Shakespeare do the stamping. Examine the text, making sure everyone understands not only what they are saying and hearing, but what they are thinking as well. This unified thought creates the world! This unified thought makes the action of the play obvious. Every time some whimsical directorial concept distresses the story or the text, the potential of the play is diminished.

For many years - particularly during the Monette years at Stratford, and all twenty-five years at Bard on the Beach (henceforth BOTB) here in Vancouver - it has been the fashion to announce immediately to an audience, **THIS IS A COMEDY**, as though without immediate larfs the audience would become confused or unhappy. This need for immediate laugh-gratification destroys potential for complex character development. An audience needs time to gather information about the characters and their journeys before they can possibly judge that their thoughts or actions are true and might deserve their attention or laughter. I often find that the laughs in great comedies are graphed like parabolas. They take a long time to get going, but near the end the hike in hilarity is huge. Don't seek gratuitous laughs at the beginning of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With this play, they will arrive in good time all on their own, clustered among the revealing truths.

## A Midsummer Night's Dream Notes

### *Act 1, Scene 1 Athens - the palace of Theseus*

#### **THESEUS**

*Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial\* hour draws on apace. Four happy days bring in another moon.*

*But O, methinks, how slow this old moon wanes!\**

*She lingers my desires like a dowager,\* long withering out a young man's revenue.*

This scene is more potent with a court present than just starting with Theseus, Hippolyta and Philostrate. Shakespeare had lots of bodies for this. A few might disperse just before Egeus arrives, but I believe this is supposed to be an important public declaration of peace and purpose.

*Now* is such a good word to start a play. Shakespeare uses it to start other plays. Is the public declaration of love that Theseus makes towards Hippolyta to be believed, or is it a well-crafted sound-bite for his adoring public? Perhaps it is both. If she is as formidable as I imagine, perhaps he feels challenged and stimulated by her. Beneath the public facade they are testing each other on beliefs about power, passion and morals. These two hardly know one another, and the long term outcome of their relationship might be very uncertain.

#### **HIPPOLYTA**

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

*and then the moon, like to a silver bow new bent in heaven, shall behold the night of our solemnities.*

The fact that Hippolyta easily plays with the moon metaphor, indicates that she is a match for Theseus. One is judged by one's linguistic nimbleness in Shakespeare's worlds. It is interesting, and perhaps disturbing to Theseus' court that Hippolyta morphs the moon into a silver bow, a weapon. That *night of solemnities* sounds a bit spooky to me.

I imagine Theseus to be a leader with a considerable body guard contingent. Large men are often close to him in public. I do not think his personal force trusts Hippolyta yet. Perhaps they are deeply suspect of the ceremonial dagger she is allowed to wear around her neck. "She is an Amazon, for heaven's sake!" Perhaps the Athens populace is divided; half think the couple will murder each other, the other half predict the couple will spawn a pack of Homeric children.

Perhaps Theseus and Hippolyta are not sure either what they want to do.

*Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,\* and won thy love, doing thee injuries;  
but I will wed thee in another key, with pomp, with triumph and with revelling.*

Okay, the partying sounds great but I'm not so sure how easy it is to win a woman's love by killing members of her tribe. Hippolyta might smile politely and wait.

**THESEUS**

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

**EGEUS**

*Full of vexation come I, with complaint against my child, my daughter Hermia.*

When Hermia and Egeus become involved, this public moment becomes much more. With a full court present and a new bride at his side, Theseus is forced to govern. As furious as Egeus is, it borders on outrageous that he should so soil the gaiety of this event with his demands. He must be very rich. He pays for his pride in time. Theseus lays down the law but gives everyone four days to come to their senses. That seems like crafty ruling to me.

It is quite common in Shakespeare for fathers to be completely unreasonable with their young daughters - Capulet, Lear, and Egeus spring to mind. All three fathers become filled with fury when their daughters won't obey them. If they were like Capulet, a *mouse-hunt* in his youth, a young man who perhaps had his way with many young women, they have good cause to fear their daughters' plans. The fact that Egeus is willing to let Hermia die if she won't follow his wishes is an aberration for Shakespeare. This denial of that which was most important, family, is not explained. The actors need to construct the story that makes sense. If they do, Egeus won't be all bad, nor Hermia all good. How does Hermia feel about a father willing to let her die? Is there any justification for this? What the hell is going on? The truths that cause such a relationship might be quite grim. When they are decided upon play them fully and see what happens.

**THESEUS**

*What say you, Hermia?*

*Be advised fair maid. To you your father should be as a god, one to whom you are but as a form in wax  
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.*

Hippolyta is queen of a tribe that enslaves men; keeps them only for breeding. She might find Hermia's situation deeply degrading. She can't do anything but she is gathering information as she watches her future husband govern. The court is likely watching her watch Theseus.

**HERMIA**

*I beseech your grace that I may know the worst that may befall me if I refuse to wed Demetrius.*

Egeus has asked for her death so it seems clear that Hermia knows this answer. The most dramatic choice might be for Hermia to sincerely fear imminent death and be relieved to discover there is another option. The nun-option might also be a seldom-used option that distresses Egeus. He wants her married to Demetrius, period! This nunnery-option, along with advice on how to sway the wayward girl, might be the *private schooling* Theseus wishes to imbue to Egeus and Demetrius.

*Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head, made love to Nedar's daughter Helena, and won her soul;  
and she (sweet lady) dotes, devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry upon this spotted and inconstant man*

Won her soul? Okay, but someone's underwear was off too, right? These type of intimate decisions do not have to be explicit for an audience but the actors playing Demetrius and Helena (if they are old enough to understand) do need to decide upon their specific past. *Idolatry* has implications. I think they have had some form of sex, perhaps very heavy, semi-naked petting that perhaps Helena expected to immediately turn to a proposal. When she wouldn't go farther without some kind of ring, Demetrius jumped to Hermia, who was better looking anyway. Helena finally gets Demetrius, but the love-juice and the truth of their story remains. Like so many Shakespearean heroines, the husband-clay Helena gets to work with and mold, is mediocre.

**THESEUS**

*I must confess that I have heard so much, but being over-full of self-affairs, my mind did lose it.*

So, these young lovers are worthy of gossip? I think it is because their fathers are so rich, and their unmarried children so unattractive.

**THESEUS**

*Come, my Hippolyta.*

She may be distracted with Hermia's plight.

**LYSANDER**

*A good persuasion.\* Therefore hear me, Hermia.*

*I have a widow aunt, a dowager of great revenue, and she hath no child.*

Obviously, Lysander has been sitting on this plan. He was probably hoping Theseus would be more reasonable. The plan seems to make sense.

**HERMIA**

*My good Lysander, I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow, by his best arrow with the golden head, tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.*

That *golden-headed arrow* sounds like teasing to me.

**HELENA**

*How happy some or other some can be. Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.*

*But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so. He will not know what all but he do know.*

If Helena is large and unattractive and Hermia short and unattractive, then she is as fair as Hermia, and everybody knows it. In any case, neither girl made the Athens Cheerleaders. Neither tried out!

*For ere\* Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,\* he hailed down oaths that he was only mine;  
and when this hail some heat from Hermia felt, so he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.*

Is this *heat* implying Hermia is a bit of a tart, or a sexual opportunist? Telling Demetrius of Hermia's plan is not logical but it sure shows how desperate she is - *doting in idolatry* indeed.

## *Act 1, Scene 2 Somewhere in Athens*

Quince is a man of the theatre. To keep his cast happy and give them a reason for being on time, he might have tea and cookies waiting. They could even meet in their customary rehearsal room, whatever that might be.

### *QUINCE*

*Is all our company here?*

Is there perhaps someone missing or someone late? It is a bit of a rug-headed question. I contend that Quince wrote *Pyramus and Thisbe* for this specific group of actors. He did not invite someone not to get a part. He is likely asking the question to break the ice and get started in an organized, but un-bossy, manner. Since no one but him knows the answer to that question, Bottom's suggestion of reading out the cast list makes sense. Besides, Bottom is just dying to know what his starring role will be this time.

### *QUINCE*

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

Perhaps being the oldest, certainly the playwright and director of the group, Quince likes to make the naming of the cast a ceremony of sorts, a special moment for special people about to be cast in his special play! Bottom can't stand it and wants to move Quince forward getting him to talk a little about the story and give him his part!!! Upon being described, no one has the slightest idea about the story, but to keep his supporting cast interested Bottom assures them it is a reliable comedy. Then perhaps to give himself room to start acting as soon as he gets his part, he orders everyone to spread themselves. Being a good company member he asks for his part so then everyone else can get their parts. When told his character's name is *Pyramus*, Bottom decides that he can only be a lover or a tyrant, for in those roles may he truly reveal his god-given emotional power. Although Bottom can be a pain in the ass to Quince, he is, and will be until he ruptures something, the leading man of the group. No one challenges his supremacy, although I believe that Flute might harbor ambitions.

While we are stopped let's clarify these characters a bit. They are all tradesmen and I think having them somehow all contribute to the props and costumes and effects of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is what would happen. Showing this process unobtrusively is not easy. The boys take pride in this back-stage creativity as well. Snout could certainly make his own wall; Starvelling could sew some costumes. I know this is clichéd but I have always liked Starvelling, the tailor who sews all day, a bit short-sighted as well. Snug, eventually cast as the Lion, should be the least imposing person possible. Quince wrote every word of the script. He has a deep, deep passion for the theatre and lives and dies with every gesture and every syllable spoken. The best way to ruin these characters is to decide they are the comics and give them (BOTB) funny music for their first entrance, or big funny teeth because they are the comics. They don't think of themselves as funny until something funny happens or occurs to them. They are craftsmen and this is their hobby. Performing for the Duke would be the height of their private lives. Their interactions

through the scenes should be completely logical, born of close familiarity with one another. They may all be idiosyncratic by nature but they are a company first and accept each other completely. They are not trying to be funny, they are just trying to figure things out, be professional, and get some fame and cash doing a play. We simply get to watch their ideas, the world, and the odd troublesome prop, intrude upon those plans.

As is often the case with a balanced company of actors, females may need to be cast in these roles. I prefer the female actors to play the roles as males, not morph the characters into females. As tempting as a female Quince may be, the mechanicals are not about gender politics, they are about male camaraderie.

*The raging rocks  
And shivering shocks  
Shall break the locks  
Of prison gates,  
And Phibbus' car\*  
Shall shine from far  
And make and mar  
The foolish Fates*

As Bottom starts up the old actor-engine and takes it for a little poetical spin, everyone must be interested. Even if Flute or perhaps Starvelling are a little more refined in their natures, they still admire the naked fearlessness of Bottom's performances. Acting keeps Bottom heart-healthy.

With that coming beard Flute should be about 15. I have seen him played by masterful comic actors of all types and ages, but once in my sister's drama class, a gawky, pimply 15 year-old, whose voice was actually changing, played the part. Every time he tried to go falsetto his voice cracked. He was so embarrassed he went beet red. As I forced him to keep going, kids were hurling themselves amongst the permanent theatre seating with laughter. Now that casting is not easy, nor is the falsetto and embarrassment easy to perform, but it was the most truthful Flute I had ever seen. Your laughs in Shakespeare do not come from sledging your audiences with comic biz; laughter is gained through the pain and uncertainty of being human. So, Flute would rather chase girls than be the girl, but I think he also decides to do a bang-up job on *Thisbe*. Perhaps he figures that some day, when Bottom finally has a hernia overacting, he will get the young lead parts, his turn in the spotlight, and all the girls!

Snug is terrified of forgetting his lines, terrified! The *Oh* on page 52, I think is him forgetting to roar. They will all be terrified when the time comes. The social chasm between the Duke and them is huge! It is Quince telling Bottom that Pyramus is a *gentleman-like man* that persuades him to give up his Lion double-casting idea. This desire to be, yet fear of, a higher class, was felt by almost everyone in Elizabethan times. They all wanted to be one notch higher. An opportunity at court changed the fortunes of many men. A great performance could begin a future, make a life. Quince and Bottom will dream big for the next few nights.

**BOTTOM**

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

The point of malapropisms is that the character chooses that specific word because of how perfectly it describes exactly what they are thinking. They may even be quite pleased with their choice. Bottom likely means scenically (acting with large gestures) and he likely has a very specific idea of what that will encompass, and might even demonstrate it. Another trick to malapropisms is deciding specifically what everyone else thinks of the word. No one corrects Bottom of course, but it might cause Quince a small twinge of uncertainty. Quince is also prone to the odd malapropism; it is understandable as many words seem to have several meanings. Perhaps Flute wants to look the word up when he gets home. Maybe Snug will store away the word for later use, he so admires everything about Bottom. The fact is, like Dogberry, no one gets finicky about Bottom's vocabulary. Bottom speaks with such relish and enthusiasm about almost everything, it is impossible to misinterpret him.

### ***Act 2, Scene 1 A wood near Athens***

The best Puck I ever saw was also at Ashland, Oregon and likely also a highly trained gymnast; he careened about the stage as a teenaged chimp might. He could be quiet and bright and thoughtful as well - he certainly feared Oberon - but he would occasionally express himself with leaps and flying summersaults that took my breath away. His physical exuberance did not seem added on, did not dominate his intelligence in any way, it was just a natural extension of his joy. As a director, I would want a daring Puck like that. The Fairy might then be like my daughter - one who does yoga daily and forever seems to be stretching like a cat. I assume the Fairy is first lieutenant to Titania, as Puck is to Oberon. The scene is very heavy on exposition, but one can easily imagine an attraction growing between them as they boast of their roles for their masters. The fact that they don't know each other is slightly perplexing. Perhaps this job is new for her; perhaps duties have changed in the band now that there is a changeling to take care of. On another day, when no one is fighting, they may get it on.

I also urge directors to integrate Puck properly into the play. The recent BOTB production here in Vancouver had their Puck wear a pink two-two, multi-colored everything, and could wink, guffaw, or break into musically accompanied hip-thrusts at any moment. He commented wherever the director thought he could get a laugh. The laugh-volume for this behavior lessened through the evening. Even entitled and intellectually-challenged Vancouverites, breast-fed on mediocrity, and stuffed on wine and world-class chocolate chip cookies, could sense they were being spoken down to. As tempting as it may be to make Puck the MC of the evening, commenting on everything, don't. My Oberon would bind him in a cloven pine, as Sycorax did to Caliban, for such coarse acting. None of the worlds should be mocked or commented upon. If we look deeply within them we will find more than enough truthful and interesting behavior to delight us.

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

So this must be a favorite campsite. I know the feeling from re-visiting provincial park campgrounds. Perhaps both fairy bands are excited and delighted to arrive, then instantly anxious to see the other band there.

**OBERON**

*Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.*

**TITANIA**

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

Typical of a male, Oberon starts with a threat; typical of a strong Shakespearean woman, she mocks him, then acts with decisiveness and strength.

**OBERON**

*Tarry, rash wanton.\* Am not I thy lord?*

**TITANIA**

*Then I must be thy lady.*

*Why art thou here?*

*But that the bouncing Amazon, 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?*

*Rash wanton.* Oberon wastes no time calling Titania a slut, just because she is attracted to Theseus. It seems much more likely that Oberon has already had sex with his *bouncing Amazon*.

The *forgeries of jealousy* speech is one of those Shakespearean passages that can almost fill the character with wonder. The fact that their quarrel could wreak such havoc, for so many, in so many ways, seems almost incomprehensible to Titania; the images almost assaulting her as she invents them. *Votaress of my order* imagines a loyalty many Shakespearean heroes brag of, yet most Shakespearean heroines actually live. It is my favourite passage in all of Shakespeare.

**OBERON**

*Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove till I torment thee for this injury.*

Perhaps because Oberon and Titania are childless, a changeling would, like for a new grandparent, completely fill his life. Perhaps the grievous *injury* Oberon imagines is Titania not allowing him a son with whom to *trace the forest wild*. There is a reason Oberon is so ruthless in his pursuit of the child and the actor needs to know it precisely. Is having the changeling in his band simply a way to dominate Titania or does it allow him to become a father? It is interesting that even in a rage, he refers to Puck as *gentle*, an adjective a parent might use for a loved child. The King of the Fairies doesn't seem to have a son.

His story of *Cupid* is delicious fairy-lore for Puck, a story Oberon loves to share, and Puck loves to hear. The Ashland Oberon had fairy dust, disappearing flowers, and a host of illusions and sounds to mesmerize his servant and us.

*But who comes here? I am invisible and I will overhear their conference.*

*(Enter DEMETRIUS with HELENA following him.)*

It is best to make it immediately obvious that Demetrius cannot see Oberon. Once the convention is firmly established Oberon can move as he pleases with the audience completely accepting his invisibility.

I find this scene to psychologically true. Having dumped Helena, Demetrius can't stand even seeing her.

**DEMETRIUS**

*Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?*

*Or rather do I not in plainest truth tell you I do not nor I cannot love you?*

Do I encourage you? Do I even say you are pretty? Don't I, in fact say, I don't, no, I CAN'T, love you? That cannot is even a realization; it is most certainly on a high note in the voice; it could even have a bit of wonder in it.

**HELENA**

*And even for that do I love you the more.*

*I am your spaniel;*

*and Demetrius, the more you beat me, I will fawn on you.*

*Use me but as your spaniel spurn me, strike me, neglect me, lose me;*

*only give me leave, unworthy as I am, to follow you.*

*What worse place can I beg in your love, and yet a place of high respect with me, than to be used as you use your dog?*

Her response is pure realization of truth, as well - again *more* on a high note. It's true; she does love him more because she can't have him. Then, another realization that must be chosen, the perfect metaphor - she is not just a dog but a *spaniel*, the suckiest of dogs. Then she works with it, because in Shakespeare characters can be wooed by words. To prove her loyalty, even when beaten, she will fawn. Each usage is one step higher in the voice because each invention is worse than the one before - *spurn me, strike me, neglect me, lose me*. Poor girl, I hope my daughter never says things like that. This desperation really can make sense if Helena is not attractive, if Demetrius is maybe her only chance. I know everyone wants to make the lovers all lovey-dovey and perfect in the end, but their descriptions and actions belie this. Shakespeare wrote truth, you just have to want to see it. By the by, I do think that Demetrius is just bloody awful to Helena. Perhaps he is a bit disgusted in himself. He seems governed completely by his penis, although he may want a dowry from Egeus as well. Athens, at her height, may be chock-full of entitled opportunists.

Don't play the scene for physical gags; there is likely just one grab. Invent it all, both characters making deeply painful realizations. Then we will want to know what happens to them when they tear off the stage.

**OBERON**

*Fare thee well, nymph.*

*Ere he do leave this grove, thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love.*

I understand this to mean that Demetrius will seek her love being under the influence of the flower, and she will flee him because his advances will be so extreme.

The only logical reason that Oberon gives Puck such a detailed description of Titania's bower is that Puck has never seen it - it is that secret. Puck is fascinated and, likely, will enjoy searching to discover this unbeknownst bower. Bowers are power in the fairy world, especially ones that are hard to find.

## ***Act 2, Scene 2 Another part of the wood***

***(TITANIA and THE FAIRIES.)***

...after the dance and song...

***FAIRY***

***Hence, away!***

***Now all is well. One aloof stand sentinel.\****

Here is a good opportunity to reveal how the fairy world works; how Oberon deals with the Sentinel. He might put this guard immediately to sleep, perhaps with care that the guard not hurt herself when falling. He might be more callous. The actions might mirror whatever Titania may have to do to influence Bottom. Hoping that Titania ***wakes when some vile thing is near*** shows his willful, vengeful side. He helps the humans yet abuses his mate. Oberon is complicated. Oberon is also deeply masculine, and therefore, imperfect.

***LYSANDER***

***Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood; and to speak truth, I have forgot our way.***

***We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good, and tarry\* for the comfort of the day.***

***Forgot???*** Hermia now gets a better measure of her husband to be. He has got them lost and Hermia is exhausted. He also seems to want sex before they are married which Hermia is not going to let happen. The added ***So far be distant*** implies she needs to be quite stern. "Nice try Lysander, but that all happens AFTER the wedding!"

This little scene is a great example of one that can be so easily ruined with coarseness. Sure Lysander wants to get laid, but he obviously hasn't been successful yet. He can't just start groping her or we won't believe in their relationship. He needs to be affectionate and sneaky. She would probably love to do it as well, but deeply fears being left with a child and without a husband. Perhaps seeing how Demetrius behaves, she decides not to be too trusting. Besides, if she is going to give away her virginity it sure is not going to be in a dirty, scratchy forest. The bed will have a huge white canopy at least, and the room will be filled with perfume and flowers.

***No, no! I am as ugly as a bear! For beasts that meet me run away for fear.***

No matter how depressed a young woman may become she is very unlikely to say such a line without some truth to it. Helena is not attractive, nor are the other three lovers. That is what the love-juice is for. Some people use alcohol for the same purpose.

Of course it is funny when Lysander declares his love for Helena, but Helena's initial complete mystification is what multiplies the humor. It only lasts for three lines but is crucial to the story. The love juice does not just affect the person sprayed but everyone around them. She moves quickly to

***HELENA***

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

*Though he love your Hermia? Lord, what though?  
Yet Hermia still loves you. Then be content.*

...and then to anger, but her initial silent wonder at his words establishes the fairy world as strongly as any actions or words. Helena has big emotional twists and turns. It is the best lover role, by far, and in the hands of a seasoned and courageous actress can provide the audience with considerable pain and pleasure.

**HERMIA**

*(Awaking.) Help me, Lysander, help me!*

*Do thy best to pluck this crawling serpent\* from my breast.*

*What a dream was here! Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.*

*Lysander? What, removed? Lysander? Lord?*

*What out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?*

*I swoon\* almost with fear.*

*Either death or you I'll find immediately.*

Nothing heroic in all this; this is inward terror. She has never camped out - too yucky and buggy. I think we can assume that it is now fully dark. Hermia cannot conceive of any reason why Lysander should not be there. She has good reason to *swoon*; did some beast drag him away to eat him? Might that be her fate? Again, this scene should not be played for laughs. The situation, the story, which almost everyone knows, is funny. Once again, this is 'big' hard acting. If we believe the sheer terror of a young girl in the woods alone at night, we will be very interested in what happens to her. Everyone assumes that there is a happy ending to this play. If so, I say let the characters earn it.

### ***Act 3, Scene 1 The woods - Titania lying asleep***

*Enter QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT and STARVELING.*

**BOTTOM**

*Are we all met?*

**QUINCE**

*Pat, pat; and here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal.*

*This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake\* our tiring-house,  
and we will do it in action as we will do it before the Duke.*

*Are we all met?* implies some of the six mechanicals enter from different directions.

*Pat, pat* means, "Yes, we are all here."

When they came to block this scene 35 years ago at Stratford, the tall, talented, hauntingly sexually-uncertain, Frank Maraden played *Starveling*. Upon entering this scene he placed about 4 pieces of cloth around the perimeter of the stage. No one asked him what he was doing and the director never told him not to. No one even wanted to speak of this odd but apt behavior. Frank was such a good actor he could honestly integrate any character into any environment. His tailor wanted limits. Frank even made sure the material was collected during the melee of Bottom entering with an ass head on. It was a lovely little idiosyncratic contribution to the

scene by the group's tailor. Shakespeare has given these six men crafts for a reason. These crafts should be exploited!

**BOTTOM**

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

Here is a great example of the social divide between the workmen and the nobles. Bottom's wife is likely sturdier than him, slaughtering small animals for their table almost daily. Bottom imagines that real ladies have such delicate sensibilities, that surely they will swoon simply seeing a sword, much less a sword plunged into a lover's breast. To harm a noble lady's sensibilities in any way is simply unimaginable to them all. This is where you begin to earn the huge payoffs in the 5th act, through this deference, this desire for acceptance from a higher class. I suggest that all six men furiously apply their minds to this problem! You can't start acting if the script will horrify the ladies. They all completely accept Bottom's concerns. What the hell are they to do??? Leave it out???

**BOTTOM**

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

*Device* and *prologue* are such delicious words to Bottom. These delicate creatures should also be assured that what is happening is not real; perhaps they have never seen actors act with such passion before, and might be convinced that the performance was real! These men are not stupid nor are they funny; they are simply convinced that nobles are made from finer, more impressionable material than they are.

Regarding the lion...

**STARVELING**

*I fear it, I promise you.*

Perhaps that is why Frank put the material around the plot - to keep any hungry forest creatures at bay. Interesting that Starveling has both a timid nature and the pluck to stand up to bad manners in Act V. If he also makes the smocks and frocks, this apparently small role can make quite a contribution to a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

**BOTTOM**

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

Directors often go wrong here by making this speech some kind of a vaudeville, duo act, with Snug copying everything Bottom says and does. First of all, Bottom is in full creative flight as a dramatist and barely aware of Snug; secondly Snug should be completely overwhelmed with even the idea of having to memorize this big speech. If he does try to follow Bottom he should not succeed. Shakespeare gives Snug *I am slow of study* and it is up to the actor and director to take full advantage of this direction. I grow so weary of directors who encourage their actors to comment on whatever they find funny in the text, by trying to be funny. Snug is terrified at having to do such a long speech and is currently only experiencing heart palpitations and dizziness. You want laughs, play the pain. You want pain, try to make up random laughs.

**QUINCE**

*Ay. Or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lanthorn,\* and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine.*

I missed this in my notes: *disfigure* is a malapropism by Quince. Surely he doesn't want to *spoil the attractiveness* of the moon, but rather *present the figure of*. We know what Quince means and so does he.

**SNOUT**

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

The idea of bringing something as big and coarse as a wall into the great chamber might truly horrify Snout. Thank goodness Bottom is so good solving problems.

**BOTTOM**

*Some man or other must present Wall;  
and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify wall;  
and let him hold his fingers thus; and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper.*

This can be a completely new thought. Don't prepare your audience by making Snout the wall during this bit. That comes later. The audience is not stupid; they would rather be surprised by casting. At BOTB, they use acting semaphore - punctuating everything with gestures or mugging, always preparing their audience for what is to happen, rather than allowing the characters to freshly experience the situations Shakespeare throws at them. In trying to baby a stupid audience over the finish line (letting Snout or Snug happily mime their coming parts before the terror of Act 5) you diffuse their pain, and their humor.

**QUINCE**

*Then all is well.*

*Come, sit down every mother's son, and rehearse your parts.*

*Pyramus, you begin.*

*When you have spoken your speech, go behind that bush; and so every one according to his cue.*

**PUCK**

*What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here, so near the cradle of the Fairy Queen?*

*What, a play? I'll be an actor, if I see cause.*

Puck actually needs to enter on *Come, sit down every mother's son*. He will then have time to finally discover the cradle holding the queen, the hidden spot Oberon told him of. He will also have time to note all the noise the mechanicals are making. Like any country local, he is

absolutely delighted at the prospect of a play, and perhaps playing a part.

**BOTTOM**

*odours savors sweet. So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisby dear.*

*But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile, and by and by I will to thee appear.*

Bottom is a good enough actor to realistically sell hearing a voice. He takes great pleasure from the finer points of the craft of the actor.

**FLUTE**

*Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,  
of color like the red rose on triumphant brier,  
most briskly juvenal, and eke most lovely Jew,  
as true as truest horse, that yet would never tire,  
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.*

This is perhaps not Quince's finest poetry and doesn't make the cut for the show. Flute may have to really hammer the rhythm just to remember the fatuous text. Bad lines are difficult to memorize - I have done a ton of TV and I know. Besides, they are just blocking the scene anyway. Bottom always gives a full blooded performance of everything. Perhaps Flute has more of a patient method to building and layering a part.

**BOTTOM**

*If I were fair, Thisby, I were only thine.*

**QUINCE**

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

I think Bottom, as an ass, should be more than wiggly ears and funny sounds; his face should be left open so we can share his wonder. He does not even need goofy teeth like BOTB! I played the part. How can Bottom not experience wonder plunked into the bower of a randy fairy queen? Michael Langham, the greatest Shakespearean director of his generation, once said, "*Wonder is the most valuable emotion in Shakespeare.*" Wonder really is the realization that complete opposites can exist side by side. When Lear says, *Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all*, I believe the strongest emotion at work is wonder. The day my son was killed in a climbing accident I experienced horror of course, but also the sheer wonder that he was dead and I was alive. Romeo and Juliet must constantly be in wonder with the opposites of their lives. Bottom is filled with wonder because he had no idea the fairy world existed. With a head of ears and jaw, and face left open, the actor can then openly and daringly attempt to navigate the extraordinary terrain of Bottom's journey. Does Bottom then bring some of this wonder or mystification back to the real world? I think he might, and we will look for it when we get there. Each actor will find different reverberations from each unique production. For this guide and my production, the ass head has an open face and we get to watch Bottom thinking and feeling and navigating his wondrous adventure. With the face open, the actor can no longer hide through this part of his journey. With the face open Bottom becomes an even more thrilling part to play!

Bottom sings to show that he is unafraid. He likely also sings well. He is a little unnerved now that his mates have run away. He might become alarmed at the few noises he is involuntarily making.

**TITANIA**

*(Awaking.) What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?*

This, of course, is just Titania hearing Bottom.

**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\* doth move me, on the first view, to say, to swear, I love thee.*

These three lines likely get her up and perhaps 1/3 the way to Bottom. She stops. The drug has made her fiercely attracted to him, yet she also does not want to scare him off. She waits.

It likely makes sense for Bottom to ask himself if he is dreaming. She is wearing something kind of see-through and just waiting for him...

**BOTTOM**

*Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that.*

*And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together now-a-days.*

*The more the pity that some honest neighbors will not make them friends.*

While very comfortable in front of a large audience, Bottom is less sure, almost shy, with a barely clad goddess, and tries to joke himself out of danger.

**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'd have enough to serve my own turn.*

**TITANIA**

*Out of this wood do not desire to go. Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.*

Here is the opportunity to be specific about the powers of the fairies. Is *whether thou wilt or no* just a thought or a gesture, or some actions by her troupe? If it is her power, her force of will, perhaps Oberon should have similar abilities. He actually silences Titania later in the play. Build the fairy world subtly, with integrity, and we will be more likely to believe it and watch it closely.

*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!*

She has closed the distance and Bottom is now immersed in wonder, then delight. This first scene with the fairies perhaps shows us Bottom's heart most clearly of all. Bottom's generosity comes from amusing those he meets; he uses humor to touch each fairy. His nickname, *Bully*, is actually the complete opposite of his true nature.

**TITANIA**

*Tie up my love's tongue.*

*Bring him silently.*

*Lead him to my bower.*

*(EXEUNT.)*

Titania can take no more and wants him in her bed! This means that while Bottom is interviewing the fairies and they are getting used to his stinky old ass, her lust is growing. This need not be overplayed but there should be no mistake that *Tie up my lover's tongue/lead him to my bower* means *Shut him up and let's get down to business!*

Shakespeare chose an ass for Bottom for the recklessness of their sexual behavior and for their huge shlongs. It is not hard to imagine Will Kemp doing a few mimed minutes taking a pee or just twirling it about. This needn't be overplayed but I do think *Methought I had* does refer to Bottom's prodigious dream-penis. I think it is so big, he dare not tell his mates the tale for fear of life-long ridicule.

### ***Act 3, Scene 2 Another part of the wood***

**OBERON**

*I wonder if Titania be awaked.*

*Then, what it was that next came in her eye, she must dote on in extremity.*

I'd say Bottom is in the best part of his extremity right about now.

**OBERON**

*This falls out better than I could devise.*

Perhaps Oberon experiences some wonder at being outdone by Puck.

**PUCK**

*This is the woman, but not this the man.*

This may make Oberon think, *Did you screw up?* and it may make Puck think

*I sure hope I didn't screw up.*

**DEMETRIUS** *lies down and sleeps.*

Perhaps Demetrius sits down but Oberon puts him to sleep.

**PUCK**

*I go, I go; look how I go, swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.*

This line is just irresistible to hack directors, encouraging their Pucks to be funny. If he is funny, it is because he is in trouble and trying desperately to ingratiate himself. I have seen this play successfully embrace all sorts of times and locations. What it does not suffer well is the bending or neglecting of carefully wrought character relationships. Smoothing edges and making

characters mindlessly happy or silly does little justice to Shakespeare's story or characters. Puck fears Oberon, and for good reason. Puck loves playfully tormenting humans and when he gets caught he is in trouble.

**PUCK**

*Then will two at once woo one.*

This is a line of discovery and joy; a line of anticipation.

**DEMETRIUS**

*(Awaking.) O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!*

Of course this is obvious, but make it so Demetrius can wake up realistically, see Helena and time his line perfectly with the preceding banter.

*To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?*

*Crystal is muddy!*

*O, how ripe in show thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow.*

*O, let me kiss this princess of pure white, this seal of bliss.*

Goodness these forest drugs are strong. They seem to affect a very pleasureable poetry gland.

**LYSANDER**

*Fair Helena, who more engilds\* the night than all the fiery eyes of light.\**

*Why seekest thou me?*

*Could not this make thee know, the hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?*

There is that *hate* word again. Shakespeare is so accurate. Humans often turn the person they so recently loved into an intense source of hate. I too have felt this; it is a distasteful trait. It is a defence mechanism, but it is still ugly.

**LYSANDER**

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

Okay, being nobles they might have swords, but this would be a silly fight. They have done nothing so far but chase, and run away from, girls. If the boys should bump into trees or nettles and hurt themselves during a night-fight, it is likely because they deserve it. They can be boastful, inconstant, and cruel.

**HERMIA**

*Puppet? Why, so! That way goes the game.*

*And are you grown so high in his esteem because I am so dwarfish and so low?*

*How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak! How low am I?*

*I am not yet so low but that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.*

Here might be another clue for Helena. She might feel long straggly braids and heavy make-up is the way to snag Demetrius. I would love my Helena to be twice as big as the Hermia, but I would also bet on Hermia for a fight.

**HERMIA**

*'Little' again? Nothing but 'low' and 'little?'*

*Why will you suffer her to flout\* me thus? Let me come to her.*

When this scene is uncut bodies are usually already flying about the stage by this point. If you wait for Shakespeare's cue - *Let me come to her* - you get a solid payoff.

**OBERON**

*This is thy negligence.*

**PUCK**

*Believe me, king of shadows, I mistook.*

*Did not you tell me I should know the man by the Athenian garment he had on?*

It is interesting that Oberon quarrels with Titania over the changeling, wreaking havoc upon humans, and finally stealing the child from her, yet he is concerned that these human couples be properly paired, and takes care in blessing them at the end of the play. Hmmmm?

### ***Act 4, Scene 1 The same - Lysander, Demetrius, Helena and Hermia lying asleep***

*(Enter TITANIA, BOTTOM, PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, MUSTARDSEED, with OBERON behind them.)*

**TITANIA**

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

She wants some after-sex cuddling but he wants to have some fun.

**BOTTOM**

*Monsieur Cobweb, good monsieur, get you your weapons in your hand,  
and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle;  
nd, good monsieur, bring me the honey-bag.  
And have a care the honey-bag break not. I would be loath to have you overflown with a honey-bag.*

Perhaps Cobweb and his weapons have intrigued Bottom. Bottom gives Cobweb a heroic quest, perhaps not full appreciating Cobweb's mortality or how seriously he might take the quest. Perhaps Bottom is exercising his new power a little carelessly. Cobweb takes his time heading towards certain doom, and when Mustardseed bows and curtsies out of fear, Bottom realizes Cobweb's plight and welcome him back. The point is, Cobweb doesn't leave and I believe it is because he fears the task. Bottom likely learns something seeing Cobweb's fear. He needs to be careful.

As Bottom asks for oats and peas and hay, he might experience a bit of wonder at how much his world is changing, even his diet. Perhaps the exposition of sleep is caused by too much sex and too many confusing thoughts.

**TITANIA**

*O, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!*

A true very brief moment of contentment within this tempest of a play.

**TITANIA**

*Come, my lord, and in our flight tell me how it came this night  
that I sleeping here was found with these mortals on the ground.*

The juice of the flower has worked its magic and Oberon now has the child. Titania only gets to wake and ask *how it came this night?* As Queen of the fairies she waged a huge war over stewardship of the changeling child. I envision Titania asking many more questions about the night until she gets suitable answers.

*(Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS and attendants.)*

**THESEUS**

*Go, one of you, find out the forester.  
Uncouple\* in the western valley; let them go.  
(Exit an attendant.)  
My love shall hear the music of my hounds.*

**HIPPOLYTA**

*I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,  
when in a wood of Crete they bayed\* the bear with hounds of Sparta.  
Never did I hear so musical a discord, such sweet thunder.*

**THESEUS**

*My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,  
and their heads are hung with ears that sweep away the morning dew.*

Hippolyta enjoys the sweet thunder of dogs hunting bears. That seems like a note for the actor, the costume designer and the sound man! It is invigorating to see the royal couple share, and even compete in, martial activities.

**THESEUS**

*Bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns.*

The horns are usually sounded from backstage. I think these horns should be brought onstage; Theseus is allowed to have some fun with his young rebellious subjects. Perhaps Theseus figures that if the kids can break the rules enough to sleep out together through the night, he should be allowed to blast them awake onstage. As the Duke it is his duty to toughen up his subjects now and then. Besides, Hippolyta is watching.

**DEMETRIUS**

*My lord, fair Helen told me of this their purpose hither to this wood,  
and I in fury hither followed them, fair Helena in fancy following me.  
But, my good lord, I know not by what power (but by some power it is)  
my love to Hermia, melted as the snow.  
Now all the faith, the virtue of my heart, the object and the pleasure of mine eye, is only Helena.  
To her, my lord, was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia,  
but, like in sickness, did I loathe this food;  
but, as in health, come to my natural taste,  
now I do wish it, love it, long for it, and will for evermore be true to it.*

Only Shakespeare can solve a whole plot with one beautiful speech.

Egeus will not be happy. One might wonder if such a character is ever happy. Shakespeare writes a very few totally noxious characters like this. I simply assume that Theseus will either buy him off, or make him a general and send him to war.

*Come, Hippolyta.*

Again, Hippolyta is distracted. She comes from a forest tribe. She likely has experienced the strange powers of love in the woods. The night the young people have shared intrigues her.

**BOTTOM**

*(Awaking.) When my cue\* comes, call me, and I will answer. My next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.'*

*Heigh-ho!\* Peter Quince? Flute, the bellows-mender? Snout, the tinker? 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 patched fool,\* if he will offer to say what methought I had.*

*The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.\**

*I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream.*

*It shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom.*

*And I will sing it in the latter end of our play, before the Duke.*

*Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death.\**

Bottom's dream, at least the top ten highlights, are from his night in the bower with Titania. Shakespeare never says anything overt, but *methought I had* just has to be a humongous penis. That is certainly what his audience would hear. The actor doesn't have to grab himself (surely the BOTB first choice) nor even look to his crotch, he just needs to remember and let his imagination work on him. Perhaps the best way to introduce the audience to Bottom's main attribute is to have a few fairies enjoy a good healthy giggle in an earlier scene. Perhaps Bottom wears a work apron - figure it out. The patrons in the pit deserve it; it is why they paid their pennies. Titania's oft-glazed expression will fill in the rest. Titania and Bottom had a great night of midsummer sex that visual artists have been re-imagining for centuries.

Notice how Bottom never calls for Snug? Perhaps Snug is so cowardly Bottom just knows he hasn't stayed through the night.

*God's my life!* Wonder again - disbelief that they could do such a thing. Then he decides he had a vision, then upgrades it to a dream. A dream can embrace it all. This desire to write or perform this story comes from a desire to spread the wonder in his soul. *Wonder - the emotion excited by what is strange and surprising; a feeling of surprised or puzzled interest, sometimes tinged with admiration.* Wonder is why Bottom's senses get mixed up. And that is what Shakespeare did so uniquely - he allowed his characters to hold such perfectly balanced, conflicting thoughts within their minds, that they could not but experience the wonder of their situations, or lives, or very existence.

**Act 4, Scene 2 Athens - Quince's house***(QUINCE, FLUTE, SNOUT and STARVELING.)*

It is sweet to hear how much they care for Bottom and how special he is to all of them

**QUINCE***Bottom! O most courageous day! O most happy hour!***BOTTOM***Masters, I am to discourse\* wonders!**But ask me not what; for if I tell you, I am no true Athenian.**I will tell you everything, right as it fell out.***QUINCE***Let us hear, sweet Bottom.***BOTTOM***Not a word of me.\***All that I will tell you is, that the Duke hath dined.**Get your apparel together, good strings to your beards, new ribbons to your pumps,\* and meet presently at the palace.**Let Thisby have clean linen; and let not him that plays the lion pare his nails, for they shall hang out for the lion's claws.**And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath; and I do not doubt but to hear them say it is a sweet comedy.**No more words. Away! Go, away!*

This is almost a choral scene with his five friends seeming to speak at one time; certainly greeting Bottom, then protesting after *I am no true Athenian*, then celebrating after *right as it fell out*, then protesting again after *Not a word of me*. Why does Bottom change his mind, twice? Some productions have Bottom leave the forest with the coronet Titania was weaving for him, and that wreath has faded or withered. I think it more likely he fears the mocking he will take if he tells of his huge penis and the antics of the amorous fairy queen. He would love to have a ballad made of the story but wisely chooses silence. Over time Mrs. Bottom should be able to put some of it together, what with the rhythmical grunts, snorts and giggles emanating from his nightly dreams.

**Act 5, Scene 1 Athens - the palace of Theseus***THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE, lords and attendants.)***HIPPOLYTA***'Tis strange my Theseus, what these lovers speak of.***THESEUS***More strange than true.**Lovers and madmen have such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cool reason ever comprehends.***HIPPOLYTA***But all the story of the night told over, and all their minds transfigured so together, grows to something of great constancy,\* howsoever strange.*

**THESEUS**

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

In cutting Theseus' speech about poets, lovers and madmen so severely, one director complained that Helena and Hermia didn't have time to get into their dresses after the forest. I'd suggest zippers and Velcro over hooks and eyes, but if the change is impossible just add some text back - it is all good stuff.

*Great constancy* is such a perceptive phrase. I admit to being rather fascinated with Hippolyta's journey through this play.

**LYSANDER**

*More than to us wait in your royal walks, your board,\* your bed.*

Lysander is on his best manners, is trying to be mature, but he has no real idea about what happens in the bed. He's excited all right, but awkward in his youth. Theseus adjusts deftly.

**THESEUS**

*Where is our usual manager of mirth? What revels are in hand?*

*Is there no play, to ease the anguish of a torturing hour before bedtime?*

*Call Philostrate.*

As Theseus chooses the mechanicals Philostrate must feel, "Why does this man hire me if he won't listen to me? He is about to destroy the whole evening."

**HIPPOLYTA**

*I love not to see wretchedness overcharged and duty in his service perishing.*

The *wretchedness* perhaps refers to the desperation of the common folk as much as their unskilled performances. Being a leader she too has been entertained in a wide variety of ways. She does not like to cause suffering.

*(Enter QUINCE for the Prologue.)*

**Prologue**

*If we offend, it is with our good will.*

*That you should think, we come not to offend, but with good will.*

*To show our simple skill, that is the true beginning of our end.*

*Consider then we come but in despite.*

*We do not come as minding to content you, our true intent is.*

*All for your delight we are not here.*

*That you should here repent you,*

*the actors are at hand and by their show you shall know all that you are like to know.*

Perhaps Quince had not had enough time to learn both speeches well. Since his mates are involved with the second one, he learned that one first. This first prologue is just him stopping inappropriately and wixing his mords a bit. Perhaps Quince even has to cheat this speech a bit by still holding and referring to a copy in his hand. It is one of those obligatory bow-and-scrape prologues before the real prologue begins.

**HIPPOLYTA**

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

While this may be construed as criticism, it is also accurate and rather enlightening.

The next big prologue speech Quince has nailed and colors it with verve and relish. He might have had an awkward start, but he will relive this performance for many years.

Too bad Demetrius has to prove such a toad with his *asses* line. We mustn't forget that all four come from rich families; Shakespeare is not going to let them off easily.

The best joke I ever heard for Wall's speech is making *whisper* a three syllable word (whi-hi-sper.) *Sinister* has three syllables so whisper has to have three as well.

**THESEUS**

*Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?*

**DEMETRIUS**

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

Notice how Theseus has gentle fun and the lovers are slightly unctuous.

**THESEUS**

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

**BOTTOM**

*No, in truth, sir, he should not. 'Deceiving me' is Thisby's cue.*

*She is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall.*

*You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you. Yonder she comes*

Bottom is not offended at Theseus' suggestion, he is more excited about it being the CUE for Thisbe, and including his Duke towards the coming journey. Some actors just have big engines; nothing stops Bottom. Even when such actors are silent they hum with intent. They just love to imbue language with layers and depth - the better the language the more nuanced they become. Unfortunately, Bottom likely listens to himself too much; is perhaps more interested in the power of the actor, or the idea of being an actor, rather than the detailed craft of the actor. Sometimes the actors who are almost good can actually seem quite dreadful.

**HIPPOLYTA**

*This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.*

**THESEUS**

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

**HIPPOLYTA**

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

**THESEUS**

*If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men*

Rather than being judgmental, perhaps Hippolyta actually draws some delight at the sheer innocence of the rude mechanicals.. She might also actually admire how Theseus responds to her giggles and jokes. She then shows empathy as she praises the terrified Snug. What is surprising is that after Demetrius and Lysander sling jokes at Starvelling as the moon, she chirps in with,

**HIPPOLYTA**

*I am awearry of this moon. Would he would change.*

Then, after being reproached by Starvelling she attempts kindness with

**HIPPOLYTA**

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

Perhaps the wine is strong, or perhaps fitting into Athenian society is challenging for Hippolyta. Perhaps the coming hours worry her. Burrowing down into what these characters might be truly feeling about their complex lives and specific situations is worth it. Finding the true north of all their moral compasses is important. How they fit together is important. And don't worry about those who ask, "But there'll be lots of laughs, right?" Do the play honestly and find out.

*Now die, die, die, die, die!*

*(Pyramus dies.)*

**THESEUS**

*With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover and prove an ass.*

It is odd, that Theseus, who has been so gracious, has such a cutting response to the death of Pyramus. This remark tells me that Bottom has done something pretty extreme during these five *dies*. As I wrote, the Ashland Oregon actor tried to hurt me. When I played the part I do remember some chaos in the audience during these bits. I had special shoes that allowed me to play a lot of the role on my tippy-toes. Don't hold back if you are ever given Bottom to play. If you love the theatre, this is your chance to show it.

So remember, whatever the shenanigans - be it with boobies or wigs or swords or strings of intestines or stuff breaking or ripping or falling apart, the boys deal with all challenges with the integrity of true professionals - they soldier on! The wondrous opportunity of performing for the Duke and Duchess at their wedding will alter all their lives, just as Bottom's dream has changed his.

**BOTTOM**

*Will it please you to see the epilogue,\* or to hear a Bergomask dance\* between two of our company?*

and before

**Pyramus**

*I see a voice!\* Now will I to the chink, to spy if I can hear my Thisby's face. Thisby!*

and it all started with

*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.\**

Poor Bottom has his senses all mixed up. He is going to drive his wife nuts for weeks.

**THESEUS**

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

*(A dance and THESEUS pays them.)*

*(Exeunt BOTTOM, QUINCE, FLUTE, SNOUT, SNUG and STARVELING.)*

This is quite masterful of Theseus; he gets off some good, obligatory court jokes just vague enough not to hurt the boys. The amount they get paid, quickly evaluated somehow, should be wondrous. Why not? The brats are rich. If it is assumed to be gold and the bag is HEAVY, and the amount is just dawning on them as they leave, they are heading back to a world they are going to change! Presents for everyone!

*The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve. Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time.  
I fear we shall out-sleep the coming morn as much as we this night have overwatched.\*  
This palpable gross play hath well beguiled the heavy gait\* of night.  
Sweet friends, to bed.  
A fortnight\* hold we this solemnity in nightly revels and new jollity.*

Two weeks of partying? Who says this marriage is not political? The unions will love him.

The four virgins are now heading to bed. Who knows what a few drinks and that reality will do to any couple. As I have encouraged the casting of non-classic lovers, I also encourage solutions to be found not associated with Barbie tales. Perhaps when the time finally comes, Helena will find herself confident, on top and in glorious control. Don't do cliches; figure out what makes sense and make us wonder.

**OBERON**

*Now, until the break of day, through this house each fairy stray.  
To the best bride-bed will we, which by us shall blessed be;  
and the issue\* there create ever shall be fortunate.  
So shall all the couples three ever true in loving be;  
and the blots of Nature's hand shall not in their issue stand.*

**TITANIA**

*Never mole, harelip, nor scar, nor mark prodigious, such as are despised in nativity,  
shall upon their children be.*

**OBERON**

*Every fairy take his gait and through this palace each chamber bless.  
Trip away; make no stay; meet us all by break of day.*

Goodness, a great gift of purification for all three couples and their children. They shall always love each other and their children shall have no birth defects. Does this gift cost the King and Queen of the fairies? It cannot just be free, can it? I think I'd have them transferring (blue light) power to the couples as Puck says goodbye. My last image might be one of a connection between the natural world and the world of spirits; a mutual sharing of pleasure and pain and life-force. William would like that; everything was interconnected.