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presents

the Annotated Popular Edition of

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

by William Shakespeare

Written c. c. 1594-6

Earliest Extant Edition: 1600

Featuring complete and easy-to-read annotations.

THIS EDITION of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
is for readers who wish to truly understand
− even luxuriate in −
Shakespeare's language,
without constantly interrupting their reading
to hunt for word meanings and explanations
in footnotes or the opposite page.

Here, all annotations are integrated
directly next to the lines they illuminate,
providing a seamless, smooth-flowing, and
deeply pleasurable experience
reading Elizabethan drama.

Our notes are immersive and educational,
written to be easily understood,
while offering a wealth of information and insight
into the play itself
and the language of Shakespeare.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

by William Shakespeare

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DRAMATIS PERSONS

Theseus, Duke of Athens.
Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus.
Philostrate, Master of the Revels to Theseus.
Egeus, Father to Hermia.
Hermia, daughter to Egeus, in love with Lysander.
Lysander, in love with Hermia.
Demetrius, in love with Hermia.
Helena, in love with Demetrius.

Quince, a carpenter,
Snug, a joiner.
Bottom, a weaver.
Flute, a bellows-mender.
Snout, a tinker.
Starveling, a tailor.

Fairies:
Oberon, King of the Fairies.
Titania, Queen of the Fairies.
Puck, or Robin Goodfellow.
Pease-blossom.
Cobweb.
Moth.
Mustardseed.

Other fairies attending their King and Queen.
Attendants on Theseus and Hippolyta.

SCENE: Athens, and a wood near it.

INTRODUCTION to the PLAY.

In his book *Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy*,* literary critic Thomas McFarland called *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "the happiest of Shakespeare's plays, and very possibly the happiest work of literature ever conceived." An entire fairy universe forms the backdrop to the play, which features most memorably, among its human characters, a group of hilariously clumsy and inept craftsmen preparing and presenting a classical play of their own to the Duke of Athens.

The purported primary characters − the duke and his accompanying nobles − are in fact the least important, and frankly least interesting, figures on the stage. One may also wish to note some of the darker elements that are never far below the surface in any Elizabethan play: a forced marriage, enchantment-induced hallucinations, and − dare we say? − a strong hint of bestiality.

* The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1972.

NOTES ON THE TEXT.

Our text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was initially adopted from O.J. Stevenson's 1918 edition of the play, which is based on the 1600 Quarto.

The play was then carefully compared directly to the 1600 Quarto. Consequently, much of the original wording, punctuation and spelling from this earliest printing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been reinstated.

NOTES ON THE ANNOTATIONS.

Mention in the annotations of various editors refers to the notes supplied by these scholars for their editions of this play.

The most commonly cited sources are listed in the footnotes immediately below. The complete list of footnotes appears at the end of this play.

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) online.
2. Crystal, David and Ben. *Shakespeare's Words.* London; New York: Penguin, 2002.
3. Ridley, M.R., ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD., 1942.
4. Durham, Willard H., ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Yale Shakespeare*. New Haven: Yale University

Press, 1918.
5. Stevenson, O.J., ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Toronto: The Copp Clark Company Limited, 1918.
6. Schmidt, Alexander. *Shakespeare-Lexicon*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007 (originally published 1902).
7. Bourus, Terri, ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *The New Oxford Shakespeare, Complete Works*, edited by Gary Taylor *et al.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
9. Furness, Horace H. *Midsommer Nights Dreame. A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1895.

NOTES.

A. Shakespeare Invents the Modern Conception of the World of Fairies.

In his primer on Shakespeare (entitled simply, *Shakspere*), Edward Dowden wrote of the Bard's Fairy Land,

> "No such fairy poetry existed anywhere in English literature before Shakspere. The tiny elves, to whom a cowslip is tall, for whom the third part of a minute is an important division of time, have a miniature perfection which is charming" (p. 72, 1895 edition).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare brings together in one work many of the quaint defining characteristics and quirks traditionally associated with fairies. In no particular order, these include the following: fairies

1. are tiny;
2. can become invisible;
3. can change their form and appearance;
4. like to dance in circles;
5. can travel at immense speed;
6. are mischievous, enjoying playing pranks;
7. typically possess great beauty;
8. will sometimes steal babies or small children, replacing them with inferior ones ("changelings"); and
9. will perform helpful deeds to those who believe in them.

B. The Earliest Texts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Two quartos of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are known to have been published before the great Folio of Shakespeare's plays appeared in 1623:

(1) a 1600 quarto, printed "**for Thomas Fisher**"; and

(2) a quarto printed "**for James Roberts**", in which the date 1600 appears on the title page; however, scholarship has determined that this edition was actually printed in 1619. Why the Roberts Quarto claimed the earlier date can only be surmised.

The play was next published in 1623 in the Folio. Interestingly, this version was based on the Roberts Quarto.

The edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* you have before you is based on the 1600 Fisher Quarto, which Ridley and others consider authoritative. Happily, the differences between the Fisher Quarto and Folio are minimal.

In general, the wording appearing in the main text will be that of the Fisher Quarto. Individual substantive discrepancies between the Folio and Fisher Quarto are discussed in the annotations. In the few cases in which the wording in the Folio is generally agreed to be superior to that of the Fisher Quarto, the wording of the Folio is adopted, and is identified as so in the notes.

In our annotations, references to "the Quarto" mean the Fisher edition. From this point on, there will be no mention of the Roberts Quarto.

C. Punctuation.

Until the 1590s, the primary full-stops used in literature were the period and colon, the colon functioning much like a modern semicolon.

In the mid-1590s, English writing began to adopt the semicolon more regularly, but the transition was gradual and would take decades to complete. As a result, texts produced in the early or middle stages of the transition often appear, punctuation-wise, to be a jumble of undifferentiated full-stops.

The Fisher Quarto, on which our text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is based, remained largely rooted in the colon era, though a good number of semi-colons are scattered throughout without any evident rule or pattern.

As was typical for the era, commas were added by the compositors (the men who set the type) with great generosity; a comma seems to have been inserted into most sentences to divide them into the smallest integral clauses possible.

Our edition of the play retains the majority of the punctuation of the Fisher Quarto. Punctuation has been added, removed, or modified only when the original punctuation obscured the meaning of the text. In other words, we changed the punctuation only when needed to facilitate comprehension.

D. Rhyming.

A substantial proportion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is written in rhyming verse, though the specific rhyme schemes used vary throughout the play.

The most common rhyme pattern employed, unsurprisingly, is the rhyming couplet. There are also instances of two rhyming octets, and even a rhyming dectet − eight and ten consecutive rhyming lines respectively!

Another frequent scheme consists of alternating rhyming lines arranged in quatrains (four lines), following the familiar *abab* pattern.

The annotations point out many of the rhyming schemes to look out for, though not at every occurrence. Readers may therefore wish to occasionally pause and consider or identify the rhyming patterns as they make their way through the play.

E. Scene Breaks, Settings, and Stage Directions.

Our edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a faithful reproduction of the 1600 Fisher Quarto, but with the spelling generally modernized. In other words, as is usual for all the plays found on our website, we lean towards adhering to the wording of the original text as much as possible.

Words or syllables which have been added to the original text to clarify the sense or repair the meter are surrounded by hard brackets [ ], and will be found mostly to have been borrowed from the Folio version of the play. A director who wishes to remain truer to the original text may of course omit any of the supplementary wording.

The Fisher Quarto divides the play into neither numbered Acts nor Scenes; nor does it provide settings. Our division into Acts and Scenes follows the conventional separation employed by most modern editions. Suggestions for scene locations are those of Stevenson.[5]

Stage directions in Elizabethan-era published plays are often minimal in number and confusing in quality. Hence, it is generally thought acceptable to healthily supplement a play's stage directions to give clarity to the action. As such, we adopt the stage directions suggested by the aforementioned Stevenson.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

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ACT I

SCENE I

Athens: The Palace of Theseus.

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Philostrate, and Attendants.

Entering Characters: ***Theseus*** is the Duke of Athens; ***Hippolyta*** is the Queen of the Amazons; and ***Philostrate*** is Theseus' "Master of the Revels", meaning he is responsible for organizing and supervising court entertainment.[1] During the Elizabethan period, the *Master of the Revels* was most well-known for his power over regulation and censorship of stage performances.[10] Needless to say, "Master of the Revels" was a distinctly English title, with no foundation in Greek history or mythology.

Theseus, the legendary founder of Athens, is one of the great heroes of Greek mythology. He is perhaps most famous for slaying the Minotaur, a fearsome half-man, half-bull creature that dwelled at the heart of the labyrinth on the island of Crete. The labyrinth was so intricate that no one could escape once inside. Theseus, however, cleverly unraveled a ball of thread as he ventured into its winding passages, using it to trace his way back out after killing the Minotaur.

Hippolyta (sometimes called Antiope) was a Queen of the famed all-female warrior society of ancient legend.

1-6 (below): in the play's opening speech, Theseus bemoans how slowly time is passing: he must wait four long days before he can marry Hippolyta.

Thes. Now fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour

= stressed on the second syllable: *hip-PO-ly-ta*. = marriage.

Draws on apace: four happy days bring in
Another moon: but oh, methinks, how slow

2: ***Draws on apace*** = approaches quickly.
2-3: ***four happy…moon*** = the new moon (***Another moon***) will appear in four days.

This old moon wanes! she lingers my desires,

4: ***old moon*** = the moon in its final phases before it disappears; a common collocation. Note the linguistic-astronomical connection: the ***new moon*** succeeds the ***old moon***.
wanes = decreases in size or disappears.
she lingers my desires = the moon delays the fulfillment of Theseus' desires − specifically the longed-for pleasures of his wedding night!

Like to a step-dame, or a dowager,

5-6: Theseus compares his agony to that of an impatient

6	Long withering out a young man's revenue.	young heir forced to wait for his inheritance, while his stepmother (***step-dame***) or widowed mother, holding a life interest in her husband's estate, lives on and gradually consumes it. ***dowager*** = a widow with a surviving interest in her husband's property.[1] ***withering out*** = wasting away.[1]
8	***Hippol.*** Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; Four nights will quickly dream away the time;	8-9: ie. the four days will pass quickly, in part because they will be swallowed up by night. ***steep*** = to "bathe" in sleep;[1] Shakespeare likely borrowed this conceit from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590): "*indeed in sleep the slothful body, that doth love to steep his lustless limbs*."
10	And then the moon, like to a silver bow	10-11: ***the moon…Heaven*** = description of the moon in its crescent shape compared to the curved form of a bow being pulled (***bent***)[1] as it is prepared to release an arrow. The inconsistency of the expected appearance of the moon on the couple's wedding night has been noted: Hippolyta's prediction that the moon will be in crescent form in four nights contradicts Theseus' earlier suggestion that the moon will be new, or dark. ***Now bent*** (line 11) = now curved, in order to fire an arrow;[1] ***Now bent*** appears in both the 1600 Quarto and the 1623 Folio, but is generally emended to "*New-bent*", ie. newly taking on its crescent shape. There is evidence that the emendation to ***new-bent*** is in fact correct: beginning in 1600, we see Elizabethan authors use the term ***new-bent*** to describe a curved bow.
	Now bent in Heaven, shall behold the night	= see, witness.[1]
12	Of our solemnities.	= (wedding) ceremony.[1]
		14-18 (below): to ease himself out of his self-imposed gloom, Theseus resolves to seek entertainment and lively company to while away the time until his wedding.
14	***Thes.*** Go, Philostrate, Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments,	= pronounced as ***th' Athenian***.
16	Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;	16: Theseus wants a spirit of joy and playfulness to be brought to bear. ***pert*** = lively.[4] ***nimble*** = keen.[1]
	Turn melancholy forth to funerals:	17: "gloom such as I have belongs at funerals."
18	The pale companion is not for our pomp. −	18: ***The pale companion*** = a personification of Theseus' gloom and melancholy; a ***pale*** face was considered sickly and undesirable. The term ***companion*** was often used, as here, with a sense of contempt.[1,9] ***pomp*** = ceremony or celebration.[1]
20	[*Exit Philostrate.*]	20: Philostrate actually doesn't get to speak until Act V.
22	Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword, And won thy love, doing thee injuries:	22-23: Shakespeare alludes to the mythological backstory of Theseus and Hippolyta. When Hercules set out to seize Hippolyta's golden girdle (a sign of her queenly rank) as one of his famous Twelve Labours, the Amazons rose in arms and waged war against his band of warriors, which, in some

versions of the story, included Theseus. During this conflict, Theseus captured Hippolyta and brought her to Athens − where, according to some accounts, he later married her; but see the note after Act II.i.94 below for an alternate version of the myth.

But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

= tone, ie. a celebratory manner, rather than a somber one.
25: with pageantry, festive or public celebration,[1] and merriment.

Enter Egeus, his daughter Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius.

Entering Characters: ***Egeus***, an Athenian noble, wants his daughter ***Hermia*** to marry ***Demetrius***, one of her suitors. However, Hermia loves ***Lysander*** and wishes to marry him instead.

Egeus. Happy be Theseus, our renownèd duke!

Thes. Thanks, good Egeus: what's the news with thee?

= ***Egeus*** is stressed on its second syllable: *e-GE-us*.

Egeus. Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia. −
Stand forth, Demetrius. − My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her. −
Stand forth, Lysander: − and, my gracious duke,
This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child. −

= distressed.[1]

= the line begins with ***This*** stressed.

Thou, thou Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,

40: Egeus, furious at Lysander, addresses him with the insulting ***thou***, rather than the polite ***you***.
given her rhymes = written (love) poetry for her;
given should be pronounced in a single syllable, the *v* elided: *gi'en*.

And interchanged love-tokens with my child;
Thou hast, by moonlight, at her window sung,
With feigning voice, verses of feigning love,

= exchanged small tokens of their love.[5]

43: ***With feigning voice*** = singing softly,[1] perhaps to escape detection.[4]
feigning love = dissembled or pretended true love.[1]

And stol'n the impression of her fantasy;

44: Lysander has secretly imprinted himself onto Hermia's imagination (***fantasy***).[3,4,9]
the impression = pronounced as *th' impression*.

With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gawds, conceits,

45: ***of*** = made from.
gawds = fancy or gaudy articles or ornaments.[1,4]
conceits = trinkets.[1]

Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats (messengers
Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth),

46: ***knacks*** = knick-knacks.[4]
trifles = toys, baubles.[1]
nosegays = small bouquets of flowers.[1]
sweetmeats = sweet treats, such as sugared nuts or candied fruits, etc.[1]
46-47: ***messengers…youth*** = these traditional tokens of courtship easily sway young girls who are inexperienced (***unhardened***)[1] in love.

With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
Turned her obedience (which is due to me)
To stubborn harshness: and, my gracious duke,
Be it so, she will not here, before your Grace,
Consent to marry with Demetrius,

= stolen, pilfered.[1]
49: converted Hermia's duty to obey her father.
51: ie. "then, if she will not, right here, in your presence..."

I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
As she is mine, I may dispose of her:

53-54: Egeus appeals to the Athenian tradition that gives a father the right to decide his daughter's fate; ***dispose of her*** suggests that Egeus sees Hermia as no different than any other personal property he owns.

Which shall be, either to this gentleman,
Or to her death; according to our law,
Immediately provided, in that case.

55-57: Egeus is prepared to give Hermia two options: either marry Demetrius, or be executed, as permitted by law!
Immediately = specifically, expressly.[3,4]

Thes. What say you, Hermia? be advised, fair maid:
To you, your father should be as a god;
One that composed your beauties: yea, and one

= ie. like a god, Egeus "created" Hermia, and as such "gave" Hermia her beauty; ***composed*** = fashioned.[2]

To whom you are but as a form in wax,
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure, or disfigure it:

62-64: Hermia is like a figure of wax, whose form (***figure***)[1] Egeus may preserve (***leave***) or mar (***disfigure***)[1] at his pleasure.
By him imprinted = Egeus is the one who has imparted to Hermia her form and character.[1]

Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

Herm. So is Lysander.

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

69: Theseus does not disagree that Lysander is a good man.
= as a suitor,[3] or "in this respect".[4] = lacking. = approval.[3]

Herm. I would my father looked but with my eyes.

= wish. = ie. "saw things as I see them."

Thes. Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

75: Hermia must conform her vision of things to Egeus'.

Herm. I do entreat your Grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold;

77-80: Hermia apologizes for speaking her mind, when she knows she ought to be more submissive.
power = pronounced as a single-syllable word.

Nor how it may concern my modesty,
In such a presence, here to plead my thoughts:
But I beseech your Grace, that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

= befit.[4]
= ie. "in the presence of one such as your highness."

Thes. Either to die the death, or to abjure,
Forever, the society of men.

85-86: Hermia must either die or join a convent.
die the death = be executed, a common euphemistic expression.[1]
abjure = renounce.

Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,

87-88: Theseus advises Hermia to consider (1) what she really wants, (2) her youth and lack of experience, and (3) the need to control her passion (***blood***), before deciding to defy her father.

Whether (if you yield not to your father's choice)
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,

= distinctive dress or uniform,[9] referring to a nun's habit.[3]
= forever. = shut up.[4]
= childless.[1]

Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.

93: ***faint*** = feeble,[1,2] perhaps suggesting "unenthusiastic".
fruitless = "averse to love";[6] ***fruitless*** also conveys a

		sense of sterility, as Theseus rams home the point that Hermia will never have relations with men or bear children if she chooses to enter a convent.
94	Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood, To undergo such maiden pilgrimage:	94-95: Theseus praises those women who choose to master their passions (***blood***, again) and follow a lifelong path of chastity in the pursuit of religious devotion. ***thrice-blessed*** = especially virtuous or fortunate;[1] ***thrice*** was a common intensifier. ***maiden pilgrimage*** = journey of virginity.
96	But earthlier happy is the rose distilled, Than that, which, withering on the virgin thorn,	96-98: metaphorically, even though a life of religious chastity is admirable, Hermia would be happier with a life of love and marriage.
98	Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness.	Theseus compares a rose from which its essential oils have been extracted (***distilled***),[1] creating perfume, transforming the rose into something beautiful and fruitful (symbolizing a woman's role as a wife and mother) to one that is left to rot on its stem (hence, ***withering***); note Theseus' description of the flower as remaining on a ***virgin thorn***, once again emphasizing the emptiness of a life without marriage. ***earthlier happy*** = meaning, that Hermia would be more contented and satisfied in her earthly life by marrying and raising children than by joining a convent. ***in single blessedness*** = leading a virtuous, but lonely, life.
100	***Herm.*** So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord, Ere I will yield my virgin patent up	101: ***ere*** = before. ***virgin patent*** = Hermia's right to remain a virgin; ***patent*** suggests an exclusive legal grant, implying that only she has the authority to decide to whom she shall give herself − and it will not be Demetrius![1]
102	Unto his lordship, whose unwishèd yoke My soul consents not to give sovereignty.	102-3: using the common Elizabethan metaphor describing marriage as a ***yoke*** − an undesired (***unwished***) burden irrevocably tying two people together − Hermia announces that she has no intention of giving up control of her life (***sovereignty***) to Demetrius (***his lordship***).
104	***Thes.*** Take time to pause, and by the next new moon,	= ie. consider.[1,2] = ie. in four days.
106	The sealing-day betwixt my love and me,	106: ***sealing-day*** = wedding day, viewed as a contract being finalized by being imprinted with a seal.[2] This compound word appears to have been an invention of Shakespeare's, and was quickly adopted by other authors in the 17th century. ***betwixt*** = between.
	For everlasting bond of fellowship,	
108	Upon that day either prepare to die, For disobedience to your father's will,	
110	Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,	= ie. "as your father wishes".
	Or on Diana's altar to protest,	111: "or to take your vow to enter a convent". ***Diana's alter*** = allusion to the virgin goddess ***Diana***, symbolizing one's dedication to a life of chastity. ***protest*** = vow.[1]
112	For aye, austerity and single life.	= forever. = self-denial, rigorous abstinence.[1]

Demet. Relent, sweet Hermia: − and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazèd title to my certain right.

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

Egeus. Scornful Lysander! true, he hath my love:
And what is mine, my love shall render him.

And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

Lysan. I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possessed; my love is more than his;

My fortunes every way as fairly ranked

(If not with vantage) as Demetrius';
And (which is more than all these boasts can be)
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she (sweet lady) dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

Thes. 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. −

For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else, the law of Athens yields you up
(Which by no means we may extenuate)

To death, or to a vow of single life. −
Come, my Hippolyta: what cheer, my love? −
Demetrius and Egeus, go along:

I must employ you in some busïness
Against our nuptial, and confer with you
Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.

= unsound.[4] = fixed or assured claim.[1,2]

= typical Elizabethan imperative form: ***do you*** = "you".

= contemptuous, derisive.[1] = ie. Demetrius.
121: ie. "because I love him, I will surrender to him that which is mine."

122-3: Egeus continues to speak of Hermia as if she were a piece of his own personal property.
estate = make over, bestow.[3,4]

= as well descended, ie. from as good a family.
= endowed,[4] ie. wealthy. = ie. love for Hermia.

127: ***fortunes*** = good or ill luck in life,[2,6] though there is a possible interpretation of ***fortunes*** to mean "status."
as fairly ranked = equal to.

= more.[1]
= anyone else here.
= loved by.
= pursue.[3] = rightful claim.
= assert, confirm.[1] = to his face.[1]
= wooed, played the suitor to.
= worships or idolizes (Demetrius).[1]

= morally stained or blemished.[1] = fickle, changeable.[1]

139: and had intended to speak with Demetrius about this.
140: "but having been occupied with my own affairs".[5]
= "it slipped my mind."

143: Theseus wishes to speak to Demetrius and Egeus privately − to Demetrius to rebuke him for his attentions to Helena, and to Egeus to counsel him to mitigate his harsh attitude towards Hermia's prospects.
schooling = can mean both "reprimands"[1] and "advice".[2]

= prepare.[1]
= "adjust your whims".

147: Theseus claims to have no right to mitigate (***extenuate***)[1] Hermia's sentence, should she continue to refuse to marry Demetrius.
we = "I"; Theseus employs the royal "we".

= ie. life as a nun.
= "how are you?"
= ie. come.

151-3: Theseus seems to let Demetrius and Egeus save face by making it appear he wants to speak with them privately about his own upcoming wedding, while downplaying the

fact that he really wants, as he made clear in lines 141-3 above, to discuss their respective relations with Hermia.

Against = in preparation for.[4]

nearly that = that closely.[4]

Egeus. With duty and desire, we follow you.

[*Exeunt all but Lysander and Hermia*.]

Lysan. How now my love? why is your cheek so pale?
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

= a metaphor for the blush or healthy pinkish hue of her cheek.

Herm. Belike, for want of rain: which I could well
Beteem them, from the tempest of my eyes.

162-3: Hermia extends Lysander's floral metaphor, picking up on his image of her cheeks as withering roses: she suggests that her emotional state is such that she could begin crying tears which could serve as the rain needed to water the roses that are her cheeks.

Belike = likely.

want = lack.

Beteem = grant, allow,[1,4] hence "pour upon".[3]

tempest = storm.

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

165-7: Lysander has never read or heard of any love story in which the ***course of true love*** ever flowed (***did run***) without obstacles; note the stream metaphor in ***course*** and ***did run***.

Ay me! = expression of frustration.[1] This clause is omitted from the Folio. The Quarto prints "***Eigh me***", ***eigh*** being a seldom-used variant of "ay".

168-188 (below): Lysander lists the various ways the course of love can be thwarted.

But either it was different in blood, −

168: "but there was either a difference in social class or rank (***blood***)"[7] − at which point, Hermia interrupts Lysander.

Herm. O cross! too high to be enthralled to love.

170: "oh, how unlucky (***cross***),[1] that someone should be born with such high status (***too high***) that they should be above becoming enslaved or ruled (***enthralled***) by love!"

to love = appears in both the Quarto and Folio; however, many editors emend "*to love*" to "*too low*". If this reading is adopted, Hermia's focus shifts to emphasizing how a difference in social rank − a nobleman in love with a common maid, for example − can act as a barrier to marriage, which makes for a more logical response to Lysander's point of line 168.

Lysan. Or else misgraffèd, in respect of years, −

172: ***misgraffed*** = literally, unsuitably grafted,[3] hence "badly mismatched".[4]

in respect of = in regards to.[9]

Herm. O spite! too old to be engaged to young.

174: "what cruel fortune! that a man should be considered too old to marry a much younger woman."

spite = suggests a malicious thwarting of true love.

Lysan. Or else, it stood upon the choice of friends, −

176: another reason love can be thwarted is that a match may not be approved by one's relatives (***friends***),[2] such as a parent.

The Folio prints, "*it stood upon the choice of merit*", which suggests that one's mate may be chosen by others

based on the suitor's objectively-determined or deserved qualities.[9]

178 ***Herm.*** O hell, to choose love by another's eyes.

178: this obstacle may be more personal to Hermia, since she is being forced to view her own suitors through her father's eyes.

180 ***Lysan.*** Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness, did lay siege to it,

180-1: ie. even if love is mutual, external factors will inevitably foil a happy ending.
a sympathy = accord.[2]
did lay siege to it = a military metaphor for any of the external forces which test the strength and endurance of a couple's love.

182 Making it momentany as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;

182-4: the course of true love is fleeting.
momentany = momentary, ie. ephemeral; stressed on its first syllable.
A common word in the 16th and 17th centuries, ***momentany*** is distinct from *momentary*; according to the OED, the former is a borrowing from French, the latter directly from Latin.
Swift as a shadow = the simile comparing something that passes quickly or swiftly to a shadow was proverbial in contemporary literature.

184 Brief as the lightning in the collied night,

184-7: An extended simile comparing true love to lightning − both fleetingly brilliant, lasting only a moment before darkness returns.
collied = blackened;[4] a *collier* was a supplier of coal.[1]

That (in a spleen) unfolds both Heaven and earth;

185: ie. lightning, in a sudden impulse (***in a spleen***),[2] briefly reveals (***unfolds***)[1] both the sky and earth.
Heaven = here and everywhere going forward, pronounced as a monosyllable, the medial *v* elided: *Hea'n*.

186 And, ere a man hath power to say “Behold!”
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:

186: and before (***ere***) a man can say, "Look!"
187: note the intense but brief metaphor of ***darkness*** as a greedy eater.

188 So quick bright things come to confusiön.

= ie. quickly. = ie. like love and lightning. = ruin.[4]

190 ***Herm.*** If then true lovers have been ever crossed,
It stands as an edíct, in destiny:

190-1: if it is true that genuine lovers have always been thwarted (***ever crossed***),[1,4] then it must be a fixed law (***edict***)[1] of fate (***destiny***)[1] that makes it so.
edict = often stressed on its second syllable, as here.

192 Then let us teach our trial patiënce:
Because it is a customary cross,

192-3: "then we should face this test of our love (***our trial***) with patience, since hardship is the usual adversity (***customary cross***)[1] that true lovers must bear."

194 As due to love as thoughts, and dreams, and sighs,
Wishes, and tears, poor fancy's followers.

194-5: (because such usual obstacles) are as much a part of true love as are dreams, etc.
poor fancy's followers = alliteratively describes sighs, tears, *et al*, as the usual emotions, thoughts and acts which accompany love (***fancy***).

196 ***Lysan.*** A good persuasion: therefore, hear me, Hermia:

= Lysander agrees with Hermia that they should practice patience in order to preserve their love.
persuasion = conviction, belief.[1,2]

I have a widow aunt, a dowager,
= a widow with a property interest in her deceased husband's estate.[1]

Of great revénue, and she hath no child:
= income; ***revenue*** was usually stressed, as here, on the second syllable.

From Athens is her house remote seven leagues;
200: ***remote*** = distant; the Folio prints "*removed*", also acceptable.
seven = pronounced as a monosyllable: *se'en*.
leagues = a league was about 3 miles, or 5 kilometers.[1]

And she respects me as her only son:
= considers, regards.[1,7]

There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
And to that place, the sharp Athenian law
= harsh, severe.[1]

Cannot pursue us. If thou lov'st me, then
= the Quarto has the disyllable ***lovest*** here, which ruins the line's meter; the Folio employs the correct single-syllable form, ***lov'st***, which we adopt.

Steal forth thy father's house, to-morrow night;
= ie. from thy.

And in the wood, a league without the town,
= ie. "three miles outside".

(Where I did meet thee once with Helena,
To do observance to a morn of May),
208: to take part in the customary games and celebrations of May Day, the popular holiday observed annually on May 1.

There will I stay for thee.
= wait.

Herm. My good Lysander,
211-221: Hermia offers an elaborate vow to meet in the woods as Demetrius asks, swearing by a series of living and non-living emblems of love.

I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,
= ***Cupid*** is the cherubic boy-god who mischievously fires his arrows at his victims, causing them to fall in love.

By his best arrow, with the golden head,
213: when Cupid struck one with a ***golden***-tipped arrow, he or she would fall strongly in love (the god used an arrow with a lead tip to cause his victim to hate another person); the golden-tipped arrow is thus the ***best arrow***. The conceit originated in Book 1 of Ovid's *Metamorphosis.*

By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
214*f*: Hermia suddenly switches to speaking in rhyming couplets: the effect is to heighten the emotional intensity of the speech, infusing her words with a sense of ceremony and formality. The pattern of rhyming couplets will continue, with one minor break and a couple of irregularities, to the end of the scene.
simplicity = sincerity, guilessness.[1]
doves = a commonly alluded-to attribute of Venus, the famed goddess of love.

By that which knitteth souls, and prospers loves,
215: Hermia swears by the power (***that***) which joins (***knitteth***) souls and makes love prosper.

And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen,
When the false Troyan under sail was seen,
216-7: when the Trojan (***Troyan***) prince Aeneus fled Troy after its capture and destruction by the Greeks, he eventually came to ***Carthage***, where he and Queen Dido fell in love. When fate compelled Aeneus to leave Carthage and continue his journey, Dido, desperate in her love for the prince, built a funeral pyre in which she took her own life by setting it on fire.

false = unfaithful, inconstant.[2]

218 By all the vows that ever men have broke,
(In number more than ever women spoke),

218-9: Hermia's secondary point − that men are much more likely to break their vows of love than are women − is a touch cynical; but we may note that men are usually the pursuers in love, so that many more avowals will come from men than from the ladies.

220 In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

= ie. self-same.

222

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

223: this line breaks away from the rhyming couplet pattern.

224

Enter Helena.

Entering character: We finally meet ***Helena***, previously identified as the daughter of the nobleman Nedar (who does not appear in the play). In lines 133-4 above, we learned that Demetrius had courted Helena even while he was engaged to Hermia, leading Helena to fall desperately in love with him.

226

Herm. God speed fair Helena! whither away?

227: with the utterance "God speed", Hermia signals that she intends to part here from Lysander, but the contentious Helena will cause Hermia to remain for a short while longer.

God speed = a general wish for success to another person, typically stated upon parting.[1]

fair = attractive, beautiful.

whither away = where are you going?

228

Helena. Call you me "fair"? that "fair" again unsay.

= take back.

230 Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!

230: ***fair*** = ie. fairness.

happy fair = ie. "how fortunate (***happy***) to possess such fairness!"[9]

231-241 (below): with some admiration but a lot of envy, Helena elaborates on how attractive Hermia is to men.

Your eyes are lode-stars, and your tongue's sweet air

231: ***lode-stars*** = guiding stars; Hermia's eyes are captivating.

tongue's sweet air = Hermia's melodious and pleasing (***sweet***)[1] manner of speaking and expression (***air***).[1]

232 More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.

232-3: more musical and harmonious (***tuneable***),[1] and hence more delightful, than a lark's song would be to a shepherd in the springtime, a season of renewal and vitality.

234 Sickness is catching: O, were favour so!

234: just as literal illness may be contagious, Helena wishes that Hermia's good looks (***favour***)[5] were catching too!

Furness poses that ***favour*** might also mean "favour in the eyes of Demetrious, which Helena would also like to acquire".[9]

Your words I['d] catch, fair Hermia, ere I go;

235: ***Your words I'd catch*** = "I would then catch your words". The Folio emends the Quarto's "*Your words **I** catch*", which doesn't really make sense.

Some editors emend this to "Yours would I catch", referring to Hermia's ***favour*** of the previous line.

ere = before.

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

My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.

= by listening carefully to Hermia, Helena hopes to "catch," or acquire, the musical and charming style of her speech.

= pleasing song-like quality."

Note how Helena in lines 235-7 refers back to all of Hermia's specific attractive attributes − her magnetic eyes and pleasing voice and speech − mentioned in lines 231-2 above.

236-7: Shakespeare neatly rotates through the organs of sight and sound − the ear, eye, and tongue.

236-7 (above): those who read Shakespeare or Elizabethan poetry regularly are typically aware that pronunciation in modern English differs from that of four centuries ago; hence, word pairs like *move* and *love*, for example, are easy to accept as genuine 16th or 17th century rhymes, even if failing to rhyme today.

But what about pairings such as that found in lines 236-7: could *eye* and *melody* have really rhymed?

The modern scholarship of David and Ben Crystal and Paul Meier sheds light on the issue: in both *melody* and *eye*, the last syllable would have been sounded with a muted long *i*, sounding something like "*uhhy*"; Meier describes the vowel sound as a diphthong, beginning with a schwa, "or neutral vowel."

The reader who is interested to hear what Elizabethan words might have sounded like may consult Meier's website: https://www.paulmeier.com/OP.pdf.

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'll give to be to you translated.

238-9: "if I owned the whole world, I would give you everything in it, Demetrius excepted (***bated***)."[3] Helena's desperate longing for Demetrius is made clear.

I'll = both the Quarto and Folio print ***I'll***, which is often emended to "*I'd*" in modern texts.

translated = transferred.[3]

O, teach me how you look, and with what art

You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart!

240: ***how you look*** = ie. "how to use your eyes so expressively".

art = technique, skill.

= steer the direction of, ie. control, influence.

Herm. I frown upon him; yet he loves me still.

243: Hermia discourages Demetrius' advances, yet he continues to love her.

Helena. O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

245: if only the smiles Helena bestows on Demetrius had the same effect on him as do Hermia's frowns! Helena continues the teacher-student motif she introduced in her previous speech.

Herm. I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

Helena. O that my prayers could such affection move!

= stir, excite.[1]

251-7 (below): you may wish to consider the degree to which these lines form pairs of rhyming couplets; Strictly speaking, the endings employ repetition (*me*/*me* and *mine*/*mine*) rather than true rhyme, but the echoing does create a pseudo-rhyme effect. Shakespeare appears to have felt it was more important to emphasize parallel phrasing in lines 251/253 and 255/7 than to force distinct rhyming word-

pairs onto the end of the lines.

Herm. The more I hate, the more he follows me.

252

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

254

Herm. His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

= should be ***Helen*** to fit the meter.

The Folio prints, "*His folly, Helena, is none of mine*," which seems a bit less defensive and sharp.[9] This version may be more likely to be the "correct" one, given Helena's response, "*None but...*"[9]

256

Helena. None but your beauty: would that fault were mine!

257: Hermia's beauty is in fact to blame for Demetrius' foolish pursuit of her; if only that beauty (***would that fault***) belonged to Helena!

258

Herm. Take comfort: he no more shall see my face;

260 Lysander and myself will fly this place.

= flee.

Before the time I did Lysander see,

261: ie. "before I met Lysander".

262 Seemed Athens as a paradise to me.

O, then, what graces in my love do dwell,

263-4: "how charming must Lysander (***my love***) be, that I

264 That he hath turned a Heaven unto a hell!

have let him turn my happy life into a hellish one" − because now that Hermia is desperate to marry Lysander, she can no longer remain in Athens, where this would be impossible (since her father insists she marry Demetrius).

266 ***Lysan.*** Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:

= ie. thoughts. = reveal.

Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold

267-8: ***when Phoebe…glass*** = poetically, when the moon is out and shining.

Phoebe = a Titan goddess, ***Phoebe*** has been identified with the moon from the earliest Greek myths.

behold = see.

visage = face; the appearance of the moon was frequently described as ***silver***.

watery glass = bodies of water imagined as mirrors reflecting the moon's face (***glass*** = mirror).

268 Her silver visage in the watery glass,

Decking, with liquid pearl, the bladed grass,

269: poetically, causing dew to appear on the grass.

decking = adorning.[1]

270 (A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal),

= night always (***still***) hides eloping lovers from view.

flights = acts of fleeing or running away.[1]

Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

= planned to sneak.

272

Herm. And in the wood, where often you and I,

274 Upon faint primrose-beds, were wont to lie,

274: ***faint*** = likely meaning "light coloured" or "pale"; a 1578 plant guide describes various flowers as being "*faint blue*", "*faint yellow*", and "*faint red*"; and in a 1593 sonnet, Thomas Lodge wrote of "*a faint and fading flower*."

wont = accustomed.

Emptying our bosoms, of their counsel swelled,

275: ie. "revealing our secrets, innermost thoughts and plans (***counsel***) to each other". The metaphoric image is of the ladies' hearts being so overfilled (***swelled***) with private thoughts that they needed to relieve the pressure by sharing them with one another.

The Quarto and Folio both print ***swelled***. In his early 18th

century edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, scholar Lewis Theobald emended ***swelled*** to ***sweet*** to rhyme with ***meet*** in line 276, thus preserving the pattern of rhyming couplets in this section of the scene, and modern editions generally adopt this change. We may note that there are plenty of 16th century examples of ***counsel*** being described as *sweet*.[9]

There my Lysander and myself shall meet,
And thence from Athens, turn away our eyes,

277: metaphorically, "and leave Athens".

To seek new friends and strange companiöns.

= foreign companions; Theobald here too dares to emend the text to ***stranger companies*** ("the company of strangers or foreigners"), noting that Shakespeare regularly used the word *company* to mean "companion".[9]

See the note after line 237 above for an explanation of how *eyes* and *companies* would have likely rhymed in Shakespeare's day.

Farewell, sweet playfellow: pray thou for us:

= playmate.[1]

And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius! −

280: ie. "may good fortune help you win Demetrius' love!"

Keep word, Lysander: we must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

281: ***Keep word*** = "keep your promise" (ie. to meet in the woods); this is a good example of Shakespeare's far-reaching effect on the English language: while the expression "keep one's word" was very common throughout the 16th century, Shakespeare here abbreviates the expression to "keep word" to help him preserve the line's meter; ***keep word*** was thereafter used by a number of other authors throughout the 17th century.

281-2: ***we must...midnight*** = Hermia and Lysander must refrain from seeing each other until they meet the next night. The lines use a neat, tightly-woven metaphor comparing the spiritual nourishment they gain from each other's sight to the sustenance of food.

morrow = tomorrow.

deep midnight = ie. the deepest or darkest part of the night, roughly around midnight. The collocation "deep night" was common in the 16th century; Shakespeare appears to have modified it to "deep midnight" to satisfy the rhythmic demands of iambic pentameter. Later 17th-century writers adopted this collocation of Shakespeare's as well.

Lysan. I will, my Hermia.

[*Exit Hermia*.]

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

289: "may Demetrius love you as much as you love him!"

[*Exit Lysander*.]

Helena. How happy some o'er other some can be!

293: "how fortunate (***happy***) some people are compared to others!"

o'er other some = over some others;[1] *other some* was actually a single word − *othersome* − though it was often broken into two.

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.

296: Demetrius refuses to recognize what everyone else knows − that she is as attractive as Hermia.

And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.

297-8: Helena's erroneous judgment in valuing or esteeming (***admiring***)[1] Demetrius parallels Demetrius's own fault in idolizing Hermia.

qualities = characteristics.[2]

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.

299-300: because love is unable to keep a proper sense of proportion (***quantity***),[3] it causes those in love to believe that objects which are lowly and contemptible possess (an attractive) appearance (***form***)[2] and nobility.

holding no quantity = the expression *to hold quantity*, meaning "to have a proper sense of proportion", appears to be unique to Shakespeare. He repeated the conceit in *Hamlet*:

> *For women's fear and love holds quantity,*
> *In neither aught, or in extremity*.

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind:

301: a variation on the common conceit that "love is blind".

302-8 (below): as was common in Elizabethan poetry, Cupid is portrayed as personified ***Love***; Helena's critiques of Cupid are therefore meant metaphorically to shine light on the irrationality, and hence unfairness, of love in general.

And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.

302: Cupid causes people to fall in love by shooting them with a golden arrow; his *blindness* symbolizes the fact that we do not choose whom we love, so that love may seem irrational or illogical.

Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste:

= ie. Cupid, as personified love.

Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste:

304: Cupid's possessing wings but no sight represents how love can strike a person quickly and impulsively, without rational judgment.

figure unheedy haste = represent heedless haste (Stevenson, p. 77).[5]

And therefore is Love said to be a child,

305: Cupid is usually portrayed as a little boy to symbolize his, and therefore love's, lack of mature judgment.

Because, in choice, he is so oft beguiled.

306: because he is so often deceived in choosing whom to strike with his arrows (Stevenson, p. 77).[5]

As waggish boys, in game, themselves forswear,
So the boy, Love, is perjured everywhere.

307-8: Helena compares Cupid's fickleness and trickery to mischievous (***waggish***) children who make playful promises which they never intend to keep.

As = ie. just as.
in game = in jest.[1]
forswear = renounce or falsely swear an oath.[1]
perjured = deceitful.[1]

For, ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths, that he was only mine;

309-310: before Demetrius ever saw Hermia, he had repeatedly pledged his love to Helena.

eyne = archaic form of "eyes";[2] rhymes with ***mine*** of the next line.

line 310: Helena begins a meteorological metaphor

which extends through line 312.

And when this hail some heat, from Hermia, felt,
312 So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.

311-2: Helena compares Hermia's amorous influence on Demetrius to a blast of ***heat*** which has melted (***dissolved***) the ***hail*** which represents his vows of love to Helena.

I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight:

313: Helena will reveal to Demetrius Hermia's plan to elope with Lysander.

314 Then, to the wood, will he, tomorrow night,

314-5: ***Then to…her*** = she expects Demetrius will appear in the woods himself at the appointed time to stop the couple's escape.

Pursue her: and for this intelligence,
316 If I have thanks, it is a dear expense:

315-6: ***and for...expense*** = Helena knows that by informing Demetrius of Hermia's elopement, she will pay dearly for his thanks (if she gets any), because she will be helping him pursue her rival.[3,4]

this = the Folio prints *"his"*.

intelligence = information.[4]

a dear expense = at great cost (to her).

But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
318 To have his sight thither, and back again.

317-8: but Helena won't mind the extra suffering, since she will at least be able to see Demetrius again, even if only briefly.

enrich my pain = ie. "add to my own hardship or wretchedness".[1]

Line 318: to see Demetrius both when he goes to the forest and when he returns from it.

thither = to there.

[*Exit Helena*.]

ACT I, SCENE II

A Room in Quince's House.

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

Entering Characters: we now meet some of the most delightful members of all the Shakespearean canon, the craftsmen of Athens. These skilled labourers have gathered to rehearse a short play that they will present for Duke Theseus' wedding to Hippolyta.

Quince the carpenter seems to have been assigned the role of manager and director of the production, though he will be quite accommodating to the whims and predilections of his cast.

Bottom the weaver is the most forward and eager of the troupe, and also − for better or for worse − the most talented.

The "mechanicals", as the manual workers are called, are, from the beginning, clearly out of their depth in attempting so earnestly to stage a bit of classical theatre for the nobility. As such, they serve as the larger play's comic relief; but Shakespeare's humorous treatment of the struggling men is gentle and affectionate, never mean-spirited or cruel.

1 ***Quin.*** Is all our company here?
2

Bottom. You were best to call them generally,

3: ***You were best*** = "it would be best if you were".[5]

generally = "all together", as opposed to "one at a time";[1] several editors point out that this is Bottom's first malapropism, since he appears to mean something like

"severally"[7] or "particularly",[9] meaning "individually".

4 man by man, according to the scrip.

4: ***man by man*** = one at a time;[1] a common expression.
scrip = usually means "short written document", but the OED asserts that in this case, ***scrip*** refers to a written list.[1]

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

= list of names.[1] = who.[5]
= suited, ie. qualified.[2]
= light dramatic entertainment.[1,3]

10

Bottom. First, good Peter Quince, say what the play
12 treats on; then read the names of the actors: and so

11-12: ***say…treats on*** = ie. "tell us what the play is about".
The common expression "to treat on" was primarily used in the period to mean (1) "speak on" or "address", e.g., "*then lise* (cease)[1] *they not to treate on earnest affayres*" (1577); or (2) "negotiate" or "raise", e.g. "*the king of Fraunce sent his Ambassadours to the Emperour, to treate on the marriage betwene her and his eldest Sonne*" (1588).

grow to a point.

= the OED suggests "come to a conclusion".

14

Quin. Marry, our play is, "The Most Lamentable
16 Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and

15: ***Marry*** = a common oath, derived from the name of the Virgin Mary.
15-16: ***The Most Lamentable Comedy*** = this muddled title is meant to be humorously incongruous, since the term ***comedy*** in this period was used to describe a lightly entertaining play with a happy ending (not necessarily a "funny" play).

Thisbe."

= the Quarto and Folio generally spell the name as *Thisby*, but we will use the modernized spelling, *Thisbe*, still a two-syllable word.

18

Digression on *Pyramus and Thisbe*.
Source and Influence: the story of these "star-crossed lovers" appeared in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the most famous and influential edition of which was Arthur Golding's 1567 translation. This brief tragedy was the primary source and inspiration for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which the Bard might have been working on in the same period as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
The Story: briefly, Pyramus and Thisbe were lovers whose parents forbade them to meet. Speaking through a crack in a wall separating their two families' properties, they planned a secret rendezvous under a mulberry tree. Arriving first, Thisbe fled when a lion appeared, dropping her veil, which the lion tore and bloodied. When Pyramus found the veil, he thought Thisbe had been killed, and in despair stabbed himself. Thisbe returned, saw him dying, and killed herself in turn.
The Title: the expression "***The Lamentable***..." had been used in other Elizabethan-era plays (e.g., *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second*, etc., by Christopher Marlowe (1590); and *The Spanish Tragedy, Containing the Lamentable End of Don Horatio and Bel-imperia*, by Thomas Kyd (1580s)); however, "*The* ***Most Lamentable***" made its first and only appearance in Shakespeare's own ***The Most Lamentable*** *Romaine*

Tragedie of Titus Andronicus (1594).
It thus seems that Shakespeare was borrowing from, and perhaps parodying, firstly himself by inserting *The Most Lamentable* into the title of the craftsmen's play, and secondly and more broadly the grandiose titles given to plays in this period by publishers.

Bottom. A very good piece of work, I assure you,
20 and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your

= Bottom's description of the drama as amusing and gay comically belies his utter ignorance of its subject matter.
Shakespeare seems to have been the first to describe something as ***"a merry"*** without an object; this usage was adopted by other authors in the 17th century.

actors, by the scroll. − Masters, spread yourselves.

21: ***by the scroll*** = ie. from the list of names.[1]
Masters = vocatively, a familiar term of respect.[1]
spread yourselves = spread out,[5] but Schmidt suggests, "line up", ie. get in a row.[6]

22

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

23*ff*: the names of the craftsmen humorously and explicitly evoke their trades.
Bottom = a ***bottom*** was a technical term for a ball of yarn, or a core around which to wind thread.[1,5]

26 ***Bottom.*** Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

28

Quin. You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

30

Bottom. What is Pyramus? a lover, or a tyrant?

= ruffian, villain.[1]

32

Quin. A lover that kills himself most gallant[ly] for
34 love.

= ie. "heroically";[1] the Quarto prints *gallant*, emended in the Folio to "gallantly".

36 ***Bottom.*** That will ask some tears in the true performing of it: if I do it, let the audience look
38 to their eyes: I will move storms: I will condole

36-39: ***that will…measure*** = Bottom is confident his acting will be moving enough to bring his audience to tears.
ask = require, demand.[5]
move storms = create rainstorms of tears.
condole = lament, grieve; the word ***condole*** was brand new in English, its first appearance in literature being in 1588.

in some measure. To the rest yet, my chief humour

38: ***in some measure*** = to a certain degree.
39-40: ***my chief...tyrant*** = Bottom prefers to play a swaggerer.
humour = inclination.

40 is for a tyrant: I could play Ercles rarely, or a part

40-41: ***Ercles*** = ie. Hercules, commonly played as a blustering character;[5] this is not necessarily a mala-propism, as "Hercles" was a common spelling of the hero's name.
rarely = excellently.

to tear a cat in, to make all split:

41: ***tear a cat in*** = rant and rave;[1,5] first appearance of this expression in literature.
make all split = cause all to come apart or go to pieces; the expression was used in a nautical context to describe ships broken up in a storm or on rocks[1,5] (see Bottom's following poetic lines). Another expression first found in Shakespeare, and adopted by others.

		Bottom might also be suggesting that his acting could cause everyone to break out in joyous laughter: the conceit "*laugh till we split*" appears frequently after 1595.
42		**43-50 (below):** Stevenson describes Bottom's poetic recitation as "a burlesque imitation of the senseless rant that was found in many plays" (p. 78).[5] However, it is also more specifically a parody of a pair of passages from John Studley's 16th century translation of *Hercules Oetaeus*, a play written by the Roman philosopher Seneca: 1. lines 43-46 of Bottom's speech find their source in these lines from Studley: *The **roring rocks** haue quaking sturd...* *Hell gloummy **gates I haue brast oape*** [burst open]... 2. line 47 derives from the play's opening lines: *O Lord of Ghostes whose fyrye flashe...* *Doth cause the trembling Lodges twain* *of **Phoebus carre** to quake...*
	The raging rocks,	
44	*And <u>shivering shocks</u>*	44: shattering or splintering violent blows or collisions.[2,6]
	Shall break the locks	
46	*Of prison-gates;*	
	And <u>Phibbus'</u> <u>car</u>	47: ***Phibbus*** is Phoebus, an epithet for Apollo as the sun god; he was frequently depicted driving his chariot (***car***), ie. the sun, across the sky, drawn by four horses. Bottom's mispronunciation of the god's name is meant to be comic.
48	*Shall shine from far,*	
	And make and mar	49-50: "and destroy the foolish Fates." The ***Fates*** were three sister deities who controlled the destinies and lifespans of all humans. It was generally understood that the Fates were not subject to the will of, much less vulnerable to be hurt by, other gods and goddesses.
50	*The foolish <u>Fates</u>.*	
52	This was lofty. Now, name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' <u>vein</u>, a tyrant's vein: a lover is more	= characteristic style.[1]
54	<u>condoling</u>.	= moving, affecting.[2]
56	***Quin.*** Francis <u>Flute</u>, the <u>bellows</u>-mender?	56: the ***bellows*** were the part of an organ through which air was admitted; ***flute*** seems to have been a synonym of sorts with the pipes of an organ, e.g., "*as all the pipes and flutes of a pair of organs*…" (1594).
58	***Flute.*** Here, Peter Quince.	
60	***Quin.*** Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.	
62	***Flute.*** What is Thisbe? <u>a wandering knight</u>?	= ie. a knight-errant, or medieval-style knight who sought adventures and engaged in deeds of chivalry.[1]
64	***Quin.*** It is the lady that Pyramus must love.	64*ff*: women's parts were all played by men or boys in this era.
66	***Flute.*** Nay, faith, let not me play a woman: I have a beard coming.	
68	***Quin.*** <u>That's all one</u>: you shall play it in a mask: and	= it's all the same.
70	you may speak as <u>small</u> as you will.	= high-pitched.[1,2]

Bottom. And I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too, I'll speak in a monstrous little voice; "Thisne;

= if.

73: ***monstrous*** = very.[1]

Thisne = this may not necessarily be a comical mispronunciation of **Thisbe**: some commentators have wondered if Bottom's intention was to use the real word "thisne", a variation of the word "thissen", meaning, "in this way" or "in this manner".[3,4] Bottom may have been trying to say *thissen*, and either mispronounced it or conflated it with *Thisbe*. All of this, however, may be unconvincing, since there is no evidence of either *thissen* or *thisne* appearing in literature before the mid-17th century.

Bourus suggests that ***Thisne*** is meant to be an affectionate nickname for Thisbe.[7]

Thisne." "Ah Pyramus, my lover dear, thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!"

Quin. No, no: you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisbe.

Bottom. Well, proceed.

Quin. Robin Starveling, the tailor?

= starving, perpetually hungry, or emaciated;[1] in this era, tailors were typically depicted as cowardly, weak, and poor, hence the man's name.

Starv. Here, Peter Quince.

Quin. Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother. Tom Snout, the tinker?

87: a ***tinker*** was a mender of metal pots and other such utensils; ***snout*** refers to the spout or beak of a household vessel.[1]

Snout. Here, Peter Quince.

Quin. You, Pyramus' father: myself, Thisbe's father: Snug, the joiner, you, the lion's part: and, I hope, here is a play fitted.

92-93: a ***joiner*** was a wood-worker who made furniture and other wooden items. He would have been skilled in making sure that the pieces of wood he put together would join ***snugly***, or closely, hence the character's name. Quince further puns on Snug's name when he expresses hope that Snug is ***fitted*** for, or well-matched to, the part of a lion.

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

= common expression for "please".
= ie. "is written". = ie. to memorize.[1]

Quin. You may do it extempore: for it is nothing but roaring.

98-99: Quince may or may not actually intend to be humorous here, but his suggestion that Snug could improvise his "lines", which are comprised of nothing but lion's roars, is itself comical.

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

103-4: Bottom imagines that the duke would be so impressed with his acting that he would call for an encore!

Quin. And you should do it too terribly, you would fright the duchess and the ladies, that they would shrike; and that were enough to hang us all.

= if. = ie. roar in too terrifying a manner.[1]

108: ***shrike*** = shriek, but pronounced to rhyme with "like".[1]
hang us all = ie. "get us all hanged." As is typical of

Elizabethan plays set in foreign lands or ancient times, the concerns of the characters are strictly English.

110 ***All.*** That would hang us, every mother's son.

= everyone,[1] ie. "each of us"; a common expression.

112 ***Bottom.*** I grant you, friends, if you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more

113-4: ***they would…hang us*** = Bottom's syntax is muddled, but he seems to mean that, should the men overly-frighten the ladies, the latter would have no alternative but to hang them all.

In Elizabethan English, ***discretion*** (line 114) could also bear a legal sense, meaning a judgment, sentence, or remedy. Bottom may thus be trying to say, "they could pronounce no sentence other than hanging."

Stevenson further points out that only the duke, not the ladies, would have the authority to pronounce judgment on the men.[5]

114 discretion, but to hang us: but I will aggravate my

= intensify;[1] Bottom once again misspeaks, as he clearly intends to say that he will moderate his roars instead.[5]

Mistress Quickly misuses ***aggravate*** in exactly the same way in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part II*, when she says, "*Good Captain Peesel, be quiet; 'tis very late, i' beseek you now,* ***aggravate*** *your choler*."

voice so, that I will roar you as gently as any sucking
116 dove; I will roar you, and 'twere any nightingale.

115-6: ***I will roar…nightingale*** = Bottom's comparison of the roar of a lion to the coo of a dove or song of a nightingale is comical; his biology is also inaccurate, as birds will not be found to be suckling (***sucking***)[1] their young.

roar you = ie. roar; a common Elizabethan construction.

and 'twere = as if it were.[4]

118 ***Quin.*** You can play no part but Pyramus: for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man as
120 one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely,

119-120: ***a proper…day*** = Shakespeare almost certainly borrowed this linguistic conceit from John Lyly, who wrote in his play "*Mother Bombie*" (1594), "*he is as goodly a youth as one shall see in a summer's day*." The use of "as one shall see on a summer's day" became proverbial.

proper = handsome.[4]

gentleman-like man: therefore you must needs play
122 Pyramus.

124 ***Bottom.*** Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to play it in?

126

Quin. Why, what you will.

= ie., "whichever you like."

128

129-132 (below): Bottom's speech alludes to the fashion of dyeing one's beard,[9] which is referred to frequently in 16th-17th century literature.

Bottom. I will discharge it in either your straw colour

= perform.[5]

130 beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain

130: ***orange-tawny*** = yellowish-brown;[1] actually a common compound word or collocation.

purple-in-grain = fast-dyed purple.[1] Bottom's enthusiasm leads him to consider this absurd colour for a beard.

beard, or your French crown colour beard, your

= the colour of a French gold coin.[1]

perfit yellow.

= perfect, a common alternate form; the Folio reads "*perfect*".

Quin. Some of your French crowns have no hair at all; and then you will play barefaced. − But masters,

134-5: ***Some of…all*** = Quince makes the inevitable joke about the baldness caused by syphilis. The English often mocked the French for the supposed prevalence of venereal disease in France (a result of French licentiousness, as the English saw it). The word "crown" adds a pun, referring to both a coin (a ***French crown***) and, of course, the head.

you will play barefaced = "you would play the part with no beard at all."

here are your parts: and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you, to con them by tomorrow night:

= memorize.

and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the

138: ***palace wood*** = royal forest, ie. woods belonging to the duke.

without = outside.

a mile without the town = this is inconsistent with Lysander's earlier suggestion that the woods are a league, or three miles, outside of town; see Act I.i.206 above.[9]

town, by moonlight; there will we rehearse: for if we meet in the city, we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. In the mean time, I will

140-1: ***we shall…known*** = Quince wants the craftsmen to rehearse in secret, so as to keep the character of the play a surprise.

dogged = followed closely.[5]

devices = plans, intentions.[2]

draw a bill of properties, such as our play wants. I pray you, fail me not.

= prepare a list of stage equipment.[3,5] = lacks, ie. needs.

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

146: ***obscenely*** = obvious malapropism; editors have posited that Bottom's intended word may have been "obscurely" or "seemly".[5,9] Shakespeare repeated the erroneous use of ***obscenely*** in *Love's Labour's Lost* − the only times the word appears in Shakespeare's works.

Take pains = make an effort, work hard.

perfit: adieu.

= perfect, as at line 132 above; the Folio reads "perfect".

Quin. At the duke's oak we meet.

Bottom. Enough: hold, or cut bow-strings.

= "be there without fail" (Durham, p. 150),[4] or "hold to the agreement at all costs" (Ridley, p. 95).[3]

An early editor suggested a complex origin for the phrase from archery, but it is not worth reproducing here.[9] Other commentators have agreed that the expression seems to have been proverbial, but I can find no other examples appearing in early English literature.

[*Exeunt*.]

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A wood near Athens.

Enter a Fairy at one door, and Puck (Robin Goodfellow) at another.

Entering characters: we now meet the play's third set of characters, those of the supernatural world.

at one door = through one of the stage-doors.[4]

The first ***Fairy*** to appear tells us explicitly in her opening speech that she is an attendant of Titiana, the Fairy Queen.

The character ***Puck***, a mischievous household spirit, also goes by the name ***Robin Goodfellow***.

Traditionally, a "**puck**" was a generic name for a class of malevolent spirits. Before Shakespeare, the word had usually been spelled *pooke* or *pouke* (probably pronounced to rhyme with "duke").[9]

Shakespeare may have also coined the name ***Puck*** by shortening the word "puckerel", or "puckrel", another word meaning imp that appears occasionally in the late 16th century.

The name **Robin Goodfellow** appears frequently in 16th century literature, usually as a generic name for a goblin. For instance, John Florio's *A World of Words* (1598) defines a scazzambrello as "*a hobgoblin, a robin good fellow*."

Puck. How now spirit! whither wander you?

1. ***How now*** = how is it now, ie. how goes it.[1]

whither wander you = alliteratively, "to where (***whither***) have you wandered?"

3-6 (below): the first four lines (3-6) of the Fairy's speech each consist of pairs of the metrical foot known as the *amphimacer*, a three-syllable foot in which the unstressed syllable falls between two stressed syllables.[1]

Note the rhyming pattern of the first four lines: *abab*; then, starting from line 7, the Fairy shifts into rhyming couplets with varying meters.

Fairy. Over hill, over dale,

3: ***dale*** = valley.[1]

Over hill, over dale = "*over hill and dale*" had been a common expression since the days of Geoffrey Chaucer; Shakespeare, however, was the first to write ***over hill, over dale***, which much later became the famous first words of *The Caissons Go Rolling Along*, a marching song written in 1908 for the U.S. Field Artillery:

Over hill, over dale,
As we hit the dusty trail,
And those caissons go rolling along.

Thorough bush, thorough brier,

4: ***Thorough*** = ie. through, a common disyllabic alternate form.

brier = thorny shrubs or bushes.[1]

Over park, over pale,

= fenced in or enclosed area.[1]

Thorough flood, thorough fire:
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere;

= in the ancient Ptolemaic view of the cosmos (a model widely adopted by Elizabethan poets in their plays and

verse), the Earth stood at the center of the universe, surrounded by a series of concentric crystalline spheres; in the sphere closest to the Earth was imbedded the moon (beyond the moon, the sun and each planet had its own sphere). As these spheres independently revolved, they carried the heavenly bodies with them, causing them to appear to circle the Earth.

Line 8 seems metrically short, with an unstressed syllable missing between ***moon's*** and ***sphere***. When faced with a situation such as this, editors have almost universally resorted to one of two expedients: (1) insert an additional word; or (2) force an extra syllable into one of the existing words.

Here, the most common "solution" is to insist that ***moon's*** should be pronounced as a disyllable: *MOON-es*.

The difficulty with this claim is that in both the Quarto and Folio, ***moon's*** is spelled − "*moons*". If Shakespeare had intended a disyllabic pronunciation, one would expect the spelling *moones*.

H.H. Furness proposes a simpler explanation: the speaker may allow the extra unstressed beat to arise naturally through a slight pause between *moon's* and *sphere*. As Furness has written, who can be certain that this was not how the line was delivered in contemporary performance? And, if other analogous situations were treated the same way, editors might finally be kept in check from "correcting" the Bard's work by inserting their own invented language unnecessarily![9]

And I serve the Fairy Queen,

10 To dew her orbs upon the green.

10: ***dew*** = sprinkle with dew, water.[1,5]

orbs = ie. fairy-rings; rings or circles of grass which appeared in fields and pastures, ***orbs*** were believed to be created by fairies as they danced in a ring or otherwise went about their duties.[2,4,5]

green = grassy ground.[1]

The cowslips tall her pensioners be,

11: ie. the Fairy Queen's pensioners are cowslips.

cowslips = common wild plant producing yellow flowers, hence the ***gold coats*** of line 12.[1]

pensioners = bodyguards; Queen Elizabeth was assigned a company of bodyguards made up of tall and attractive men, called her **Pensioners**.[4]

12 In their gold coats, spots you see:

= a large reddish spot appears in the middle of each yellow petal of the cowslip.

Those be rubies, fairy favours:

13: ***Those*** = ie. the ***spots*** of line 12.

fairy favours = gifts from the fairies (to the cowslips for doing their jobs).[5]

14 In those freckles, live their savours.

14: in the red spots (***freckles***) of the cowslips' petals, the flowers' fragrance or scent (***savours***) will be found .[5]

In *Henry V* too, Shakespeare refers to the "*freckled cowslip*".

I must go seek some dewdrops here,

16 And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear. −

16: a ***pearl*** was common metaphor for a dewdrop; here Shakespeare extends the image by comparing a dewdrop clinging to a cowslip's petal to a piece of jewelry hanging

		from an ear.
	Farewell, thou Lob of spirits: I'll be gone.	= bumpkin, lout;[1] the Fairy alludes to the traditional view of a "puck" as a coarser type of hobgoblin, rather than the unintrusive spirit of folklore.[5]
18	Our queen and all her elves come here anon.	= will be here shortly.
20	***Puck.*** The king doth keep his revels here tonight.	20: ***The king*** = Oberon, the Fairy King. ***doth keep his revels*** = holds a festive celebration.[1]
	Take heed the queen come not within his sight:	21: be careful (***Take heed***) not to let the Fairy King see the Fairy Queen.
22	For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,	= exceedingly angry (***fell*** and ***wrath*** are synonyms for irate).
		23-29 (below): the Fairy King is upset because the queen has taken into her care a beautiful child whom the king wants for himself, but the queen refuses to give him up.
	Because that she as her attendant, hath	
24	A lovely boy, stol'n from an Indian king:	= ie. kidnapped.
	She never had so sweet a changeling.	= fairies were said to sometimes steal a child and leave an inferior one − a ***changeling*** − in exchange; here, however, Puck uses the word ***changeling*** to refer to the abducted child.[1,4] Note that ***changeling*** is trisyllabic: *CHANGE-e-ling.*
26	And jealous Oberon would have the child	= wishes to.
	Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;	= a knight in his retinue or group of followers. = cross.[4]
28	But she, perforce, withholds the lovèd boy,	= forcibly.[5] = beloved.
	Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.	= pronounced in a single syllable.
30	And now, they never meet in grove or green,	= ie. the Fairy King and Queen.
	By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,	31: ***fountain*** = spring. ***spangled starlight sheen*** = literally, starlight appearing as bright specks of light; in context, meaning "at night, outside". ***starlight sheen*** = ***starlight*** and ***sheen*** (meaning "bright") each could be used either as a noun or an adjective.[1] Which is which here? Take your pick. It was common in the 16th century to describe the night sky as *spangled* with *stars*.
32	But they do square, that all their elves, for fear,	= quarrel.[4] = ie. so that.[4] = out of.
	Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there.	= ie. themselves.
34		
	Fairy. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,	35: ie. "either I am mistaken in who you look like". ***making*** = form.[4]
36	Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite,	36: ***shrewd*** = mischievous.[5] ***knavish*** = roguish.[1] ***sprite*** = common monosyllabic alternate form of *spirit*.
	Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he	37-42: ***Are not you…harm*** = the Fairy lists some of Puck's pranks in order to solidify his role as a troublemaker and trickster.
38	That frights the maidens of the villagery?	= ie. frightens. = collection of villages.[1]

	Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,	39: ***Skim milk*** = remove the desired cream from milk by skimming it off the top.[1] ***labour in the quern*** = work in the ***quern*** (a hand mill for grinding grain) to cause it to malfunction.[3,6]
40	And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,	40: and cause the housewife to work to churn butter in vain (***bootless*** = uselessly or unsuccessfully) until she is exhausted (***breathless*** = out of breath).[1]
	And sometime make the drink to bear no barm,	41: "And sometimes you cause the ale (***the drink***) to fail to rise or ferment." ***drink*** = note the use of ***drink*** as a generic word standing for a specific reference − ale. ***barm*** = yeast-froth;[3,4] ***barm*** is the fermenting agent of beer or ale.[1]
42	Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?	= leading night-wanderers astray. **39-42 (above):** the verb forms in these lines seem, at first glance, to be incorrect: shouldn't Shakespeare have written *Skims, labours, makes*, and so on, to match *frights* in line 38? But no; rather, the clauses are meant to be read with an implied "you", or "do you not", as a lead-in: "**you** skim milk", or "**do you not** sometimes labour", and so forth.
	Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,	43-44: for those who acknowledge him (line 43), Puck can be a beneficent spirit, performing helpful services. These lines reflect a conventional belief about fairies, that they would do good deeds for those who believed in them.[19]
44	You do their work, and they shall have good luck.	
	Are not you he?	
46		
	Puck. Thou speak'st aright;	
48	I am that merry wanderer of the night.	
	I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,	= ie. amuse. Shakespeare seems to have been the first to use the construction, to "jest to" someone.
50	When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,	50-51: when Puck neighs in imitation of a young mare, or female horse (***filly foal***), tricking a stallion into pursuing the phantom filly. ***fat*** = suggests a horse fed an ample diet. ***bean-fed*** = contemporary works suggest that a diet of beans and oats was ideal for horses used in hard service, keeping them healthy and strong: e.g. "*for your horse for service in the wars, or the horse kept for highway trauelling, or long journeys, your best provender is beans and oats well kiln-dried and mingled together*" (1607). ***beguile*** = catch the attention of, divert.[1] ***filly foal*** = the Folio prints "*silly foal*", also acceptable. Pre-Shakespeare, however, only *filly foal* appears elsewhere in the written record.
	Neighing, in likeness of a filly foal;	
52	And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,	= a sweet drink of spiced ale, traditionally used at christenings.[4] ***gossip*** = common name for a sponsor, ie. godfather or godmother, at a christening.
	In very likeness of a roasted crab,	= ie. crab apple, another ingredient of the ***gossip's bowl***.
54	And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,	54-55: as the gossip drinks, Puck, disguised as one of the

	And on her withered dewlop pour the ale.	ale's crab apples, bounces (***bob*** = bounce or jerk)[1] up against her lips, causing her to spill the drink onto her neck. ***withered dewlop*** = indicates the gossip is an old woman, with a sagging dewlap (the fold of loose skin under the neck); the term *dewlap* was originally applied only to animals, but later humorously, as here, to a person;[1] *dewlop* was an occasional variant spelling.
56	The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale, Sometime, for three-foot stool, mistaketh me:	= old woman.[1] = soberest, most serious.[4]
58	Then slip I from her bum, down topples she, And "tailor" cries, and falls into a cough;	= why she would cry out "Tailor!" has never been understood or fully explained.
60	And then the whole quire hold their hips, and loffe;	60: ***quire*** = company.[4] ***loffe*** = ie. laugh; a possibly unique variant, used here by Shakespeare to indicate a rhyme with ***cough***, spelled "*coffe"* in the texts.
	And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear	61: ***waxen in their mirth*** = wax, or grow, in amusement, ie. laugh louder and louder.[1,4] ***neeze*** = sneeze; *neeze* was the original word for *sneeze*, *sneeze* itself not emerging until the very early 16th century.[1] There seems in this period to have been an association between sneezing and laughter: for example, in Ben Johnson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), we find "*I was at supper with him, and he neezed at every jest, as if the very laughter had struck his nose*."
62	A merrier hour was never wasted there. − But room, fairy! − here comes Oberon.	= spent.[1] = ie. "make room!", a common cry upon the arrival of an important personage in a crowd. Line 63 seems to be short a syllable; however, the pause between the line's two clauses is sufficient to provide the missing beat or syllable;[9] see the note after line 8 above.
64	***Fairy.*** And here, my mistress! Would that he were gone!	65: "And here comes the Fairy Queen! I wish Oberon were elsewhere!" The Fairy is distressed, knowing that the Fairy King and Queen have been fighting, and she fears a confrontation.
66 68	*Enter Oberon at one door, with his train;* *Titania, at another, with hers.*	**Entering Characters:** ***Oberon*** is the Fairy King, ***Titania*** the Fairy Queen. ***at one door*** = through one stage door. ***train*** = followers, attendants. Shakespeare borrowed the name of his Fairy King from *The Faerie Queene* (1590), in which Edmund Spenser wrote, "*when with king oberon he came to fary land*".
70	***Ober.*** Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.	70: ***Ill met*** = a contrast to the usual friendly greeting, "well met"; Oberon is not pleased to run into Titania. ***Titania*** = stressed on its second syllable: *ti-TA-ni-a*.
72	***Titan.*** What, jealous Oberon? − Fairies, skip hence:	72: ***What, jealous Oberon?*** = ie. "hey, is that the suspicious (***jealous***)[2] Oberon I see?" Titania is not speaking to Oberon here, but rather indicating irritation at running into him. ***skip hence*** = ie. "let us get away or hasten (***skip***)[1]

		from here."
	I have forsworn his bed and company.	= sworn to do without.
74		
	Ober. Tarry, rash wanton. Am not I thy lord?	75: ***Tarry*** = "wait a moment". ***rash*** = impetuous or overhasty.[2,6] ***wanton*** = obstinate one.[2] ***thy lord*** = Tatiana's master or ruler; as king, Oberon implies that Titania owes him complete obedience.
76		
		77-86 (below): Titania is piqued over Oberon's infidelities. Her tone throughout the speech is sarcastic and accusatory.
	Titan. Then I must be thy lady: but I know	
78	When thou hast stol'n away from Fairy Land,	= stealthily or secretly left.
	And in the shape of Corin sat all day,	79-81: ***in the shape…Phillida*** = Titania imagines Oberon as disguising himself as a rustic in his attempts to seduce his maiden victims. ***Corin*** = conventional name for a shepherd.[4]
80	Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love,	80: ***pipes of corn*** = ie. a wind instrument comprised of a reed or cornstalk. Both Chaucer and Spenser wrote of "*pipes made of green corn*". Compare *Love's Labour's Lost*, in which Shakespeare writes, "*When shepherds pipe on oaten straws...*" ***versing love*** = writing or reciting love poetry.[4]
	To amorous Phillida. Why art thou here,	= conventional name for a shepherdess.[4]
82	Come from the farthest steppe of India?	82: Titania expresses amazement that Oberon is not far away somewhere chasing girls. ***steppe*** = vast plains;[1] ***steppe*** is from the Quarto; the Folio has *steepe*, ie. steep, meaning a "precipitous place"[1] or "mountain range"[4] − quite the opposite meaning. Succeeding writers adopted Shakespeare's *steep* of India, and not the *steppe*, suggesting *steep* to be the "correct" word here.
	But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,	83-86: Titania mockingly suggests that the only reason Oberon has returned from his amorous escapades is to attend the wedding of Hippolyta (the ***Amazon***) to Theseus, and not to see her. ***forsooth*** = in truth. ***bouncing*** = hefty, vigorous, strapping.[1,2,6]
84	Your buskined mistress, and your warrior love,	84: Titania implies that Oberon has flirted with Hippolyta. ***buskined*** = wearing a high-heeled hunting boot.[3,4]
	To Theseus must be wedded; and you come,	
86	To give their bed joy and prosperity.	86: ie. to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta.
		88-94 (below): Oberon fires back, accusing Titania of hypocrisy, since she has, in her turn, had a real affair with Theseus.
88	***Ober.*** How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,	= probably meaning, "without shame". Although the OED does not list such a sense for *for shame*, multiple examples from the 16th century suggest it was used this way: e.g., "*dare we for shame our stained faces*

shew?" (1590).

Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,

89: "make even the slightest hint at or attack on (***Glance at***)[1] my standing or reputation (***credit***)[2] with Hippolyta".

Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?

91-94 (below): Oberon accuses Titania of having pursued Theseus in the past, leading the Greek hero into ending his relationships with his various paramours; see the explanatory note after line 94 below.

Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night

From Perigenia, whom he ravishèd?

= violated.[1]

And make him with fair Ægles break his faith
With Ariadne, and Antíopa?

93: ***Ægles*** = the Quarto and Folio both print *Eagles* here, a humorous typographer's error.

93-94: ***break…Ariadne*** = betray his oath to be faithful to Ariadne (Theseus' wife at the time).

92-94 (above): Shakespeare has borrowed the various women mentioned here from the chapter on Theseus in Plutarch's *Lives*. *Lives* was available to Shakespeare thanks to Sir Thomas North's popular translation of 1579 (all quotes below are from North's edition).

1. ***Perigenia*** = the beautiful daughter of Sinnis, a cruel robber slain by Theseus. After Theseus found Perigenia hiding behind a bush, he convinced her to come out, after which she "*lay with him*." Shakespeare's use of ***ravished*** suggests a more violent and coercive violation of the lady's virtue.

2. ***Ægles*** = a "*nymph*" whom Theseus "*loved*".

3. ***Ariadne*** = daughter of Minos, King of Crete. She fell in love with Theseus and fled Crete with him after he slew the Minotaur. Plutarch notes that some believed Ariadne "*had two children by Theseus*." Plutarch also opined that Theseus was much to blame for leaving "*his wife Ariadne for the love of Ægles*."

4. ***Antiopa*** = Plutarch believed that Theseus likely went to see the Amazons alone (and not with Hercules, as described in the note at Act I.i.23 above), and took her prisoner on his own. As mentioned earlier, there is no consistent account of Theseus' relationships with Hippolyta and Ariadne: the ancient sources offer overlapping and contradictory details about his exploits against the Amazons.

Titan. These are the forgeries of jealousy:

96: Oberon's accusations are the inventions of a suspicious mind.[5]

And never, since the middle summer's spring,

= the beginning (***spring***)[4] of midsummer, with obvious pun.

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

= valley. = meadow.

By pavèd fountain, or by rushy brook,

99: ***paved fountain*** = spring whose bottom is covered with pebbles.[1,4]

rushy brook = stream filled with rushes.

Or in the beachèd margent of the sea,

= ie. on the beach which comprises the margent (***margent***), or edge, of the sea.[1,5]

	To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,	101: ***ringlets*** = round or circular dances.[3,4] ***the whistling wind*** = ie. the sound or music of the wind.[4]
102	But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.	102: ***brawls*** = squabbling;[1] possible pun, as ***brawl*** also referred to a French dance.[1] ***sport*** = recreation, amusement.[2]
	Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,	= figuratively, playing music for no purpose (since the fairies can no longer dance, due to Oberon's persistent interference).
104	As in revenge, have sucked up, from the sea,	= drawn up.[1]
	Contagious fogs: which, falling in the land,	= noxious, full of pestilence.[4,5] = ie. descending upon.
106	Hath every pelting river made so proud,	106: ***pelting*** = trifling, insignificant.[3,5] The Folio prints "*petty*" here, also acceptable. ***proud*** = turbulent, swollen.[1,2]
	That they have overborne their continents.	= overflowed their banks;[5] ***continents*** = enclosures.[1]
		108-115 (below): *The ox...undistinguishable* = Titania evokes (with some hyperbole) the ecological and agricultural disasters which have unfolded as a result of the flooding she mentioned in line 107.
108	The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,	= strained (to pull).[1] = ie. because the crop has failed.[5]
	The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn	109: ***ploughman*** = one who drives a plough, ie. farm labourer.[1] ***lost his sweat*** = ie. toiled in vain.[5] ***corn*** = grain in general.[5]
110	Hath rotted, ere his youth attained a beard:	= ie. the sense is, "before (***ere***) the grain reached maturity." The ***beard*** is another name for certain grains' awns, the sharp prickles (Samuel Johnson's definition) or bristles that grow on barley, oat and some grasses.[1] The clause does punning double-duty, as it brings to mind the image of a man not yet old enough to grow facial hair.
	The fold stands empty in the drownèd field,	111: livestock can no longer graze in their pens because the latter are covered with water. ***fold*** = pen or enclosure, especially for sheep.[1]
112	And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;	112: the crows have a plentiful food supply in the numerous dead livestock. ***murrion*** = diseased, especially of plague; alternate form of *murrain*.[1,4,5]
	The nine men's morris is filled up with mud:	= a marked area on the ground where people played the outdoor board game "nine men's morris".[2,3]
114	And the quaint mazes, in the wanton green,	114-5: the clever and intricate (***quaint***)[1,3] network of paths (***mazes***)[2] laid out on the village green have become over-grown, and are now indistinguishable because people no longer walk on them (***lack of tread***).[5] ***wanton*** = luxuriant; the grass grows unchecked.[3,5]
	For lack of tread, are undistinguishable.	**116-129 (below):** Titania discourses on how seasonal patterns have been severely disrupted as a result of

		the discord in her relationship with Oberon.
116	The human mortals want their winter here, No night is now with hymn or carol blest.	116-7: the exact meaning of this pair of lines has long puzzled editors. One interpretation is, "ie. winter no longer arrives as it should; as a result, the usual outdoor singing, such as of the carols sung at Christmas time, is absent.[5,9] ***want*** = lack. ***blest*** = ie. blessed.
118	Therefore the moon (the governess of floods)	118: the moon has long been recognized for its influence on the tides (***floods***). ***Therefore*** = ie. as a result of the quarrels between Oberon and Titania; this "*Therefore*" acts in parallel with the one that begins line 103 above.
	Pale in her anger, washes all the air,	119: ***Pale in her anger*** = a pale countenance was frequently associated with anger. ***washes all the air*** = saturates the air with moisture.[1]
120	That rheumatic diseases do abound.	= cold-like illnesses;[4] ***rheumatic*** is stressed on its first syllable.
	And, thorough this distemperature, we see	= ie. on account of this quarrel of ours",[5] or "on account of this unwholesome weather"; ***distemperature*** has two applicable senses here, and past editors have favoured either: (1) a "disturbance of mind or temper", and (2) "deranged atmospheric conditions" (OED).[1] ***thorough*** = ie. through, a disyllabic variant.
122	The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,	122: ***The seasons alter*** = the normal progression of the seasons has changed. 122-3: ***hoary-headed…rose*** = winter is now encroaching on spring. The compound word ***hoary-headed*** typically was used to refer to the white hair of an older man (thus creating a linguistic connection to *Hiem's crown* in line 124 below); here it simply means "white".[5]
124	And on old Hiëms' chin and icy crown, An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds	124-126: ***And on…set*** = metaphorically, "and buds appear in winter." ***Hiems'*** = ***Hiems*** was a common personification of winter; *hiems* is Latin for winter. ***chin*** = appears in both the Quarto and Folio; usually emended to "*thin*". The idea of a chaplet adorning Hiems' *chin* has puzzled commentators for centuries. Shakespeare referred to the "*thin and hairless scalps*" of old men in *Richard II*, suggesting *thin* is correct. ***An odorous*** = a fragrant.[1] ***chaplet*** = wreath or garland, as of flowers.[1]
126	Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,	**122-6 (above): *hoary-headed…set*** = it is worth noting the richness of the parallelism in Shakespeare's metaphors for the crossed seasons in these lines: not only do we have the contrast of the ***frosts*** of winter appearing on the ***roses*** of spring on the one hand, and ***summer buds*** growing on personified winter on the other; but the Bard inserts a symbolic anatomical contrast as well, of the ***lap*** of the roses and the ***crown*** of old man winter.

	The childing autumn, angry winter change	127-8: ***The childing...liveries*** = autumn and winter exchange (***change***) their accustomed (***wonted***) uniforms, ie. take on each other's appearance; ***liveries*** are the uniforms worn by servants. ***childing*** = fertile or fruitful,[1] ie. the season when crops reach maturity. The literal meaning of ***childing*** is "that bear or is capable of bearing a child or children" (OED).
128	Their wonted liveries: and the mazèd world,	= bewildered, confused.[2,4]
	By their increase, now knows not which is which:	129: ***their increase*** = the product of the seasons,[1] ie. the growth and proliferation of buds and other plant life (appearing in the wrong seasons). ***which is which*** = ie. which is winter and which is autumn.[9]
130	And this same progeny of evils comes	130-2: and the source (***original***) of the unnatural disorder of the seasons is the discord between Oberon and Titania. ***same*** = self-same. ***progeny of evils*** = figurative offspring (***progeny***) in the form of seasonal and agricultural calamities (***evils***).[1] ***comes*** = stems. ***debate*** = wrangling, quarreling.[1]
	From our debate, from our dissensiön;	
132	We are their parents and original.	
134	***Ober.*** Do you amend it then: it lies in you.	= an imperative: ie. "you should remedy the situation".
	Why should Titania cross her Oberon?	= thwart (the wishes of).
136	I do but beg a little changeling boy,	
	To be my henchman.	= high-ranking servant, page of honour.[1,4]
138		
	Titan. Set your heart at rest:	139-140: "be assured, I would not part with the child for the whole realm of fairies."[5] ***Set your heart at rest*** = an ironic rebuke, not a line of comfort: "do not bother any longer trying to think of ways to convince me to relent."
140	The Fairy Land buys not the child of me.	
	His mother was a votress of my order:	= a woman who had taken vows to serve as one of Titania's devoted followers or attendants.[3] ***votress*** = disyllabic variant of *votaress*.[1] ***order*** = suggestive of an organized religious fraternity or social class.[1]
142	And, in the spicèd Indian air, by night,	= air fragrant with the rich spices of India.[1,5]
	Full often hath she gossiped by my side,	= ie. have Titania and the Indian woman sat in close and intimate talk. In this period, the verb ***gossip*** did not necessarily refer to idle discussion about others' affairs.[1]
144	And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,	= poetically, the beach or seashore; ***Neptune*** was the Roman god of the sea. **145-152 (below):** a spectacularly intricate extended metaphor comparing the Indian child's mother to trading ships at sea: (1) Titania first recalls how she and the mother would watch trading ships gliding along on the sea in front of them (line 145); (2) she then compares the appearance of the ship's wind-swollen sails to the pregnant mother's own belly (lines 146-9); (3) finally, just as a merchant ship travels to distant

locations in order to bring back new goods, so the mother went on errands for Titania to bring the queen items that she requested (lines 148-152).

Marking th' embarkèd traders on the flood;

145: observing (***marking***)[2] the merchant vessels (***traders***)[1] on the sea (***flood***).[2]
embarked = alluding to the goods which have been put on board the ship.[1]

When we have laughed to see the sails conceive,
And grow big-bellied, with the wanton wind:

146-7: with ***conceive*** and ***big-bellied***, the sails are amusingly imagined as having become impregnated by the lascivious (***wanton***) wind.

Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait,

148: ***Which*** = ie. the traders of line 145.
swimming gait = smooth and flowing manner of walking;[1] ***swimming*** reinforces the passage's water imagery.

Following (her womb then rich with my young squire)

= the mother was, at the time, pregnant with the Indian boy.
rich with = wealthy by the possession of;[1] Schmidt suggests "enriched by".[6]
squire = lad.[2]

Would imitate, and sail upon the land,
To fetch me trifles, and return again,
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.

= ie. the mother would imitate the ships.

But she, being mortal, of that boy did die,

153: ***mortal*** = ie. human; unlike the immortal spirits of the fairy world.
of that boy did die = the mother died during childbirth.

And, for her sake, do I rear up her boy:
And, for her sake, I will not part with him.

Ober. How long, within this wood, intend you stay?

Titan. Perchance, till after Theseus' wedding-day.

= maybe.[2]

If you will patiently dance in our round,

160: ***patiently*** = tolerantly,[1] ie. without being quarrelsome.
round = a circular dance, typically performed while holding hands.[1]

And see our moonlight revels, go with us:

= merrymaking.[1]

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

162: ***shun me*** = ie. "keep away from me".[1]
spare your haunts = "avoid your usual hangouts."[1]

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

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

= argue or quarrel straightaway or directly.[1,2]

[*Exit Titania and her train.*]

Ober. Well: go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove,
Till I torment thee for this injury. −

171-2: Oberon apostrophizes the departed Titania: he will get his revenge on her for her insult or affront (***injury***).[2]
shalt not from = ie. shalt not depart from; in this common Elizabethan construction, in the presence of the verb of intent (***shalt***), the verb of action (*depart*, or similar) could be omitted.

My gentle Puck, come hither: thou rememberest,

Since once I sat upon a promontory,

And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,

That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,

To hear the sea-maid's music.

Puck. I remember.

Ober. That very time, I saw (but thou couldst not)
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,

Cupid, all armed: a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal, thronèd by [the] west,

And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:

But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft

174: ***Since*** = when.[4]
promontory = "a point of highland which juts out into the sea" (OED).

176: ***Uttering*** = giving voice to;[1] in *The Winter's Tale* too, Shakespeare uses the word ***utter*** in connection with singing: "*He sings several tunes faster than you'll tell money: he utters them as he had eaten ballads*..."
dulcet and harmonious = sweet or pleasing and melodious.[1,5]
breath = voice or song.[2]

177: the mermaid's singing pacified the rough (***rude***)[1] sea.
civil = calm.[5]

178: Shakespeare used the same imagery in his long poem *Lucrece* (1594): "*… and little stars shot from their fixed places*." See the note at line 8 above for the ***spheres*** of the heavenly bodies.

182-192 (below): Oberon recounts a lengthy story of Cupid firing an arrow without effect on a maiden. The point of Oberon's tale is to explain the origin of the magical flower, called love-in-idleness, whose juices Oberon intends to use to spread some mischief.
Editors have agreed that some allegory was intended by Shakespeare in this passage; certainly, the ***vestal*** is Queen Elizabeth I, the unmarried English monarch famed for her chastity. But beyond that, no satisfactory explanation has been established.

184: = in ancient cosmology (which assigned attributes like cold or hot, and dry or moist, to heavenly bodies), the moon was regarded as ***cold*** and moist.
= sure, accurate.[2]

186: ***vestal*** = the ***vestals*** were famous virgin-priestesses of ancient Rome.
throned by the west = enthroned in the west; the reference is to Elizabeth I, ruling over England. The Quarto prints "*throned by west*", and the Folio "*throned by the west*". Ridley wonders if the clause has been printed incorrectly, noting that ***by*** doesn't really work.[3]

= launched his arrow (which would cause its victim to fall in love).

188: = ie. as if.

189-192 (below): the flame of Cupid's fiery arrow (***shaft***) was extinguished by the moist beams of the moon, and so, when it struck the vestal, it had no effect on her, failing to inflame her love.

= arrow.

Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon:

190: ***chaste*** = allusion to Diana, the virgin Roman goddess of the moon; hence, a reinforcing allusion to England's virgin queen.
watery moon = reference to the moist character ascribed to the moon (see the note at line 184 above).

And the imperial votress passèd on,
= religious devotee, bound by vows, ie. the vestal.

In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
= ie. untainted by feelings of love (***fancy***).

Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
= ie. "I noted". = arrow.

It fell upon a little western flower;
Before, milk-white; now purple, with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

196: ***love-in-idleness*** was a rare name used for the pansy sometimes called a johnny jump up (*Viola tricolor*), which is known in part for its multicolored petals of purple, yellow and white.[11]

Fetch me that flower; the herb I shewed thee once.

= ie. showed; *shew* was the older and more common alternate form of *show*.

The juice of it, on sleeping eye-lids laid,

198: ***The juice of it*** = the flower's liquid.
on sleeping eye-lids laid = when spread or applied onto the eyelids of one who is asleep.

Will make or man or woman madly dote
199: ***or…or*** = either…or.

Upon the next live creature that it sees.
199-200: ***dote / Upon*** = fall excessively in love with, become infatuated with.[1]

Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

201-2: ***be thou…league*** = "return to me in less time than it takes a sea monster (***leviathan***) to swim a ***league*** (about three miles).[1]
leviathan = could refer to a whale.[2,5]

Puck. I'll put a girdle round about the earth,

= go around the earth;[1] this expression first appeared in published literature here, and was soon adopted by subsequent authors.

In forty minutes.

205: if ***leviathan*** (line 202) is taken to mean whale, and if one assumes Puck is equating forty minutes with the time it takes a whale to swim a league (about three miles), the implied speed for a whale would be about 4.5 miles per hour. Cruising speed for most whales is, in fact, in the 3-6 miles per hour range.[12]

[*Exit Puck.*]

Ober. Having once this juice,

= ie. "once I have".

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)

214: ***meddling*** and ***busy*** both mean "interfering" or "prying",[1,2,6] reflecting a trope of the period, though the exact reason is not completely clear. Some examples include:
(1) a 1570 text recounts "*a tale of an **ape medling** in that* (in which) *he had no skill*." The ape was skilled at making toys (so went the story), but "*one day being **busy** to **meddle** with an art he had no skill of*" (that is, when he tried his hand at fishing, a task for which he was unqualified), "*instead of a fish he caught a frog*."

(2) A 1581 publication describes a man as "*too **busy** like an **ape***" and a later (1683) text suggests that monkeys were considered "***busy-bodies**…full of **meddling***."

She shall pursue it with the soul of love:
= most passionate love.[5]

216 And ere I take this charm from off her sight,
(As I can take it with another herb)
216: "but before (***ere***) I reverse the charm on her eyes".

218 I'll make her render up her page to me. −
= give up, relinquish.[1] = ie. the young Indian boy.

But who comes here? I am invisible,
220 And I will overhear their conference.
= eavesdrop on. = conversation.

222 *Enter Demetrius, Helena following him.*

Entering Characters: we remember that ***Helena*** is in love with ***Demetrius***, but her feelings are not returned; Demetrius, instead, loves Egeus' daughter Hermia.

Helena has followed through on her vow to inform Demetrius of Hermia's plan to meet Lysander in these woods, from where they plan to elope. Demetrius has arrived in pursuit, hoping to catch them.

Notice how throughout this dialogue, Helena consistently uses "*you*" to address Demetrius, to demonstrate both her respect for and submission to him; Demetrius, meanwhile, varies his form of address, using "*thee*" when he wishes to emphasize his scorn for Helena, and "*you*" as a way to maintain his emotional distance from her.

224 ***Demet.*** I love thee not: therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
226 The one I'll stay: the other stayeth me.

226: Demetrius intends to keep Lysander from eloping with Hermia (*The one I'll stay*), while acknowledging that it is Hermia who is driving his actions and emotions (*the other stayeth me*).

However, it is conventional to emend ***stay*** to *slay* and ***stayeth*** to *slayeth*: the meaning of the line thus becomes, Demetrius intends to literally kill Lysander, while lamenting that Hermia is figuratively killing him (Demetrius) by rejecting his love.

Thou told'st me, they were stol'n unto this wood;
= ie. into.
228 And here am I, and wood, within this wood,
= mad (punning).
Because I cannot meet my Hermia.
230 Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

232 ***Helena.*** You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant:
= attract. = lodestone, magnet.[1]

But yet you draw not iron, for my heart

233-4: ***But yet…steel*** = the meaning of this pair of clauses has been extensively debated. One interpretation might be: what Demetrius attracts is not mere ***iron***, but steadfast ***steel*** − and being ***true as steel***, Helena emphasizes her complete loyalty to Demetrius. Both iron and steel have magnetic properties.

true as steel (line 234) = this expression's pedigree dates back at least to 1300.

234 Is true as steel. Leave you your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.

234-5: ***leave you…follow you*** = if Demetrius would stop exerting his magnetic power over her, she would no longer feel compelled to follow him.

Leave = give up.[5]

236 ***Demet.*** Do I entice you? do I speak you fair?

237: Demetrius, aggravated, asks rhetorically if he has done or said anything to lead Helena on.

entice = allure.[1]
speak you fair = "speak kindly to you?"[1]

Or rather do I not in plainest truth,
Tell you I do not, nor I cannot love you?

= double negatives were common and acceptable in Elizabethan English.

Helena. And even for that, do I love you the more.

= precisely;[1] pronounced as *e'en*. = ie. for that reason.[1]

I am your spaniel: and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:

242-9: the ***spaniel*** was commonly used metaphorically to describe one who fawns submissively on another;[1] Shakespeare had used this exact conceit in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (written c. 1590):
Yet, spaniel-like, the more she spurns my love,
The more it grows and fawneth on her still.

Use me but as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me: only give me leave

= treat. = kick.
= permission.

(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?

247-9: Though being treated (***used***) like Demetrius' dog is the most degrading and lowest role Helena can imagine, she would still regard it as an honourable position so long as it allows her to be with him.

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

251: ie. Demetrius warns Helena not to push him too hard.

Helena. And I am sick when I look not on you.

Demet. You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city, and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;

256-8: by chasing Demetrius so obviously, Helena is opening herself up to accusations of immodesty, and even promiscuity.
impeach = call into question, cast doubt upon.[4]
modesty = chastity, propriety of behaviour.

259-261 (below): Demetrius rebukes Helena for putting herself into such a dangerous position when her chastity is at stake.

To trust the opportunity of night,

259: to risk being out after dark, when there is greater chance for immorality.

And the ill counsel of a desert place,

260: and trusting for her safety in the face of any evil plans or designs (***ill counsel***) that likely exist in such a deserted or desolate (***desert***) location.[1,2]

With the rich worth of your virginity.

261: to put her precious virginity at risk.

Helena. Your virtue is my privilege: for that

263: ***Your virtue…privilege*** = Helena responds that she is in fact protected from harm thanks to Demetrius' upright moral nature; ***privilege*** = sanctuary, protection.[1,2]
for that = because.[5]

It is not night, when I do see your face.
Therefore, I think, I am not in the night;

264-5: it doesn't feel like night to Helena when she is with Demetrius, ie. her world is lit up by his presence.

Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company.
For you, in my respect, are all the world.
Then how can it be said I am alone,
When all the world is here, to look on me?

266-9: Helena continues to pitifully equivocate: since Demetrius is her world, she in fact has a world of company in the woods (ie. she is not alone at all!).
in my respect (line 267) = "in my view", ie. "as far as I am concerned".[9]

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

= bushes, thickets.[2]

Helena. The wildest hath not such a heart as you.

274: even the most savage beast is not as cruel as Demetrius.

275-279 (below): Helena admits to Demetrius that she will stubbornly follow him wherever he goes, using several analogies to highlight her recognition that this situation represents a reversal of natural roles − it is usually the boy who chases the girl!

Run when you will: the story shall be changed:
Apollo flies and Daphne holds the chase:

276: in the original myth, it is ***Apollo*** who chases the beautiful maiden ***Daphne*** through the woods.
holds the chase = does the chasing.

The dove pursues the griffin: the mild hind

277: ***griffin*** = mythical monster with the head and wings of an eagle and body of a lion.
hind = female deer.[1]

Makes speed to catch the tiger. Bootless speed,
When cowardice pursue, and valour flies.

278: ***Makes speed*** = hurries, makes haste.[1]
278-9: ***bootless…flies*** = Helena concludes her speech with a strained, even nonsensical, example of inversion of the natural order, but this time it's personal: running quickly is useless (***Bootless speed***), when the coward (she, Helena) chases the fleeing brave one.

Demet. I will not stay thy questions. Let me go:

= no longer endure this conversation[2] (Durham suggests, "listen to thy talk."); a likely adoption from Shakespeare's most-quoted Bible, the Geneva Bible of 1561: in Titus 3:9, Paul advises Titus to "*stay* (meaning "avoid") *foolish questions*".

Or if thou follow me, do not believe,
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

= ie. "cause thee harm".

Helena. Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field,
You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius!
Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex:

= for shame.
287: "your cruelty towards me forces me to act in a way (ie. chasing him) which is unbecoming for my sex."

We cannot fight for love, as men may do:
We should be wooed, and were not made to woo.

= ie. women.

[*Exit Demetrius*.]

293*ff*: the remainder of the scene is spoken, mostly, in rhyming couplets.

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

293-4: for Helena, being close to Demetrius is enough to turn her suffering into a kind of joy, even if it leads to her own death through Demetrius' cruelty.
I'll = the Folio prints "*I*".
make a Heaven of hell = an interesting inversion of Hermia's exclamation at Act I.i.264 that Lysander "*hath turned a Heaven unto a hell*."
To die upon the hand = in dying by the hand.[5,9]

[*Exit Helena*.]

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

298-9: Oberon apostrophizes Helena, promising her yet another reversal of roles: before (***ere***) Demetrius leaves the woods, he will be the one chasing her, and she fleeing him; ***fly*** = flee.

Re-enter Puck.

Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

303: the line is printed as shown in both the Quarto and Folio; however, it would seem to make sense to reverse the two clauses: "Welcome, wanderer. Hast thou the flower there?"[9]

Another suggestion has been to move the question mark to the end of the sentence: "Hast thou the flower there, welcome wanderer?"[9]

the flower = ie. the love-in-idleness; see line 196 above.

Puck. Ay, there it is.

Ober. I pray thee give it me.

= please.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,

308: a syllable seems to be missing from this line, unless ***where*** or ***wild*** is to be treated as a disyllable.

bank = ie. shore of a stream.[1]

wild thyme = species name for *Thymus serpyllum*.

blows = blooms or blossoms.[2]

Where oxlips, and the nodding violet grows,

309: ***oxlips*** = plant whose flower resembles the cowslip.[1]

nodding violet = likely ***nodding*** because of the way the violet's flower can droop: a 1631 work writes, "*I asked a nodding violet why it sadly hung the head…*"

Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,

310: ***over-canopied*** = overhung.[1]

luscious = highly pleasant to the sense of smell.[1]

woodbine = honeysuckle.[1]

With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine:

311: ***musk-roses*** = species of rose with large, white flowers possessing a musk scent.[2]

eglantine = ie. the eglantine rose, or sweet-briar.[2,3]

There sleeps Titania, sometime of the night,

= at some time or another during the night.[1]

Lulled in these flowers, with dances and delight:

= "dances that give delight."[5]

And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,

= sheds. = hard polished,[1] glossy,[6] and/or multi-coloured.[2]

Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.

315: the cast-off skin of a snake is just ***wide enough*** to make a garment or covering (***Weed***)[1,4] for a fairy.

And, with the juice of this, I'll streak her eyes,

And make her full of hateful fantasies.

316-7: Oberon himself will rub (***streak***)[1] the juice of the flower onto the eyes of Titania as she sleeps, so as to cause her to fall violently in love with whoever she sees first upon waking: wanting to humble her, he expects this enchantment will lead her into a ridiculous and humiliating situation.

make her full of hateful fantasies = fill her with disgusting or repulsive hallucinations or conceits.[1,2,6]

318-325 (below): on the other hand, Oberon, showing compassion for Helena, instructs Puck to smear Demetrius' eyes with the same juice, in order to cause him to fall in love with her when he wakes up and sees her next to him.

Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove:

A sweet Athenian lady is in love

= ie. Helena.

With a disdainful youth: anoint his eyes.

= ie. Demetrius.

But do it, when the next thing he espies,

= so that. = the sense is "first". = sees.

May be the lady: thou shalt know the man

322-3: ***thou shalt…hath on*** = Puck does not know

By the Athenian garments he hath on.

Demetrius, so Oberon must explain how the Fairy may recognize him.

324 Effect it with some care, that he may prove
More fond on her than she upon her love:

= ie. be careful!

325: more deeply in love with Helena than she loves him (***her love***, ie. Demetrius).

fond = foolishly doting.[5]

326 And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

= before the rooster first crows, perhaps a couple of hours before dawn.[13]

328 ***Puck.*** Fear not, my lord: your servant shall do so.

= ie. Puck himself.

330 [*Exeunt*.]

ACT II, SCENE II

Another part of the wood.

Enter Titania, with her train.

1 ***Titan.*** Come, now a roundel and a fairy song:

= dance in a circle.[4]

2 Then, for the third part of a minute, hence,

2: after the dance, the fairies are instructed to go about their various duties, as delineated below, for 20 seconds. Stevenson comments, "the fairies, being so small themselves, divide up their time into small parts" (p. 86).[5]

hence = ie. "go from here".

Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds;

= caterpillars or other insect larvae that attacks plants.[1]

4 Some war with rere-mice for their leathren wings,

4-5: ***Some war…coats*** = some of the fairies should battle bats (***rere-mice***, a disyllable, pronounced *rear-mice*) to collect their wings from which coats can be made for elves.

leathren = leather-like;[1] *leathren* was an occasionally-used alternate form of *leather*.

Shakespeare may have borrowed the idea for this line from Edmund Spenser's influential *The Faerie Queene*: "*the lether-winged bat*."

To make my small elves coats; and some keep back
6 The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots and wonders
At our quaint spirits. Sing me now asleep:

5-7: ***and some…spirits*** = other fairies should keep away the owls, with their noisy (***clamorous***) hooting and intrusive curiosity at the fairies' doings.[5]

wonders = marvels.[1]

quaint = dainty, delicate.[4,5]

8 Then to your offices, and let me rest.

= duties.[4]

10 *The Fairies sing.*

12-36 (below): As the fairies sing, note the variety of rhyme schemes they employ, including both alternating rhyming lines (*abab*) and rhyming couplets.

12 ***All Fairies.***
You spotted snakes, with double tongue,

= ie. forked.[5]

14 *Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen,*

= covered with spines.[5]

Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong,

= a legless lizard, the slow-worm.[1]

16 *Come not near our Fairy Queen.*

16: Stevenson notes that both newts and blind-worms were

		thought to be poisonous.
18	*Chorus.* *Philomel, with melody,*	= ie. the nightingale. The allusion is to the gruesome story of Tereus, the king of Thrace, who violently raped Philomena, the sister of his wife Procne. Tereus cut out Philomena's tongue to keep her from telling anyone what happened, and kept her locked in a shed. Philomena famously weaved her story onto a cloth, which she then was able to pass on to a friend. When Procne, who had been told by Tereus that her sister was dead, learned the truth, she, in revenge, cooked and fed Itys, her son by Tereus, to Tereus. As Tereus chased the girls with murderous intent, the gods transformed them into birds − Philomena a nightingale, and Procne a swallow.
20	*Sing in our sweet lullaby,* *Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:*	21: ***lulla*** is the older word, transformed into ***lullaby*** in the late 16th century.[1]
22	*Never harm,* *Nor spell, nor charm,*	
24	*Come our lovely lady nigh;* *So good night, with lullaby.*	24: ie. come near (***nigh***) the lovely Fairy Queen.
26		
	1st Fairy. *Weaving spiders, come not here;*	
28	*Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence!* *Beetles black, approach not near:*	= away!
30	*Worm nor snail, do no offence.*	
32	*Chorus.* *Philomel, with melody, &c.*	
34		
	2nd Fairy. Hence, away! now all is well:	
36	One aloof, stand sentinel.	36: one fairy should remain, standing apart (***aloof***), acting as a guard to watch over Titania.
38	[*Exeunt Fairies*]	
40	[*Titania sleeps*.]	
42	*Enter Oberon,* *and squeezes the flower on Titania' s eyelids.*	
44		**45-52 (below):** Oberon casts a spell on Titania. The lines form rhyming couplets, each line seven syllables, beginning with a stressed syllable, then alternating between unstressed and stressed, and ending with a stressed syllable. The resulting cadence is hypnotic and sing-songy, perfectly suited for an incantation. Note how Oberon, in this speech, employs a pair of rhyming triplets surrounding a rhyming couplet.
	Ober. What thou seest, when thou dost wake,	45-46: whoever (***What*** = who) Titania sees first upon waking, she will take for her true love.
46	Do it for thy true-love take:	
	Love and languish for his sake.	47: Oberon desires that Titania not just love, but pine and yearn (***languish***) for, the object of her affection.
48	Be it ounce, or cat, or bear, Pard, or boar with bristled hair,	48-49: for the second time in the play, Oberon gleefully imagines Titania falling in love with an animal; see Act II.i.213-4 above. ***ounce*** = lynx.[3] ***cat*** = wildcat.[4]

		pard = leopard.[3]
50	In thy eye, that shall appear When thou wak'st, it is thy dear:	= ie. that which.
52	Wake, when some vile thing is near.	52: Oberon's hope that Titania will awaken to fall in love with some repulsive creature reveals his vindictive streak.
54	[*Exit Oberon.*]	
56	*Enter Lysander and Hermia.*	**Entering Characters:** ***Lysander*** arrives in the woods as he promised, meeting ***Hermia*** in anticipation of their secret elopement. Note that the couple continues the rhyming, employing a variety of rhyme schemes in their dialogue.
58	***Lysan.*** Fair love, you faint, with wandering in the wood: And to speak troth, I have forgot our way.	58-59: Lysander notices that Hermia is exhausted from wandering through the forest, and is also honest enough to admit they are lost. ***troth*** = truth.
60	We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,	= an example of the common Elizabethan grammatical construction known as the ethical dative, in which the superfluous ***us*** adds emphasis − and also helps fill out the meter.
	And tarry for the comfort of the day.	61: and wait (***tarry***) until daytime before resuming their search for a way out of the woods. ***comfort*** = cheering influence.[6]
62		
	Herm. Be it so, Lysander: find you out a bed:	=ie. yourself.
64	For I, upon this bank, will rest my head.	
66	***Lysan.*** One turf shall serve as pillow for us both:	66-67: Lysander prefers to sleep nearer to Hermia, and assures her poetically that his intentions are honourable. ***turf*** = patch or small area of grass,[1] to be shared as a pillow.
	One heart, one bed, two bosoms, and one troth.	67: Lysander explains the meaning of this line at lines 74-77 below.
68		
	Herm. Nay, good Lysander: for my sake, my dear,	
70	Lie further off, yet; do not lie so near.	70: after Hermia says, "Lie further off, yet", there may be a pause as Lysander moves a little further away, but not enough to satisfy Hermia's nervous sense of propriety. ***yet*** = still.[2]
72	***Lysan.*** O take the sense, sweet, of my innocence. Love takes the meaning in love's conferënce.	73: when two people are in love, they understand the true meaning of what is spoken between them, ie. no ill intent should be inferred.[9]
74	I mean that my heart unto yours is knit,	74-75: Lysander explains "***one heart***" from line 67 above.
	So that but one heart we can make of it:	75: the Folio prints, "*So that but one heart can you make of it*", placing slightly more pressure on Hermia to understand Lysadner's meaning correctly, in comparison to the tone of the Quarto's more neutral, mutual, and reassuring phrasing.
76	Two bosoms interchainèd with an oath:	76: ***bosoms*** = commonly used, as here, to refer to the breast or heart as the seat of emotions.[1,2]

interchained = linked together.[6] The Folio, however, prints "*interchanged*", meaning "exchanged", here.[1]

So then two bosoms, and a single troth. = ie. one faith as pledged to each other.[1,6]

Then, by your side, no bed-room me deny: = space or room in which to lie.[6]

For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie. 79: note Lysander's light punning.

Herm. Lysander riddles very prettily. = speaks enigmatically; Hermia compliments Lysander's wordplay.

Now much beshrew my manners, and my pride, = curse, a mischief on.[1,4]

If Hermia meant to say, Lysander lied.

But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy, = ie. for the sake of.

Lie further off, in human modesty: = ie. as decorum demands.[1,5,6]

Such separation, as may well be said,

Becomes a virtuous bachelor, and a maid, = is appropriate for.[2]

So far be distant, and good night sweet friend:

Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end! 89: Hermia wishes Lysander's love to last until he dies. Note how Lysander at line 92 responds directly to this wish.

Lysan. Amen, amen, to that fair prayer, say I;

And then end life, when I end loyalty! = ie. "so may my life end". = am no longer faithful.

Here is my bed: sleep give thee all his rest! = "may personified Sleep grant you all his (Sleep's) rest", ie. a full night's rest.

Herm. With half that wish, the wisher's eyes be pressed! 95: in response, Hermia playfully hopes that half of Sleep's rest will be given to Lysander.

eyes be pressed = possibly an abbreviated use of the expression "pressed with sleep", in which ***press*** means "lie heavy on", suggesting the sleeper is overcome with exhaustion and in need of rest.

[*They sleep*.]

Enter Puck.

Puck. Through the forest have I gone,

But Athenian found I none, 101-2: Puck's assignment, we remember, was to find Demetrius, and apply the magic flower's juice to his eyelids as he slept, so that he would fall instantly in love with Helena upon awakening and seeing her first.

found = the Folio prints "*find*".

On whose eyes I might approve = put to the test, confirm.[2,5]

This flower's force in stirring love. − = power.

Night and silence. Who is here? = Puck notes conditions as he cautiously seeks his target.

Weeds of Athens he doth wear: = garments, clothes.[3,5]

This is he (my master said) 107: Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius.

Despisèd the Athenian maid: 108: ie. "who viewed with contempt (***Despised***)[1] Helena."

And here the maiden, sleeping sound, = Puck also mistakes Hermia for Helena!

On the dank and dirty ground. = damp.[1]

Pretty soul, she durst not lie 111-2: Puck notes that Hermia and Lysander are sleeping far apart, but assumes that Lysander is actually Demetrius, who, cruel and unloving, avoids sleeping too closely to Helena.

Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy. −

durst = dares.

lack-love = one who is without love.

kill-courtesy = boor.[1]

	Churl, upon thy eyes I throw	= contemptible fellow.[2]
114	All the power this charm doth owe:	= own, possess.
	When thou wak'st, let love forbid	115-6: "when you wake up, may the love you will feel for (the supposed) Helena be so great that it will hinder or prevent (***forbid***)[1] you from returning to sleep."
116	Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.	***his seat on*** = from settling upon.
	So awake, when I am gone:	
118	For I must now to Oberon.	= ie. go to.
120	[*Exit Puck.*]	
122	*Enter Demetrius and Helena running.*	122: Helena is chasing after Demetrius.
124	***Helena.*** Stay, though thou kill me, sweet Demetrius.	124: ***Stay*** = stop! ***though thou kill me*** = "even if your cruel treatment hurts me terribly".
126	***Demet.*** I charge thee hence, and do not haunt me thus.	= "I order (***charge***) you to get away from me!"
128	***Helena.*** O, wilt thou darkling leave me? do not so.	= in the darkness.[1]
130	***Demet.*** Stay, on thy peril: I alone will go.	
132	[*Exit Demetrius.*]	
134	***Helena.*** O, I am out of breath in this fond chase!	134: ***out of breath*** = common expression since the early 16th century. ***fond*** = both "foolish" and "love-crazed".[1,3]
	The more my prayer, the lesser is my grace.	135: "the more I beg, the less is my good fortune (***grace***)."[2,6] ***prayer*** = act of entreaty.[1]
136	Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies: For she hath blessèd and attractive eyes.	137*f*: Helena's insecurity and sense of inferiority take center stage.
138	How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears.	= ie. became.
	If so, my eyes are oftener washed than hers.	= ie. with tears.
140	No, no: I am as ugly as a bear: For beasts that meet me, run away for fear.	
142	Therefore, no marvel, though Demetrius	= ie. "it is no wonder that".
	Do, as a monster, fly my presence, thus.	= ie. "as if I were a monster". = flee.
144	What wicked and dissembling glass of mine Made me compare with Hermia's sphery eyne? −	144-5: Helena blames her deceiving (***dissembling***)[1] mirror (***glass***) for tricking her into believing that her eyes could be as lovely as Hermia's. ***sphery*** = sphere-like;[1] Schmidt suggests "star-like" or "celestial".[6] ***eyne*** = eyes, an archaic and poetic form.
146	But who is here? Lysander, on the ground? Dead, or asleep? I see no blood, no wound. −	146-7: ***ground*** and ***wound*** would have rhymed much more so in the 16th century than they do today; Paul Meier suggests the words would have been pronounced *gruh-oond* and *wuh-oond*.[22]
148	Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.	
150	***Lysan.*** [*Awaking.*]	150: the first person Lysander sees upon waking is Helena, and immediately falls passionately in love with her!
	And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake.	= metaphorically, "face any danger";[5] this still recognizable expression dates back to Old English, and references Psalms 66:12 (Geneva Bible: "*we went into fire and*

into water, but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place").

Transparent Helena, nature shews art,
That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.

152-3: literally, Lysander imagines he can see Helena's heart through her chest (***bosom***), hence calling her ***transparent***; figuratively, her open and undeceiving nature (her ***transparency***) allows him to perceive exactly what she thinks and feels.

nature shews art = nature is showing its magical powers (***art***).[7]

Where is Demetrius? Oh how fit a word
Is that vile name to perish on my sword!

154-5: knowing that Helena loves Demetrius, Lysander expresses a desire to kill his rival, even though Demetrius does not return her feelings.

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

157-9: Helena misunderstands Lysander's rage: she thinks he wants to kill Demetrius because Demetrius is his rival for Hermia's hand. She assures Lysander that Hermia loves him, and so he has no reason to feel such hostility to Demetrius.

Lysan. Content with Hermia? No: I do repent
The tedious minutes I with her have spent.

= wearisome, annoying.[1]

Not Hermia, but Helena I love.
Who will not change a raven for a dove?

= figuratively, exchange an ugly woman for a beautiful one. Dark features were considered undesirable in Shakespeare's time. The ***raven*** was proverbial for its blackness.

165-172 (below): Lysander asserts that a person's passions are directed and controlled by reason; there is humour here in that Elizabethan characters, including many in this play (such as Lysander at this moment) frequently fall in love completely unguided by reason.

The will of man is by his reason swayed:

= desire.[2] = directed.[1]

And reason says you are the worthier maid.
Things growing are not ripe, until their season:
So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason.

168: Lysander concludes the metaphor begun in the previous line: up until now, he was not mature (***ripe***) enough to let reason manage and direct his feelings and desires.

And touching now the point of human skill,

169: "and now that I have reached the summit (***point***)[2] of mature adult judgment and discretion (***skill***).[4]

touching = attaining.[2]

Reason becomes the marshal to my will,

170: personified Reason becomes the leader (***marshal***)[6] of Lysander's passion (***will***), ie. his will now follows his reason.[9]

marshal = the OED suggests that Shakespeare has in mind the formal office of *marshal* − the person responsible for organizing and overseeing the ceremonies of a noble or royal household, "especially ... the arrangement ... of guests"; the sense, however, seems more to be "conductor", since in the next line, we see that Reason has led Lysander to Helena's eyes.

And leads me to your eyes; where I o'erlook

171-2: in Helena's eyes (***love's richest book***), Lysander can

172	Love's stories, written in love's richest book.	read through (***o'erlook***)[1] the stories of love. Shakespeare may have borrowed this metaphor of one's ***eyes*** being a ***book*** from Sir Philip Sydney's linguistically influential *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*: "*are your eyes a fit book (think you) to read a tale upon?*" (1590). In *Love's Labour's Lost* (written about the same time as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) Shakespeare wrote, "*and makes his book thine eyes*".
174	***Helena.*** Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born?	174: "why (***Wherefore***) was I born to endure this harsh and cutting (***keen***)[2] mockery?"
	When, at your hands, did I deserve this scorn?	= ie. "from you".[1]
176	Is 't not enough, is 't not enough, young man,	
	That I did never, no nor never can,	
178	Deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye,	
	But you must flout my insufficiency?	179: Helena feels that Lysander is deliberately ridiculing her, and feels the humiliation keenly. ***flout my insufficiency*** = insult or abuse Helena's inadequacies.[1,2]
180	Good troth, you do me wrong (good sooth you do)	180: both ***Good troth*** and ***good sooth*** have the sense of, "truly" or "really".
	In such disdainful manner me to woo.	
182	But, fare you well: perforce I must confess,	= ie. "I am forced to admit".
	I thought you lord of more true gentleness.	183: Helena expected Lysander to behave with more politeness and courtesy (***gentleness***)[1] than he is currently showing.
184	O, that a lady, of one man refused,	= by one man (Demetrius) rejected.
	Should, of another, therefore be abused!	= by. = deceived[3] or wronged.[2]
186	[*Exit Helena*.]	
188	***Lysan.*** She sees not Hermia. − Hermia, sleep thou there,	
190	And never mayst thou come Lysander near!	190: Lysander wants Hermia to stay away from him!
		191-6 (below): Lysander uses a pair of analogies to make the insightful psychological point that, under certain circumstances, love and delight can swiftly turn to hatred, just as his affection for Hermia has instantaneously changed to intense disdain.
	For, as a surfeit of the sweetest things	191-2: just as overindulging in the sweetest foods can make a person's stomach revolt at the thought of eating more. ***surfeit*** = sickness brought on by consuming in excess.[1]
192	The deepest loathing to the stomach brings:	
	Or, as the heresies, that men do leave,	193-4: false doctrines (***heresies***) are hated most by those who once believed them, but, upon realizing they have been misled, give them up.[5] ***of*** = by.
194	Are hated most of those they did deceive:	
	So thou, my surfeit, and my heresy,	195: Hermia, whom Lysander once loved, is now the object of both his own excess (***surfeit***) and error (***heresy***): his former affection now nauseates him, and he regards that love as an emotional wrong.
196	Of all be hated; but the most, of me! −	196: ie. Hermia should be hated by everyone, but most of all, by Lysander!

Of…of = by…by.

And all my powers, address your love and might,
198 To honour Helen, and to be her knight!

197-8: Lysander apostrophizes his own faculties: all their efforts should be directed toward honouring Helena.
address = direct.
Helen = Shakespeare varies the form of the name (*Helen* vs. *Helena*) depending on a line's meter or the number of syllables he needs.

200 [*Exit Lysander*.]

202 ***Herm.*** [*Awaking*.]
Help me, Lysander, help me! do thy best
204 To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast! −
Ay me, for pity! what a dream was here! −
206 Lysander look, how I do quake with fear.

= the expression "quake for fear" was very common, but "quake with fear" much less so.

Methought a serpent ate my heart away,

= the Quarto and Folio both print "*eate*" (ie. eat) here. We make the expected emendation to the past tense.

208 And you sat smiling at his cruël prey. −

= the editors generally agree that the meaning of ***prey*** here is "preying", though the OED does not record this sense.

Lysander! what, removed? Lysander! lord!

209: Hermia suddenly realized Lysander is not nearby.
removed = gone, departed.

210 What, out of hearing? gone? no sound, no word?

= common expression meaning, "out of hearing distance".[1]

Alack, where are you? speak, and if you hear;

211: ***Alack*** = like "alas", a common interjection used to express grief and regret.[1]
and if = ie. if.[5]

212 Speak, of all loves! − I swoun almost with fear. −

212: ***of all loves*** = ie. "for my sake"[3] or "for the sake of all loves."[4]
swoun = ie. swoon, meaning "faint". The spelling *swoon* was not used until the 1640s or so. *Swoun* suggests a bit of a diphthong in the original pronunciation: *swuh-oon*. Listen to Paul Meier's pronunciation of analogous words at https://www.paulmeier.com/OP.pdf.[22]

No? then I well perceive, you are not nigh:

= near.

214 Either death, or you, I'll find immediately.

214: Hermia will at once set out to find Lysander, or die trying.

216 [*Exit Hermia*.]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

The wood. Titania lying asleep.

Enter Quince, Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout, and Starveling.

Entering Characters: the craftsmen return to the woods to rehearse their play, just as Peter Quince had instructed them to do the day before at Act I.ii.138-9 above.

The Quarto and Folio both read, ***Enter the Clowns***; in the 16th century, the term "clowns" referred to rustic or comic characters,[1,2] or men of the lower class.[5]

One feature that makes this scene particularly funny is the men's exaggerated yet sincere fear that their acting will be so lifelike and realistic that it might terrify their audience, especially the women!

Bottom. Are we all met?

1: ie. "is everyone here?"

Quin. 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.

= exactly,[5] or "right on time".[2] = suitable, appropriate.[1,2]
= piece of ground.[1]
= thicket.[1] = ie. attiring-house, or dressing area.[1]
= practice or perform it here (in a manner akin to a dress rehearsal).

Bottom. Peter Quince?

Quin. What sayest thou, Bully Bottom?

= term of endearment, especially for a rough but good-natured fellow.[1,5]

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

= obvious malapropism by Bottom: the play is a tragedy!

= ie. what should we do about this?

Snout. Berlakin, a parlous fear.

17: ***Berlakin*** = "by our lakin", meaning "by our Lady", a strong oath and allusion to the Virgin Mary; ***lakin*** is a diminution of *Lady*: *Lady + kin* became *lady-kin* which in turn was shortened to *lakin*.[1]

parlous = perilous, dangerous;[1] not a malapropism, but a common word.

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

19-20: ***when all is done*** = after all;[5] a common predecessor to the still-used expression, "when all is said and done."

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

= not in the least, ie. not at all.[1] = plan or stratgem.[1,5]

25: ***indeed*** = ie. for real.
more better = double comparatives such as this (*more easier*, *more happier*, etc.) were common.

= ie. rid the spectators of fear.

Quin. Well: we will have such a prologue, and it shall be written in eight and six.

= in alternating lines of eight and six syllables.[1] Stevenson notes that many ballads were written in this measure.

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

32-33: Bottom thinks he is improving the meter with his suggestion, but he only reveals his lack of understanding

of poetry.

Snout. Will not the ladies be afeared of the lion?

Starv. I fear it, I promise you. = assure.[5]

39-43 (below): several early editors have suggested that Shakespeare may have been alluding in these lines to a description, published in 1594, of the ceremonies and pageantry surrounding the baptism of Prince Henry of Scotland.

It seems at one point a chariot was drawn into the presence by a "*black-moore*"; the author noted, though, that the original plan called for a real lion to pull the chariot: "*This Chariot which should haue bene drawn in by a Lyon, (but because his presence might haue brought some feare, to the neerest or that the sight of the lights and torches might haue commoued his tamenes*)" − that is, the planners feared the lion might have terrified those closest to it, and that the bright lights would have spooked the lion (*commoved his tameness*; *commoved* = disturbed or excited violently).[1,3,9]

Bottom. Masters, you ought to consider with

39-40: ***consider with yourselves*** = think about, contemplate. The Quarto reads "yourself", but we adopt the Folio's "yourselves". The construction "consider with oneself" was common in the late 16th and 17th centuries.

yourselves, to bring in (God shield us) a lion among ladies, is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living: and

= ie. that to.[9] = ie. protect.

= obvious malapropism. = colloquial use of "your".[5]

we ought to look toote.

= "look to it", ie. address or deal with this.

Instead of "*to it*", poets usually wrote "*to 't*" if they wished to indicate that *to it* should take up only a single syllable of verse. Shakespeare, however, seems to have created the genuine one-syllable word ***toote*** to mean the same thing. The use of ***toote*** may be intended to give a rustic and unsophisticated flavour to Bottom's speech, highlighting his dialect. Interestingly, the Folio replaces *toote* with *to 't*.

The word's earliest appearance in print was actually in the 1597 Quarto of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "*Thinke ont, looke toot, i doe not vse to iest*."

Subsequent writers adopted ***toote*** for "to 't", including Thomas Middleton, in 1607's *A Trick to Catch Old One*: "*nay looke toote*."

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

45-46: Snout's absurd solution is to present a second prologue to assure the spectators that Bottom is not a real lion!

48-57 (below): Bottom rejects Snout's idea and instead proposes his own ridiculous list of suggestions of how Snout can assure the audience that he is not a real lion.

Bottom. Nay: you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck, and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect: "Ladies," or, "Fair ladies, I would wish

= upon entering the stage in a lion's costume, Snug should let the audience know who he really is!

= ie. effect, a malapropism.

you," or, "I would request you," or, "I would entreat

= beseech.[2]

you, not to fear, not to tremble: my life for yours. If

= "I'll bet my life against yours." This expression was used to express a certainty.

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.

54-55: ***it were pity of my life*** = it would be a matter of great regret.[1]

Quin. Well: it shall be so: But there is two hard things;

59: ***there is two*** = the non-agreeing construction ***there is two*** was common in Elizabethan English.
hard things = difficulties or problems that need to be addressed.

that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber: for you know, Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight.

60-61: the first problem is, how should the production represent moonlight on the stage in the performance area (which Quince assumes will be indoors)?

Snout. Doth the moon shine, that night we play our play?

63-69: since the play is to be presented within the next day or so, it would seem obvious that the moon's phase − and hence the strength of its light − at showtime will be much the same as on the current night.
On the other hand, the mechanicals may in fact be rehearsing during the daytime, which would be more sensible than doing so at night in the woods. If this were the case, it would be at least plausible that none of them would know off hand the current phase of the moon.

Bottom. A calendar, a calendar! look in the almanac: find out moonshine, find out moonshine.

Quin. Yes: it doth shine that night.

71-73 (below): Bottom humorously assumes that the craftsmen will be admitted into an important room such as the great chamber in the duke's palace, and that the play will be performed in a room intimate enough that the moon's light could meaningfully shine in through a single open window.

Bottom. Why then, may you leave a casement of the

= window which opens on hinges.[5]

great chamber window (where we play) open; and the

= a semi-private room, often used for ceremonies or receptions, or even dining; a 1607 law dictionary states that the great chamber was part of the suite of rooms belonging to "*his majesty's household*", which included the "*bedchamber*".

moon may shine in at the casement.

75-77 (below): Quince alludes to the familiar image of the "man in the moon", a motif dating back in English literature to at least the 14th century.[1]

Quin. Ay: or else, one must come in, with a bush

75-77: or, one of the craftsmen will have to play the part of the moon, carrying with him the recognizable attributes of the "man in the moon".
75-76: ***bush of thorns*** = the man in the moon was traditionally imagined to be carrying a thorn bush or a bundle of sticks; the origin of this idea is thought by some to

		be found in Numbers 15:32-36, in which a man was stoned to death for collecting sticks on the Sabbath.[1,5]
76	of thorns, and a lantern, and say he comes to	= to represent the light of the moon. The Quarto prints "*lantern*", the Folio "*lanthorne*", a common variant, used because the sides of lanterns used to be made of horn.[5] In his famous dictionary, Samuel Johnson wrote that ***lantern*** "*is by mistake often written lanthorn*."
	disfigure, or to present, the person of moonshine.	= malapropism for "figure", meaning "represent" or "depict".[1]
78	Then, there is another thing; we must have a wall in	= ie. the second problem needing to be addressed (see line 59 above).
	the great chamber: for Pyramus and Thisbe (says	
80	the story) did talk through the chink of a wall.	= crack, crevice.[1]
82	***Snout.*** You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?	= ie. cannot; note that the men instinctively look to Bottom to solve the practical problems of performance.
84		
	Bottom. Some man or other must present wall: and	= ie. "play the part of the".
86	let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some	= "a composition of moistened clay and sand with an admixture of horse-dung, chopped straw, or the like, used in making bricks and casting-moulds, plastering walls, grafting, etc." (OED).
	rough-cast, about him, to signify wall; or let him	87: ***rough-cast*** = a mixture of water, lime and gravel, applied onto a wall's surface to give it a rough texture.[1] ***or*** = appears in both the Quarto and Folio; usually emended to "*and*".
88	hold his fingers thus: and through that cranny, shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.	
90		
	Quin. If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit	
92	down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts.	= everyone; an old and common expression.
	Pyramus, you begin: when you have spoken your	
94	speech, enter into that brake, and so every one	= bush, thicket.
	according to his cue.	95: ie. should follow the script and speak when cued. It has frequently been noted that in the Elizabethan era, each actor received only his own lines plus the preceding cue lines. Copying entire scripts by hand, solely to ensure that each participant had a complete copy of the entire play, was too labour-intensive to be practical.
96		
	Enter Puck.	
98		
	Puck. What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,	= wearing homemade garments of hemp; hence, coarse and rustic fellows or country bumpkins.[2,5]
100	So near the cradle of the Fairy Queen? −	= poetically, resting place.[1,2]
	What, a play toward! I'll be an auditor,	= afoot, in preparation.[3,5] = a listener.
102	An actor too perhaps, if I see cause.	= ie. a good reason to jump in or interfere.
104	***Quin.*** Speak, Pyramus: − Thisbe stand forth.	= come forward.[1] Bottom is playing Pyramus, Flute Thisbe.
		106-139 (below): the labourers rehearse their play. The script has pretenses of grandeur, but becomes instead an unintended farce; the malapropisms, absurd metaphors, and misused words transform their earnest drama with its awful

attempts at elevated language into a very funny scene.
You may wish to note that the speeches of the craftsmen's play are written in iambic pentameter.

Bottom. Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet, −

= obvious malapropism. = smells.

Quin. Odours, odours.

108: Quince corrects Bottom's error. The text here reflects the Folio's version; the Quarto reads, "*Odours, odorous*."

Bottom. − odours savours sweet:
So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.
But hark, a voice! stay thou but here awhile,
And by and by I will to thee appear.

= listen. = wait.
= presently, shortly.[1]

[*Exit Bottom*.]

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

117: it seems clear that Puck is commenting on what an odd Pyramus Bottom makes. However, Stevenson thinks Puck is saying that, when Bottom reappears, he will be the most unusual Pyramus ever seen − foreshadowing his (Puck's) next move.
The Quarto assigns this line to Quince, the Folio to Puck; it would not make sense for Quince to say this: we must keep in mind that the craftsmen themselves think very highly of Bottom, seeing him as their strongest actor, no matter how ridiculous he comes across to the audience.

[*Exit Puck*.]

119: Puck follows Bottom off-stage and into the brush.

Flute. Must I speak now?

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

= common oath, derived from the Virgin Mary.
= ie. Pyramus.
= ie. return.

Flute. Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
Of colour like the red rose, on triumphant brier,

= ie. growing on a "triumphant" rose bush (***brier***);
triumphant is an absurd way to describe the rose.

Most brisky juvenal, and eke most lovely Jew,

129: ***brisky juvenal*** = brisk juvenile. Both of these words were invented by Shakespeare.[1] In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the comically pompous Spaniard Don Armado also uses *juvenal*.
eke most lovely Jew = "also a most lovely Jew". A truly unexpected and incongruous comparison.

As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire,
I'll meet thee Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

= faithful, loyal. = grow exhausted.
= a delightful malapropism; the word ***ninny***, meaning "simpleton" or "fool" had just entered the literature in 1593.[1]

Quin. "Ninus' tomb," man: why, you must not speak
that yet; that you answer to Pyramus. You speak all
your part at once, cues and all. − Pyramus enter: your
cue is past: it is, "never tire."

133-6: not only has Flute mispronounced "Ninus", but he should have waited to deliver line 131 until Bottom had re-entered the stage and spoken his own next line.
Ninus was the legendary founder of the first Assyrian Empire and its capital Nineveh.[14]
There are multiple layers of humour in the inclusion of ***Ninus' tomb*** in the craftsmen's script: of course, ***Ninny's tomb*** is funny on its own; but perhaps only literate members

of the audience would recognize that Shakespeare directly borrowed the reference to Ninus' tomb from Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which, in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe (which Ovid placed in Nineveh), the couple "*did agree at Ninus Tumb to meet without the town*".

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

Re-enter Puck, and Bottom with an ass's head.

141: Puck has transformed Bottom's head into that of a donkey!

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

143: "If I were attractive, Thisbe, I would be yours alone"; this of course makes little logical sense; but, as Stevenson notes, Bottom has humorously mispunctuated his line: responding to Thisbe's description of him (Pyramus) as true as a horse, he should have said, "If I were, fair Thisbe, I were only thine."[5]

Bottom delivers his line without realizing the metamorphosis he has just undergone.

We may also note that the adjective ***fair*** is misapplied here, since it was normally used to describe a woman[1] − a small slip that further underscores the amateur nature of the script.

fair = pronounced as a disyllable if line 143 is accepted as written: *FAY-er*.

Quin. O monstrous! O strange! we are haunted!
Pray, masters! fly, masters! Help!

[*Exeunt Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout, and Starveling*.]

148-9: Bottom remains on the stage. However, the stage direction in the Folio reads simply, "*The clowns all exit*", meaning all of the craftsmen, including Bottom, leave the stage. In the Folio, Bottom re-enters after Puck exits the stage at line 158 below.

Puck. I'll follow you: I'll lead you about a round,

= around in circles;[5] Puck intends to mischievously get the men to run about in confusion.

Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier:
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire,

= the editors all agree that ***fire*** refers to a will o' the wisp − a florescent light sometimes seen floating above a swamp or marsh − even though the OED does not include this sense in its entry for ***fire***.

And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.

155: note that the four sounds (together with ***burn***) correspond exactly, and in the same order, to the four animals and fire Puck listed in the previous two lines (153-4); the sequence is then repeated exactly in the next line (156).

[*Exit Puck*.]

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

= mischievous trick, prank.[1,5]

Re-enter Snout.

Snout. O Bottom, thou art changed! what do I see on thee?

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

[*Exit Snout.*]

Re-enter Quince.

Quin. Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! thou art translated.

[*Exit Quince.*]

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

Sings.

The woosel cock, so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle, with his note so true,
The wren, with little quill;

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

Bottom. [*Sings.*]
The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo gray:
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay; −

168-9: ***you see…your own*** = in trying to make Bottom seem foolish, Snout has only revealed himself to be the foolish one. Bottom, of course, does not perceive the irony of his own words.

ass-head = a vulgar term of abuse meaning "fool" or "simpleton".[1]

Commentators tell us that Shakespeare here has adopted a proverbial insult of the period, "you see a fool's head of your own", meaning, "in trying to make another look foolish, one only exposes one's own folly." However, I have been able to find only one other 16th century work that used this expression, Nicholas Breton's *A Flourish Upon Fancy* (1577). The expression "fool's head of his own", used in various ways, appears with greater frequency in the 17th century.

Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly will use the expression in its basic form − "*You shall have an fool's-head of your own*" − in *The Merry Wive's of Windsor*, written just a couple of years after *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

= elliptically, "God protect thee".[1]

= transformed.

= ie. frighten.

= male European blackbird;[4] ***woosel*** was a common variant of ***ouzel***, both used for the blackbird.

= yellowish-brown;[1] Bottom used the same adjective at Act I.ii.130 above to describe the colour of a beard he was prepared to wear.

= thrush.[1]

= quiet voice.[1,3]

= perhaps describing the cuckoo's song as a simple melody.[1,5]

199-200: many a man hears the cuckoo's call − which was said to announce he is a cuckold − and dare not deny it (***answer nay***).[1] The joke stems from the cuckoo's habit of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds, leaving them to raise the cuckoo's hatchlings; thus the cuckoo's call was imagined to be mocking cuckolded husbands, as here.[15]

mark = take notice of.[1]

For indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a

= pit his intelligence or mind against, ie. waste his time arguing with.[1]

bird? who would give a bird the lie, though he cry

= accuse the bird of lying.[1]

"cuckoo" never so?

= ever so, ie. persistently.

Titan. I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:

206: ***gentle*** = honourable, noble, friendly.[1]

mortal = creature subject to death; Titania naturally notes that the being before her is not supernatural like herself.[2,6]

There is much humour here in Titania addressing the ridiculous Bottom, with his ass's head, in such dignified verse.

Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note:

207: ***mine*** = my.

enamoured of thy note = delighted or in love with Bottom's song (***note***);[1] ***of*** = by.

So is mine eye enthrallèd to thy shape,

= made a willing slave to (ie. captivated by) Bottom's (attractive) appearance or looks.[1,2]

And thy fair virtue's force (perforce) doth move me

209: "and the power (***force***) of your beautiful or admirable qualities (***fair virtue***) irresistibly (***perforce***) stirs or compels me (***doth move me***)".[1,2,5]

On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

= "my looking upon you for the first time".

Bottom. Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason and

213-4: ***reason and…now-a-days*** = metaphorically, "these days, people fall in love for no reason", ie. love does not follow logic.[5]

love keep little company together, now-a-days. The more the pity, that some honest neighbours will not

214-6: ***the more…friends*** = with this unexpectedly witty remark, Bottom imagines personified Reason and Love (***them***, line 216), which are rarely found together, as quarreling neighbours who ought to have some third-party step in to reconcile them.

make them friends. − Nay, I can gleek, upon occasion.

= Bottom is proud of his witticism about reason and love.

gleek = quip, jest.[3,4]

Titan. Thou art as wise, as thou art beautiful.

Bottom. Not so neither: but if I had wit enough to

= ie. were clever enough.

get out of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.

221: ***get out of*** = ie. "find my way out of".

221-2: ***I have…turn*** = "that would be sufficient to serve my purpose."

Titan. Out of this wood do not desire to go:

224*f*: Titania begins to recite in rhyming couplets, elevating her language even further.

Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.

= "you want to or not."

I am a spirit, of no common rate:

= value or estimation.[1,2]

The summer still doth tend upon my state,

227: emphasizing her own exalted rank in order to convince Bottom to remain with her, Titania seems to imagine that summer itself waits upon her.

still = always.[9]

doth tend...state = obeys her or revolves around her high rank; Stevenson paraphrases the line, "the riches of summer are always at my command."

And I do love thee: therefore go with me.
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee:
And they shall fetch thee jewëls, from the deep,
And sing, while thou, on pressèd flowers, dost sleep:

= gems from the seas, ie. specifically pearls.[5]
= a bed made up of flattened flowers, to emphasize Bottom's special treatment.

And I will purge thy mortal grossness so,
That thou shalt, like an airy spirit, go. −

232-3: Titania promises to purify (***purge***) Bottom's human materiality (***mortal grossness***), so that he may move about like a spirit.[1,2,6]
Stevenson suggests, "I will remove all the coarseness of your human form, so that you shall be like a fairy" (p. 90).[5]
airy = living, located, or subject to the air.[1,5]

Pease-blossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed!

234: Titania calls in her fairy attendants.
Moth = pronounced "mote", which clarifies the name's suitability for a fairy.

Enter four Fairies.

236: the Folio reads, confusingly, "*Enter Pease-blossome, Cobweb, Moth, Mustard-seede, and foure Fairies*." However, the aforementioned fairies *are* the four fairies.

Pease. Ready.

238-244: in both the Quarto and Folio, the four brief lines here are assigned to Fairy #1, Fairy #2, etc.; but there is no reason not to name the speakers, as done by Durham, whose arrangement we adopt.

Cob. And I.

Moth. And I.

Must. And I.

All. Where shall we go?

Titan. Be kind and courteous to this gentleman:

= ie. Bottom.

249-258 (below): note Titania's remarkable rhyming dectet − ten consecutive rhyming lines (even with the repetition of ***eyes***). See the note at Act I.i.237 above for a brief discussion of how words like ***eyes*** would have reasonably rhymed with words like ***dewberries*** in Shakespeare's day.

Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes,

249: the fairies are instructed to skip (***Hop***) along the paths Bottom frequents, and even frolic (***gambol***) where he can see them.[1,2,6]

Feed him with apricocks, and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;

= apricots, a common variant. = blackberries.[1]

The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,

252: ***honey-bags*** = the *honey-bag* is the "enlarged part of the alimentary canal" of a bee, "in which nectar is carried" (OED); the modern name is the "honey-stomach".
humble-bees = *humble-bee* is the earlier name for the bumble-bee, though the latter was also in use in the 16th century; called "humble-bee" because of its humming sound (*bumble-bee* is also appropriate, as the word "bumbling" meant "buzzing").[1]

And for night-tapers, crop their waxen thighs,

253: ***night-tapers*** = candles to be used at night.
crop their waxen thighs = cut off the bees' legs; the wax contained therein (imagines the Bard) can be used to make the candles.
It seems to have been a popular belief that wax was

		stored or found on the legs of the bee. However, it is pollen, not wax, that is stored on bees' legs: bees collect pollen using rows of stiff hairs (called *pollen combs*) on their hind legs; these hairs scrape pollen from the bees' bodies into concave structures called *pollen baskets*, which hold the collected pollen.[16] The only bees that make wax are young female worker honeybees: inside the bee's body, the sugars of honey are converted to wax; then, the honeybee secretes the wax, using it to construct honeycombs.[17]
254	And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,	254: here too Shakespeare is in error: the bioluminescence of the beetle species known as the ***glow-worm*** occurs in its tail, not its head.[5] ***at*** = ie. with or by.
	To have my love to bed, and to arise;	255: Bottom may use the candles to find his way to bed at night and when he awakens in the morning. ***To have*** = to bring.[5]
256	And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,	= allusion to the butterfly's colorful and variegated wings.
	To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes;	257: the fairies should use the wings to fan away any moonlight that might disturb Bottom's sleep.[5]
258	Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.	= ie. in salutation.[1] = show Bottom every consideration.[1]
260	***Peas.*** Hail, mortal!	260-6: as at lines 238-244 above, the Quarto and Folio assign these lines to Fairy #1, etc.
262	***Cob.*** Hail!	
264	***Moth.*** Hail!	
266	***Must.*** Hail!	
268	***Bottom.*** I cry your worships' mercy, heartily: − I beseech your worship's name.	= "I beg your worships' pardon."[5] = earnestly, sincerely.[1,6] = entreat, ask earnestly for.[1]
270	***Cob.*** Cobweb.	
272		**273-292 (below):** as Bottom greets each fairy, he will make comically polite-sounding remarks based on the literal meaning of their names.
274	***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?	274-5: ***if I cut…you*** = a popular folk-remedy was to apply cobwebs to staunch bleeding and heal wounds.
276	***Pease.*** Pease-blossom.	= the flower of the pea plant.
278	***Bottom.*** I pray you, commend me to Mistress	= ie. please. = "remember me kindly".[1]
280	Squash, your mother, and to Master Peascod, your father. Good Master Pease-blossom, I shall desire	= an unripe peapod.[1,5] = pea-pod.[1]
282	you of more acquaintance, too. − Your name, I beseech you, sir?	
284	***Must.*** Mustardseed.	
286	***Bottom.*** Good Master Mustardseed, I know your	287-8: ***I know your patience well*** = commentators differ widely in their interpretation of this line:

		(1) Reynolds and Sawyer[18] believe the line refers to two things: (a) the "persistence and vigor of the mustard seed"; it was well known that "no matter how often the seed-head is destroyed or cut back, the mustard remains one of the most prolific of plants"; and (b) the mustardseed's "use in a plaster or poultice to ease a sore back or aching muscles." The authors argue that a listening audience would hear *patience* as *patients*; **(2)** Stevenson wonders if Bottom "is referring ironically to the fact that mustard is hot" (p. 91);[5] **(3)** is there a Biblical allusion here? In the parable of the mustardseed (Matthew 13:31-32), Jesus says, "*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man taketh and soweth in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and it is a tree...*" (Geneva Bible). In saying "*the least of all seeds*", Jesus emphasizes: (a) the smallness of the mustard seed, which makes its name for a fairy apropos; and (b) that the mustard seed requires time and ***patience*** to reach its full size; **(4)** a very early commentator thought that Bottom was complimenting Mustardseed's family for showing great forbearance because they were continuously being consumed by oxen;[9] and finally, **(5)** in the New Oxford edition of the play, Bourus simply interprets ***your patience***, in a footnote, to mean, "what you have endured", but without explanation.
288	patience well. That same cowardly, giant-like ox-beef hath devoured many a gentleman of your house. I	288-9: ***That same…house*** = Bottom is aware that oxen feed on mustard plants. ***cowardly*** = one interpretation is that the ox is ***cowardly*** because it, being the size of a relative ***giant***, preys on something so much smaller than itself.[18] ***ox-beef*** = properly refers to the flesh of an ox consumed as food, but here Bottom means simply "ox" as an animal. There is also a subtle association of mustard as a condiment, traditionally served by the English with beef during a meal.[5,18] ***many a...house*** = humorously, members of Mustard-seed's "family" − that is, other mustard plants.
290	promise you, your kindred hath made my eyes water	= allusion to the propensity of hot mustard to cause the eyes to water. ***your kindred*** = other members of Mustardseed's "family".
292	ere now. I desire your more acquaintance, good Master Mustardseed.	
		293: **The Greetings Conclude:** note the absence or omis-sion of greetings from Bottom to Moth.
294	***Titan.*** Come, wait upon him: lead him to my bower. The moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye:	= attend. = leafy, shady recess.[1,6] 295: the moon appears a bit tearful to Titania. Once again, there is a reference to the cosmic moistness of the moon.
296	And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,	296-7: literally, when the personified moon (***she***) weeps, so does every flower; more concretely, when the moon weeps,

its tears, figured as dew, moisten every flower.[19]
The line alludes to the belief that at night, the shining moon moistens the air, creating the dew which settles on the ground: e.g., "*the Moone imprinteth her moisture in the earth, & is cause of gendring and dew therein...*" (1582, *Batman Upon Bartholome*).

Lamenting some enforcèd chastity.

299: another line open to multiple interpretations: could be "mourning an involuntary chastity",[19] or "mourning a violated chastity."[3,4,5] Whichever way we take it, the underlying point remains unclear.

298 Tie up my lover's tongue, bring him silently.

= an instruction to keep Bottom from speaking anymore − perhaps Titania, though she finds her new love's looks irresistible, is not so impressed by his endless and mindless speech![9]

300 [*Exeunt*.]

ACT III, SCENE II.

Another part of the wood.

Enter Oberon.

1 ***Ober.*** I wonder if Titania be awaked;
2 Then what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on, in extremity.
4

2-3: Oberon is eager to learn upon whom Titania has first set her eyes, knowing that she will fall madly in love with him.
what = who.
dote on = love excessively, be infatuated with.[2]
in extremity = to the utmost degree.

Enter Puck.

6 Here comes my messenger. −
8 How now, mad spirit?

= "how are things now?"[1] = wild, gay.[6]

What night-rule now about this haunted grove?

9: "what night-time revelries or diversions (***night-rule***)[2,4,6] have been going on in this much-frequented (***haunted***)[4] woods?
Line 9 begins an extended period of rhyming (mostly in couplets) that extends for several hundred lines.

10 ***Puck.*** My mistress with a monster is in love,

11: ***My mistress*** = ie. Titania.
a monster = an unnatural creature,[5] ie. Bottom with his ass's head. However, Shakespeare may have been using the word ***monster*** in its older sense of a being that is part-human and part-animal,[1] which describes Bottom precisely.

12 Near to her close and consecrated bower.

= private or secret.[5] = sacred sleeping space.[2]

While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,

= ie. asleep.
dull = weary, sleepy;[6] ***dull*** could also refer to the insensibility experienced during sleep.[1] The collocation ***dull sleep*** appears frequently in the 16th and 17th centuries.

14 A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,

14: ***patches*** = clowns, simpletons.[1,4]
rude = ignorant, uneducated.[2]

mechanicals = craftsmen or manual labourers.[1]

That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,

15: ***bread*** = ie. food.[6]
upon = at, by.
stalls = small shops or sheds where tradesmen carry on their work.[5]

Were met together to rehearse a play,
Intended for great Theseus' nuptial-day:
The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort,

18: Puck alludes to Bottom here.
shallowest = most lacking in depth of mind, stupidest.[1,5]
thick-skin = dull or slow fellow.[1,5]
barren sort = stupid or dull company.[3,5]

Who Pyramus presented, in their sport,
Forsook his scene, and entered in a brake:
When I did him at this advantage take,
An ass's nole I fixèd on his head.

= represented, played. = play, performance.[1]
= left, walked away from. = bush.
21: "when I caught him at this favourable moment".[2]
= head.[1]

Anon his Thisbe must be answerèd,

23: shortly thereafter (***Anon***), Bottom (playing Pyramus) must respond to his cue as spoken by Thisbe.
Note that Puck now switches to the present tense as he approaches the climax of his narrative: the effect is to heighten the excitement and immediacy, creating a sense of reliving and not just recounting the events.

And forth my minnick comes. When they him spy,

24: ***forth my minnick comes*** = Bottom comes forth, out of the brush.
minnick = burlesque actor, or actor; rare variant of "mimic".[1,2]
spy = see.

25-30 (below): in this extended double simile, Puck compares the labourers' flight − their running in fear − from Bottom to
(1) geese who see a hunter (line 25), and
(2) jackdaws (***choughs***) who hear a gun fired (26-27),
both flocks flying away in panic (28).

As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye;

= see the stealthily approaching (***creeping***)[6] wild-bird hunter (***fowler***). We may note that a ***fowler*** usually looked to catch birds with a net.[1]

Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,

26: ***russet-pated choughs*** = jackdaws (***choughs***) with grey (***russet***) heads; ***russet*** usually means reddish-brown, but there are numerous contemporary examples of *russet* used for grey.[1,3,5]
pated = headed.
many in sort = in a great crowd, many together; ***in sort*** = in a body.[1]

Rising and cawing at the gun's report;

27: taking flight (***Rising***) and calling out when they hear a gunshot (***report***).

Sever themselves, and madly sweep the sky:

= scatter.[1] = frantically move swiftly across.[1]

So, at his sight, away his fellows fly,

29*f*: the simile now shifts to the craftsmen.
at his sight = upon seeing Bottom.
fellows = companions.[2]
fly = flee; but ***fly*** also connects subtly back to the literal flying away of the scattering birds of the double-

		simile.
30	And at our stamp, here o'er and o'er one falls:	30: the fairies knock over one of the men by stamping on the ground; Stevenson tells us that fairies were thought to have the ability to shake the ground. ***our*** = why Puck uses "our" here is unclear, as he was the only fairy present at the tradesmen's rehearsal.
	He "murther!" cries, and help from Athens calls.	31: ***He*** = another one of the men.[5] ***murther*** = common alternate form of "murder".
32	Their sense, thus weak, lost with their fears, thus strong, Made senseless things begin to do them wrong:	32-33: "having lost what little sense they had, and being overcome by fright (line 32), they were so panicked that even inanimate objects (things without consciousness, ie. ***senseless***) seemed to do them harm (line 33)."[5] It is worth noting the parallelism within line 32 (*Their sense, thus weak ... their fears, thus strong*) and the linguistic link and contrast between *sense* in line 32 and *senseless* in line 33. This is Shakespeare at his subtle best.
34	For briers and thorns, at their apparel, snatch: Some sleeves, some hats; from yielders, all things catch.	= catch, snag.[1] = ie. the briers and thorns would snag every loose item their owners wore. ***yielders*** = people who let such things get pulled off.[3]
36	I led them on, in this distracted fear, And left sweet Pyramus translated there:	= confused, mad.[2,6] = ie. Bottom. = transformed.[5]
38	When in that moment (so it came to pass) Titania waked, and straightway loved an ass.	
40	***Ober.*** This falls out better than I could devise. −	= turns out. = have planned.
42	But hast thou yet latched the Athenian's eyes With the love-juice, as I did bid thee do?	42: ***latched*** = watered, moistened; a variant of "leach".[1] ***the Athenian's*** = ie. Demetrius'.
44	***Puck.*** I took him sleeping (that is finished too)	= ie. the assignment to moisten the Athenian's eyes was completed.
46	And the Athenian woman by his side; That when he waked, of force she must be eyed.	= by necessity. = ie. he couldn't help but see her.
48	*Enter Demetrius and Hermia.*	
50	***Ober.*** Stand close: this is the same Athenian.	= stand still (so as to remain unnoticed).[5]
52	***Puck.*** This is the woman: but not this the man.	53: we remember that Puck mistakenly applied the herb's juice to Lysander's eyes, not Demetrius'. The goal was to cause Demetrius, who had been mistreating Helena, to awaken and fall in love with her. Instead, in mistakenly applying the drug onto Lysander's eyes, Puck has caused Lysander to fall in love with Helena, abandoning Hermia, with whom he had been planning to elope. Demetrius, in the meantime, remains in love with Hermia, who still only has eyes for Lysander. Oberon and Puck will remain on-stage as observers to the quarreling between the mortal characters, not to speak again until lines 473*ff* below.
54		**55*ff* (below):** note how in the following dialogue, Demetrius

uses the respectful "you" in addressing Hermia, while she addresses her pursuer with the contemptuous "thou".

Demet. O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
= ie. Demetrius himself.

56 Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe.
= speak so harshly. = ie. Demetrius himself.

58 ***Herm.*** Now I but chide: but I should use thee worse,
= ie. "am only reproving you." = treat.

For thou (I fear) hast given me cause to curse.
= pronounced as a one syllable word: *gi'n*.

60 If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
Being o'er-shoes in blood, plunge in the deep,

61: ***o'er-shoes in blood*** = literally "above shoe-level in blood", used figuratively by Hermia to mean "whole-heartedly immersed in your bloody course of action".[1]
plunge in the deep = ie. "plunge into the depths of it" (Stevenson, p. 92);[5] the sense is, "then you may as well go all in".

62 And kill me too.
The sun was not so true unto the day
= faithful.

64 As he to me: would he have stolen away
= ie. as Lysander was. = slipped; pronounced "*stol'n*".

From sleeping Hermia? I'll believe as soon

65-68: ***I'll believe…Antipodes*** = a reasonable interpretation of this difficult bit of hyperbole may be, "I would as soon believe that the earth could be drilled straight through with a hole (***bored***),[1,6] and that the moon would move slowly (***creep***)[1] into the resulting hole, and through the center of the earth (and out the other end), thus annoying her brother the sun who is shining at noon (***noontide***) on the opposite side of the earth, disrupting the lives of the people living there (***the Antipodes***)."[1,6]
with (line 68) = among.[3]

66 This whole earth may be bored, and that the moon
May through the centre creep, and so displease
68 Her brother's noontide with the Antipodes.

It cannot be, but thou hast murdered him;

69: Lysander's murder is the only possible explanation for his disappearance!

70 So should a murtherer look; so dead, so grim.
70: Hermia imagines Demetrius to have the look of a killer.
dead = ie. deadly.[1,5]

72 ***Demet.*** So should the murdered look, and so should I,
Pierced through the heart, with your stern cruëlty:

72-73: the sense is, "you mean, this is what a murdered man should look like − it is I who has been killed, by your rejection."

74 Yet you, the murtherer, look as bright, as clear,
As yonder Venus, in her glimmering sphere.

75: ***Venus*** = ie. the planet.
sphere = another reference to the Ptolemaic view of the cosmos: the earth, sitting at the center of the universe, is surrounded by the moon and planets, each embedded in its own crystalline sphere which revolves around the earth.

76
Herm. What's this to my Lysander? where is he?
= ie. "what does this have to do with", or "what does this matter compared to my concern for ".

78 Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?
= ie. "to me?"

80 ***Demet.*** I had rather give his carcass to my hounds.

82 ***Herm.*** Out, dog! out, cur! thou driv'st me past the bounds
Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him then?
= Demetrius' reference to Lysander's ***carcass*** in line 80 above may have prompted this question.

84 Henceforth be never numbered among men. −
= from this moment on.

O, once tell true: tell true, even for my sake; −

85: Hermia briefly softens her tone, pleading sincerely for truth, before immediately returning to her bitter and sarcastic tirade.
once tell true = ie. "for once, tell the truth."

even = pronounced "*e'en*".

86 Durst thou have looked upon him, being awake?
And hast thou killed him, sleeping? O brave touch!
= ie. "have you dared". = ie. Demetrius being awake.
= "what a valiant deed or achievement!" (ironic).[2,5,6]

88 Could not a worm, an adder, do so much?
= snake.[2]

An adder did it: for with doubler tongue

89: ***An adder did it*** = Lysander's murderer was in fact a snake − Demetrius!
doubler tongue = ie. greater deceit; the common expression ***double-tongued*** meant "deceitful" and "insincere",[1] but also alludes to the serpent's forked tongue.

90 Than thine (thou serpent) never adder stung.
= the ***serpent*** was sometimes used by Shakespeare as a symbol of deceit (OED).

92 ***Demet.*** You spend your passion on a misprised mood:
= use up, waste.[1] = emotion.[1] = misplaced anger or fancy.[1,5]
I am not guilty of Lysander's blood:
= ie. spilling Lysander's blood.
94 Nor is he dead, for aught that I can tell.
= ie. "for all that I know."[1]

96 ***Herm.*** I pray thee, tell me then, that he is well.
= please.

98 ***Demet.*** And if I could, what should I get therefore?
= ie. if. = ie. get for that, ie. receive in return.[1]

100 ***Herm.*** A privilege, never to see me more:
= right, benefit.[1,6]

And from thy hated presence part I [so]:

101: ***hated*** = loathed, hateful.[1]
so = ***so*** appears in neither the Quarto or Folio, but is usually added here to fill in the meter and complete the rhyme with line 102.

102 See me no more, whether he be dead or no.

102: ***whether*** = pronounced as a monosyllable: *whe'er*.
he = ie. Lysander.
no = ie. not.

104 [*Exit Hermia*.]

106 ***Demet.*** There is no following her in this fierce vein:

106: "there is no use following Hermia while she is in this fierce mood" (Stevenson, p. 92).[5]

Here therefore, for a while, I will remain.
108 So sorrow's heaviness doth heavier grow
For debt that bankrout sleep doth sorrow owe:

108-9: Demetrius' sorrow is intensified because he has not gotten any sleep; Shakespeare uses a striking metaphor of sleep as a bankrupt debtor: it owes relief − sleep itself − to Demetrius, but cannot pay it off, leaving his grief to grow heavier.
bankrout = bankrupt, a common alternate form.
sleep = printed as *slippe* and *slip* in the Quarto and Folio respectively, and generally emended to *sleep*.

110 Which now in some slight measure it will pay,
= ie. the debt. = a small or partial amount. = ie. sleep.
If for his tender here I make some stay.
111: if I pause here (***make some stay***)[1] to accept sleep's (***his***) offer (***tender***) (of partial payment).
112

[*Demetrius lies down and sleeps*.]

114

Ober. What hast thou done? thou hast mistaken quite,
116 And laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight.
= ie. applied. = ie. Lysander's.

Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
117-8: "the result of your mistake (***misprision***) must necessarily be that a faithful lover (this would be Lysander) has rejected his or her beloved (***some true love turned***; the beloved here is Hermia), rather than someone becoming
118 Some true love turned, and not a false turned true.

		faithful to (ie. falling in love with) one he or she previously hated." The latter refers to Oberon's intended scheme − for Demetrius (who disliked Helena, and thus was ***false***) to fall in love with Helena. ***perforce*** = of necessity.
120	***Puck.*** Then fate o'er-rules, that one man holding troth, A million fail, confounding oath on oath.	120-1: then fate, which always prevails, ordains that for every one man who remains true to his love, a million do not, ruining or bringing to nought (***confounding***) one vow after another.
122		
	Ober. About the wood, go swifter than the wind,	= throughout.
124	And Helena of Athens look thou find. All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer,	= love-sick.[5] = countenance.[5]
126	With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear.	126: reference to the belief that for every sigh, the heart loses a drop of blood,[5] and hence that sighing directly leads to loss of strength and power.[9]
	By some illusion see thou bring her here:	127: Oberon instructs Puck to use one of his tricks to bring Helena around; ***illusion*** = deception.[2]
128	I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.	128: Oberon plans to enchant Demetrius so that when Helena appears, he will, upon seeing her, immediately fall in love with her. ***against she do appear*** = in expectation or anticipation of Helena's arrival.[1,4]
130	***Puck.*** I go, I go, look how I go, Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.	= the ***Tartars***, a central-Asian peoples, were famed for their prowess in warfare and their skill as horsemen and in archery in particular. Shakespeare made frequent reference to the Tartars in his plays.
132		
	[*Exit Puck.*]	
134		
		135-142 (below): Oberon first apostrophizes the flower (through line 140), then the sleeping Demetrius. Note that Oberon's entire speech comprises a rhyming octet − eight consecutive rhyming lines!
		135-159 (below): Oberon and Puck return to speaking in seven-syllable lines, all beginning with a stressed syllable, then alternating between unstressed and stressed. All the lines are in rhyming couplets.
	Ober. Flower of this purple dye,	135: ie. "you purple-colored flower", referring to the love-in-idleness, the flower whose juice had been anointed previously on the eyelids of Lysander and Titania.
136	Hit with Cupid's archery,	136: "act with the same power as an arrow shot by Cupid, which when it strikes, causes its victim to fall in love."
	Sink in apple of his eye;	137: "penetrate (***Sink***)[1] into Demetrius' eye." ***apple of his eye*** = this expression for the pupil dates back to Old English.[1]
138	When his love he doth espy, Let her shine as gloriously	138: when Demetrius sees Helena.
140	As the Venus of the sky. − When thou wak'st, if she be by,	141-2: spoken to Demetrius; ***she*** = Helena.
142	Beg of her for remedy.	142: "seek a cure from Helena for your love for her", ie. "plead for her to return your love."

Re-enter Puck.

Puck. Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand,
And the youth, mistook by me,

146: Puck addresses Oberon.

148: Puck has brought Lysander with him as well as Helena.
mistook by me = Puck admits to having mistakenly applied the love-juice to Lysander instead of Demetrius.

Pleading for a lover's fee.

149: Lysander is begging Helena for that which a lover is entitled to − meaning a return of his affection, or perhaps a kiss.

Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

= literally, "foolish show", ie. ridiculous antics, spectacle.[3,5]

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

= ie. Lysander and Helena.

Puck. Then will two, at once, woo one:

156: ie. both Lysander and Demetrius will be courting Helena.

That must needs be sport alone.

157: this cannot help but be a bit of entertainment (***sport***) without equal (***alone***).[4]
must needs be = is necessarily.

And those things do best please me
That befall preposterously.

= occur or happen unnaturally or perversely.[2,5]

Enter Lysander and Helena.

163-175 (below): the following speeches by Lysander and Helena are each in **sestet** form, following an *ababcc* rhyming scheme − exactly the pattern found in the closing six lines of an Elizabethan sonnet.

Lysan. Why should you think, that I should woo in scorn?

= "am courting you mockingly or insultingly?"[1]

Scorn and derision never come in tears.

164: ie. people who are genuinely mocking someone don't cry while doing so.
never come in = ie. are never accompanied by.

Look, when I vow, I weep: and vows so born,
In their nativity all truth appears.

165-6: as Lysander pledges his love to Helena, he sheds tears, which are evidence of the sincerity of his vows. Note the metaphor, with ***nativity***, of newly-made vows as being ***born***.

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

= carrying or showing (***Bearing***) the visible sign or mark (***badge***) of sincerity and trustworthiness (***faith***)[2] − ie. his tears.

Helena. You do advance your cunning, more, and more.

170: Lysander's deceit is escalating.
advance = show.[2,5]

When truth kills truth, O devilish-holy fray!

171: ***When truth kills truth*** = Lysander's swearing his love to Helena (the first ***truth***), by superseding his previous oath to Hermia (the second ***truth***), is ***killing*** it. Stevenson's gloss is, "In order to be true to me, you must break your vows to Hermia."
O devilish-holy fray! = a powerful oxymoron: Lysander's separate protestations to the two women are individually both sacred (***holy***), but in attempting to present both as truth, he sets them against each other, and the resulting conflict or

		combat (***fray***) is evil or damnable (***devilish***).[1,2,6]
172	These vows are Hermia's. Will you give her o'er?	= abandon or give up Hermia.[1]
	Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh.	173-5: weigh each vow on a scale, and you will find that each weighs nothing; by promising his love to both Hermia and Helena, Lysander has created vows that have equal value − none at all.
174	Your vows to her and me, put in two scales,	
	Will even weigh; and both as light as tales.	***light as tales*** = as of little value (***light***) as are idle stories or fictional narratives (***tales***);[1] ***light*** also bears the literal sense of being low in weight.
176		
	Lysan. I had no judgement, when to her I swore.	= discretion, good sense, wisdom.[2]
178		
	Helena. Nor none, in my mind, now you give her o'er.	= nor any.
180		
	Lysan. Demetrius loves her: and he loves not you.	
182		
	Demet. [*Awaking*.]	
184	O Helen, goddess, nymph, perféct divine,	184: ***nymph*** = beautiful maiden.[1] ***perfect divine*** = sacred or ideal godlike one;[1,2] ***perfect*** is stressed on its second syllable, not uncommon in Elizabethan verse.
	To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?	= "your eyes"; ***eyne*** is the old poetic form of "eyes".
186	Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show	186: ***Crystal is muddy*** = "compared to the brightness of your eyes, crystal is dull and dirty."[1,5]
	Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!	186-7: ***how ripe…grow*** = a brief but dense metaphor, by which Demetrius compares Helena's ***lips*** to ***cherries***, describing them both as red and full (***ripe***)[1] and tempting. We may note that the comparison of a woman's lips to cherries was ubiquitous in Elizabethan poetry. ***tempting grow*** = becoming increasingly enticing; but ***grow*** also carries an agricultural sense, suggesting the ripening or growth of the cherries on the tree.
188	That pure congealèd white, high Taurus' snow,	188-190: ***That pure…hand*** = compared to Helena's white hand, even the snows of the Taurus mountains, blown by the cold wind, appear black.[5] ***congealed*** = frozen.[1] ***Taurus*** = large and lofty mountain range in southeast Asia Minor; Sugden notes that the peaks are snow-covered all year round.[20]
	Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow,	189: ***the eastern wind*** = an east wind was considered harsh and sharp. ***turns to a crow*** = metaphorically, appears black in comparison. A dark complexion was considered unattractive by Elizabethan standards.
190	When thou hold'st up thy hand: O, let me kiss	
	This princess of pure white, this seal of bliss!	191: ***This princess*** = this paragon[2] (ie. the hand). ***seal of bliss*** = pledge or symbol of happiness.[1,5]
192		
	Helena. O spite! O hell! I see, you all are bent	193-4: Helena couldn't be more indignant, now that both Lysander and Demetrius (***you all***) are mocking her by pretending to be in love with her.
194	To set against me, for your merriment.	***bent*** = inclined.

set against = attack, act hostile toward.[1]

If you were civil, and knew courtesy, = decent, well-behaved.[6] = ie. had good manners.[2]
You would not do me thus much injury.
Can you not hate me, as I know you do,
But you must join in souls to mock me too? = ie. act as one, or "conspire together".[5]

If you were men, as men you are in show, 199: if Lysander and Demetrius possessed the qualities of true men − honour, courage, etc. − as they have the appearance of men.
You would not use a gentle lady so; = treat. = tender, meek.[6]
To vow, and swear, and superpraise my parts, = excessively praise or overpraise.[1] = personal qualities.[1]
When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.
You both are rivals, and love Hermia:
And now both rivals, to mock Helena.
A trim exploit, a manly enterprise, = a fine deed (ironic).[2,5]
To conjure tears up in a poor maid's eyes = bring tears to.
With your derision! none of noble sort = no person of virtuous nature or high birth.[5]

Would so offend a virgin, and extort 208: ***virgin*** = maiden.
208-9: ***extort…patience*** = exhaust Helena's patience,[5] ie. push to the limit her capacity to endure the men's cruelty; ***extort*** = wrest away through intimidation.[1,4]

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

Lysan. You are unkind, Demetrius: be not so.
For you love Hermia: this you know I know.
And here, with all good will, with all my heart,
In Hermia's love I yield you up my part: 214-5: because Lysander no longer loves Hermia, he willingly gives up his share (***part***) of her love to Demetrius, and asks Demetrius in return to give him his share of Helena's love (***yours of Helena***).
And yours of Helena, to me bequeath:

Whom I do love, and will do till my death.

Helena. Never did mockers waste more idle breath.

Demet. Lysander, keep thy Hermia: I will none. = I want nothing to do with her."
If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.
My heart to her but as guest-wise sojourned, 222-4: Demetrius compares his heart to a traveller, which took temporary residence with Hermia, but has now returned to its own home with Helena.
And now to Helen is it home returned,
There to remain.
guest-wise = like a guest.[1]
sojourned = travelled, perhaps with sense of remaining elsewhere only for a time.[1,2]

Lysan. Helen, it is not so.

Demet. Disparage not the faith thou dost not know, 228: "do not scorn or vilify (***Disparage***)[6] the sincerity of a love that you don't understand."
Lest to thy peril, thou aby it dear. − = "you will pay or atone for (***aby***)[2,5] it dearly."
Look, where thy love comes: yonder is thy dear. = ie. there. = over there.

Re-enter Hermia.

234-7 (below): because the darkness of night takes away a person's ability to see, his or her hearing becomes more acute as compensation.

Herm. Dark night, that from the eye his function takes,

= its function, ie. the eye's role.
The word ***function*** could be used to specifically describe the actions or jobs of bodily organs;[1] hence, in Shakespeare's later play *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus speaks of a credence in his heart which "*doth invert the attest of eyes and ears / As if those organs had deceptious functions*..."

The ear more quick of apprehension makes;

= perception.[3]

Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,

= ie. dark night.

It pays the hearing double recompence. −

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

238-9: Hermia was able to find Lysander by hearing him, not seeing him, in the night.

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

242: "why should a person remain, when love compels (***doth press***)[1] him to depart?"

Herm. What love could press Lysander from my side?

Lysan. Lysander's love, that would not let him bide,

= ie. Helena. = stay, remain.[6]

Fair Helena; who more engilds the night

= literally "gilds", figuratively "brightens with golden light" (OED).

Than all yon fiery oes and eyes of light.

= poetically, the stars.[5]
yon = those.[1]
oes = circles, round spots.[1,3]
eyes = while it was commonplace to compare one's eyes to stars, Shakespeare may have been the first to call the stars "eyes".
Note the alphabetical wordplay of "*oes and eyes*" ("o's and i's").

Why seek'st thou me? could not this make thee know,

= ie. didn't Lysander's leaving Hermia make it clear to her.

The hate I bare thee made me leave thee so?

Herm. You speak not as you think: it cannot be.

Helena. Lo: she is one of this confederacy!
Now I perceive they have conjoined all three,

254-5: Helena believes that Hermia has joined the two men in the conspiracy to torment her.
Lo = look, behold.
confederacy = plot, alliance.[2]
conjoined = united.[2]

To fashion this false sport, in spite of me. −

256: "to contrive (***fashion***)[2] this deceptive or wicked recreation or diversion (***false sport***)[1,2,5] in their contempt (***spite***)[4] of me."

Injurious Hermia, most ungrateful maid,

= insulting.[4]

Have you conspired, have you with these contrived

= ie. these other two.

To bait me with this foul derisiön?

259: "to persecute (***bait***) me with this shameful mockery (***foul derision***)?"[1,5]

260-278 (below): in this lengthy passage, Helena appeals to Hermia's memory of the close bond they have forged to ask why she would now join this plot against her.

Is all the counsel that we two have shared,

= confidences.[2,6]

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

261: ***The sisters' vows*** = the pledges of loyalty and friendship the two women, as close as sisters, have shared. Note that there may also be a secondary allusion to the vows

		(of chastity, etc.) taken by nuns (in the 16th century, ***sister*** could refer to a nun) upon entering a convent; such a reference would heighten the sense of solemnity and sacredness of the intimacy shared by the two women. ***hours*** = pronounced as a single syllable.
262	When we have chid the hasty-footed time For parting us: − O, is all forgot?	262-3: ***When we…us*** = the girls would scold time for moving too quickly, prematurely ending their moments together. ***chid*** = rebuked; past tense of "chide". Line 263 seems short, but a brief pause between the line's two clauses, as Helena awaits an answer from Hermia, may provide the missing unstressed syllable.
264	All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence? We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,	= artistically skillful, proficient in creating new things.[2,5]
266	Have with our needles created both one flower, Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,	266-7: have embroidered together. ***needles*** = as here, ***needle*** was usually pronounced as a single syllable in Shakespeare's verse. ***sampler*** = a sample of embroidery work, used to demonstrate a woman's skill.[1,5]
268	Both warbling of one song, both in one key;	268: ie. singing the same song together, in unison (***in one key***) rather than in harmony.
	As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds	= the precise meaning of ***sides*** is unclear; Schmidt suggests "frame", ie. their bodies, and more specifically, their "breast(s), as containing the heart or the lungs" (p. 1056),[6] ie. the chest cavities as the seat of vital organs.
270	Had been incorporate. So we grew together,	= in one body.[5]
	Like to a double cherry, seeming parted; 272 But yet an union in partitiön, Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;	271-3: Helena compares her relationship with Hermia to that of two cherries or berries growing from a single stem − separate (***in partition***) but joined (forming ***an union***), distinct yet united. ***Like to*** = like. ***seeming parted*** = seemingly separate. ***moulded*** = formed.[1]
274	So with two seeming bodies, but one heart;	274: the women appear to have distinct bodies, but they share one heart between them.
	Two of the first, like coats in heraldry, 276 Due but to one, and crownèd with one crest.	275-6: Helena employs an analogy from heraldry to emphasize her close bond with Hermia: the pair of them were like two coats-of-arms joined into a single shield and topped by a single ***crest***. In heraldry, the coats of arms of two families could be combined, or "impaled", on one shield (this could occur, for example, when a marriage united two families); the arms of one family (in the case of a marriage, the husband's) were placed on the left half, and the other's (the wife's) on the right half. Above the coat of arms was typically placed a helmet, which in turn was topped by a device (***crest***) such as a crown or wreath. ***Two of the first*** = ie. with two bodies (***first*** = former, referring to the ***bodies*** of the previous line, line 274). ***Due but to one*** = belonging to one family or lineage.[5]

crowned = topped.[6]

And will you rent our ancient love asunder, = rend, tear.[4] = apart.
To join with men, in scorning your poor friend?
It is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly: = behaviour appropriate for a maiden, ie. gentle and modest.[1]
Our sex, as well as I, may chide you for it;
Though I alone do feel the injury.

Herm. I am amazèd at your [passionate] words: 283: ***amazed*** = confused, bewildered.[1,5]
passionate = in the Folio only, absent from the Quarto.
I scorn you not: it seems that you scorn me.

Helena. Have you not set Lysander, as in scorn, = ie. did. = assign or put to a task.[1]
To follow me, and praise my eyes and face?
And made your other love, Demetrius,
(Who even but now did spurn me with his foot) = pronounced *e'en*. = kick.
To call me goddess, nymph, divine, and rare, 290: see line 184 above for the first three compliments; but Demetrius never called Helena ***rare*** (meaning "excellent").

Precious celestial? Wherefore speaks he this, 291: ***Precious celestial*** = nor did Demetrius call her this.
Wherefore = why.
To her he hates? and wherefore doth Lysander 292-5: ***wherefore…consent*** = why would Lysander pretend to reject your love and offer me his, unless you urged him to do so?"

Deny your love (so rich within his soul) = reject. = so deeply rooted within him; ***rich*** = abundant.[6]
And tender me (forsooth) affectiön, = offer. = truthfully, but implying some contempt.[4]
But by your setting on, by your consent? 295: "except that you encouraged it and agreed to it?"
What though I be not so in grace as you, 296: "what does it matter (***What though***) that I am not so much in favour (***in grace***) (with Lysander) as you".

So hung upon with love, so fortunate, = the sense is, Helena does not have men admiring her as much as does Hermia; ***hung upon*** = clung to.[5]
But miserable most, to love unloved? 298: ***miserable most*** = ie. "(I am) utterly miserable".
to love unloved = ie. Helena loves, but is unloved.
This you should pity, rather than despise.

Herm. I understand not what you mean by this.

Helena. Ay, do; perséver, counterfeit sad looks: 303: "sure, keep at it (***persever***); continue to pretend to be sorrowful or serious (***sad***)."
persever = typically stressed on the second syllable.
Make mouths upon me, when I turn my back: = make faces at.[5]
Wink each at other, hold the sweet jest up: = ie. at each other. = keep the pleasant practical joke going.[1]
This sport, well carried, shall be chronicled. 306: this diversion (***sport***), if well executed (***carried***), will deserve to be recorded for history (***chronicled***).[1,5] Helena is bitterly sarcastic.

If you have any pity, grace, or manners,
You would not make me such an argument. − = a subject or target (of merriment).[2,5]
But fare ye well: 'tis partly my own fault:
Which death, or absence soon shall remedy.

Lysan. Stay, gentle Helena: hear my excuse,
My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!

Helena. O excellent!

Herm. Sweet, do not scorn her so.

317: spoken to Lysander.

Demet. If she cannot entreat, I can compel.

319: ie. if Hermia cannot successfully persuade Lysander too leave Helena alone, then Demetrius can force him to do so.

Lysan. Thou canst compel no more than she entreat:
Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers.

= feeble entreaties
prayers = both the Quarto and Folio print *praise*, which is generally emended to ***prayers***, as here.

− Helen, I love thee, by my life, I do:
I swear by that which I will lose for thee,

= an oath.
324: Lysander swears again by his *life*, which he would willingly sacrifice for Helena.

To prove him false that says I love thee not.

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

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

= go away, retire;[1] but with ***and prove it too***, and the lines that follow, the sense may be more like "come along", suggesting Lysander is challenging Demetrius.[6]

Demet. Quick, come!

331: Demetrius is as eager as Lysander to settle this.

Herm. Lysander, whereto tends all this?

= "what is the object of all this?" (Stevenson, p.95).[5]

Lysan. Away, you Ethiop!

335: ***Away*** = "get away from me"; Hermia is clinging to Lysander (see lines 341-2 below).
Ethiop = allusion to Hermia's dark complexion; ***Ethiop*** was a favourite word of Shakespeare's. As suggested previously, darker skin was considered unattractive, so Lysander's use of this word is meant to be hurtful.

Demet. No, no: he'll

337-8: ***he'll…loose*** = Lysander will only pretend (***Seem***) to try to break free from Hermia to fight Demetrius.

Seem to break loose: − take on as you would follow,

338-9: ***take on…come not*** = "act as if you will willingly follow me, but then don't actually come along;"
take on = behave or act (in a specified manner) (OED).

But yet come not. You are a tame man, go!

= meek, submissive;[1] an insult. = ie. "get out of here!"

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

341-2: Lysander continues to try to shake off Hermia, who desperately keeps hold of him.
Hang off = ie. "let go"; Shakespeare may have invented, or at least seems to have recorded, a long-lost opposite to the still common expression, "hang on", meaning "to cling or hold onto".
cat = commonly used by Shakespeare as an insult for a woman.
burr = obvious metaphor, since Hermia refuses to release her hold on Lysander.
like a serpent = ie. "as if you were a serpent wrapped around me!"

Herm. Why are you grown so rude? what change is this, Sweet love?

Lysan. Thy love! out, tawny Tartar, out!

347: ***out*** = common exclamation of abhorrence or impatience.[1,2]

tawny Tartar = another allusion to Hermia's supposed brownish (***tawny***)[1] complexion, a trait Shakespeare connects here to the ***Tartars***. Note that this is the second mention of the ***Tartars*** in this scene (see line 132 above).

Out, loathèd medicine! O hated potion, hence!

348: Lysander compares Hermia to something distasteful, such as a medicine or potion he might ingest.

The OED tells us that the word ***medicine*** could inherently carry a sense of a remedy "which is necessary but disagreeable or unwelcome", and that the word ***potion*** also frequently was employed "with disparaging connotations."

hence = "get away from here!"

Herm. Do you not jest?

350: incredulous, Hermia asks Lysander if he is joking.

Helena. Yes, sooth: and so do you.

= truly.

Lysan. Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.

354: Lysander reminds Demetrius that they have a date for a fight.

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

356-7: Demetrius expresses skepticism that Lysander will actually keep his word.

I would I had your bond = "I wish (***would***) you would give me a written pledge (***bond***)," ie. to do as he promised.[1,6]

A weak bond holds you = Demetrius sees that Hermia is not really clinging that tightly to Lysander, nor is is he really trying hard to release himself from her clutches;[9] a secondary meaning may be that Lysander does not keep his promises.

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

= an exclamation expressing astonishment and indignation.[1]

Herm. What? can you do me greater harm than hate?
Hate me, wherefore? O me! what news, my love?

= Hermia mocks Lysander's use of "*What?*" in line 359.
= why. = "what novelty is this?"[1,5]

Am not I Hermia? are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.

= beautiful. = before, previously.[1,5]

Since night, you loved me; yet since night, you left me:

= nightfall.[5]

Why then, you left me (O, the gods forbid)
In earnest, shall I say?

367-8: the sense is, "am I supposed to conclude that you genuinely (***In earnest***)[1] left me?"

Lysan. Ay, by my life:
And never did desire to see thee more.

= an oath.

Therefore be out of hope, of questiön, of doubt;

372: Lysander employs some wonderful parallel structure to force Hermia to understand, once and for all, that he is done with her.

out of hope = without hope; a now rarely-used opposite expression to the still common "full of hope".

out of question = beyond question, without any doubt.[1]

out of doubt = beyond doubt;[1] another lost phrase, used as the opposite to the still common "filled with doubt".

Be certain: nothing truer: 'tis no jest,
That I do hate thee, and love Helena.

376*ff* (below): Hermia's understanding of the situation

shifts: finally accepting that she no longer possesses Lysander's love, Hermia now turns her wrath on Helena, whom she blames for stealing Lysander away from her.

Herm. O me, you juggler, you canker-blossom,

376: ***juggler*** = trickster, deceiver;[1,2] may be a trisyllable here: *JU-guhl-er*.
canker-blossom = ***canker*** here likely is a verb, meaning "to cause a plant to become diseased";[1] with this invented compound word, Hermia describes Helena as one who destroys a blossom.[1] As a noun, we may add, ***canker*** may refer to a caterpillar or grub that attacks plants.[1]

You thief of love! what, have you come by night,
And stol'n my love's heart from him?

= ie. Lysander's.

Helena. Fine, i' faith!

380: "that is excellent, truly!"
As we have seen previously, Helena is prone to sarcasm.

Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?

382: ***No touch*** = not a bit.[5]
382-3: ***will you…tongue*** = Helena resents Hermia's attempts to force an answer from her.

Fie, fie, you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

384: ***fie*** = for shame.
counterfeit = faker, feigner.
puppet = literally a doll;[5] but ***puppet*** could also mean
(1) "bad actor or performer",[1] suggesting that Helena is not impressed with Hermia's acting or emotional display; and
(2) "marionette",[1] implying that Hermia is allowing herself to be manipulated by the men in carrying out this practical joke.
(3) at line 387*f*, however, Hermia will make her own inference from this insult.

Herm. Puppet? why so? ay, that way goes the game.

= Hermia suddenly grasps what Helena really is hinting at; the modern equivalent is "that's the way the wind is blowing".

Now I perceive that she hath made compare

387-392: Hermia accuses Helena of capturing Lysander's heart by emphasizing that she (Helena) is attractively tall, and Hermia unappealingly short!
compare = ie. a comparison.

Between our statures: she hath urged her height,

= ie. Helena has asserted or pressed forward (***urged***)[2,6] the fact that she is tall.

And with her personage, her tall personage,

= figure, appearance.[4,5]

Her height (forsooth) she hath prevailed with him.

= verily, truly. = ie. Lysander.

And are you grown so high in his esteem,
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?

= ie. short.

How low am I, thou painted maypole? speak:

= Hermia mocks Helena's height and thinness; ***painted*** may also scornfully suggest that Helena wears cosmetics.[1]
The ***maypole*** was the familiar pole around which people danced during May Day celebrations; it was typically ***painted*** with spirals of various colours.[1,5]

How low am I? I am not yet so low,
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

397-403 (below): Helena suddenly − and disingenuously! − adopts the persona of the meek and innocent girl; but

she has already shown herself to be perfectly capable of attacking her companions with remarkable fury and viciousness.

Helena. I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
= "I beg you".

398 Let her not hurt me. I was never curst:
= savage, sharp-tongued.[1,4,5]

I have no gift at all in shrewishness:
399: ie. "I was not born with the quality of being scolding and quarrelsome (***shrewishness***)."

400 I am a right maid for my cowardice:
400: the sense is, "I am naturally as timid as a real girl (***right maid***)[3,9] should be."
for = in.[3]

Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,

402 Because she is something lower than myself,
= pronounced as "*she's*". = somewhat.[4] = shorter.

That I can match her.
= meet Hermia equally in a fight.

404

Herm. Lower? hark again!
405: the sense is, "listen (***hark***) − again she mentions that I am short!"

406

Helena. Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me;

408 I evermore did love you, Hermia,
= always.

Did ever keep your counsels, never wronged you,
= always. = secrets.

410 Save that, in love unto Demetrius,
410-1: there was only one time that Helena wronged Hermia − when she informed Demetrius that Hermia and Lysander were going to meet in the woods the previous night.
Save that = except that.
in love unto Demetrius = "out of my love for Demetrius".

I told him of your stealth unto this wood.
your stealth = ie. "your having stolen away".[5]

412 He followed you: for love, I followed him.
= ie. "out of my love for him".

But he hath chid me hence, and threatened me
= "driven me away through his scolding"; ***chid*** is the past tense form of *chide*.

414 To strike me, spurn me; nay, to kill me too.
414: ***spurn*** = kick.
to kill me too = not exactly true; the closest Demetrius came to threatening Helena's death was when he said he would leave her alone in the woods at "*the mercy of wild beasts*." (see Act II.i.271-2 above).

And now, so you will let me quiet go,
= if.[5]

416 To Athens will I bear my folly back,
= ie. "take my foolishness back with me".

And follow you no further. Let me go.

418 You see how simple, and how fond I am.
= stupid, silly.[2] = foolish.

420 ***Herm.*** Why? get you gone. Who is 't that hinders you?
= the sense is, "who's stopping you?"

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

424 ***Herm.*** What, with Lysander?

426 ***Helena.*** With Demetrius.

428 ***Lysan.*** Be not afraid: she shall not harm thee, Helena.

430 ***Demet.*** No sir: she shall not, though you take her part.
430: Demetrius affirms that Hermia shall not hurt Helena, even though Lysander (***you***) is siding with Helena (something Demetrius resents because he sees Lysander as his rival in love for Helena).

Helena. O, when she is angry, she is keen and shrewd!

she is = pronounced as "*she's*".
keen = sharp, cutting.[2]
shrewd = shrewish, bad-tempered, malicious.[1]

She was a vixen when she went to school:

= figuratively, a quarrelsome and shrewish girl; a ***vixen*** is a she-fox.[1]

And though she be but little, she is fierce.

Herm. Little again? nothing but low and little?
Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?

= allow. = abuse, insult.[2]

Let me come to her.

= at.

Lysan. Get you gone, you dwarf;
You minimus, of hindering knot-grass made;

minimus = small creature.[1]
hindering knot-grass = the common weed known as knot-grass was called so because of the prominent joints, or nodes, located up and down the stem. It was thought that an infusion of this plant would stunt (***hinder***) the growth of any child or animal.[5,19]

You bead, you acorn.

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

officious[1] in speaking for Helena, even though she rejects his attention.

Let her alone: speak not of Helena,
Take not her part; for if thou dost intend

= some editors suggest ***intend*** means "pretend".[4,5]

Never so little shew of love to her,

shew = show, a common alternate form.

Thou shalt aby it.

= pay or atone for.

Lysan. Now she holds me not:

she), he is free to confront Demetrius over Helena.

Now follow, if thou dar'st, to try whose right,
Of thine or mine, is most in Helena.

to try…Helena = to find out (***try***) which of the two of them has the best claim to Helena.[2,5]

Demet. Follow? nay: I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl.

cheek by jowl) with him.

[*Exeunt Lysander and Demetrius*.]

Herm. You, mistress, all this coil is 'long of you. −

mistress = the vocative bears a sense of contempt here.[6]
all this…you = "all this to-do or commotion (***coil***)[1,5] is because of you."
'long of = along of, meaning "on account of";[1] ***'long*** is an aphetic form of *along* (meaning that the initial short unstressed vowel of *along* has been dropped).

Nay, go not back.

= ie. "don't go anywhere;" suddenly alone with her nemesis, Helena may be slowly retreating from Hermia.

Helena. I will not trust you, I,
Nor longer stay in your curst company.

curst = shrewish, savage, ill-tempered.

Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray.
My legs are longer though, to run away.

[*Exit Helena*.]

467, 471: the Quarto has both women exit as line 471; the Folio fails to direct either to leave the stage. The stage directions here represent a common adaptation.

Herm. I am amazed, and know not what to say.

= dumbfounded.[2,3]

[*Exit Hermia*.]

471: Oberon and Puck remain on-stage; they have been viewing the endless confusion − the results of Puck's handiwork − between the mortals since the latter began to arrive at line 49*ff* above

473-4 (below): Oberon is aggravated by the error Puck made in applying the love-juice to Lysander instead of Demetrius, and notes that Puck makes an awful lot of such gaffes.

Ober. This is thy negligence: still thou mistak'st,

= ie. "you are always (***still***) making mistakes."

Or else committ'st thy knaveries wilfully.

= mischievous tricks.[1]

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

= spirits.[5] = erred.

Did not you tell me, I should know the man
By the Athenian garments he had on?
And, so far blameless proves my enterprise,
That I have 'nointed an Athenian's eyes:

479-480: Puck is not to be blamed if Oberon's plan miscarried, as Puck in fact followed the Fairy King's instructions to the letter.

And so far am I glad it so did sort,

= turned out (***did sort***)[4] the way it did.

As this their jangling I esteem a sport.

482: ie. "because all their bickering (***jangling***) I consider or judge (***esteem***) to be great entertainment (***sport***).[2,6]

484*ff* (below): after the lengthy scenes of squabbling between first the mortals and then the spirits, Shakespeare now returns to doing what he does best − creating sublime poetry.

484-499 (below): Oberon has a three-point plan to prevent Lysander and Demetrius from fighting; Puck should:
(1) (a) cause the sky to become overcast with clouds; and (b) raise a dense fog, so that the resulting darkness will cause the two men to have difficulty seeing (lines 485-7);
(2) by impersonating one and then the other, cause the two men to run around in circles and lose sight of each other, until, exhausted, they fall asleep (488-495);
(3) squeeze into Lysander's eyes some juice from a new herb which will reverse the spell that caused him to fall in love with Helena; then Lysander and Hermia can go ahead with their original plan to marry (496-9).

Ober. Thou see'st, these lovers seek a place to fight:

= Lysander and Demetrius.

Hie therefore, Robin, overcast the night,

= hurry.[2] = cover the dark sky with clouds.[5]

The starry welkin cover thou anon

486: an imperative: "cover the starry sky (***welkin***)".
anon = immediately after.[6]

With drooping fog, as black as Acheron,

487: ***drooping*** = descending, sinking.[1,6] There are instances in earlier 16th century literature of fog described as falling or descending upon the landscape.
Acheron = one of the rivers of Hades; it was across Acheron that the ferry-man Charon carried the souls of the

		departed into Hades proper.
488	And lead these testy rivals so astray, As one come not within another's way.	= short-tempered.[2]
490	Like to Lysander, sometime frame thy tongue: Then stir Demetrius up, with bitter wrong:	490-1: ie. "by impersonating Lysander's voice, rile up Demetrius with stinging insults (***bitter wrong***)."[2,5] ***frame*** = fashion, shape.[2]
492	And sometime rail thou like Demetrius: And from each other, look thou lead them thus;	= rant abusively.[2]
494	Till o'er their brows, death-counterfeiting sleep With leaden legs and batty wings doth creep:	494-5: poetically, till sleep overtakes them. ***death-counterfeiting*** = in imitation of death; sleep and death were frequently compared. In *MacBeth*, Shakespeare wrote, "*Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit*…" ***leaden*** = heavy, like lead. ***batty wings*** = like the wings of bats, perhaps alluding to the silent and nocturnal nature of bats. ***creep*** = steal into.[2]
496	Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye; Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,	= ie. juice. = powerful, efficacious.[1]
498	To take from thence all error with his might,	498: ***from thence*** = from there (Lysander's eyes). ***his might*** = its (the juice's) power or efficacy.[3,5]
	And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.	499: and restore to Lysander's eyes their accustomed (***wonted***) way of seeing, ie. so that he once again perceives things the way they truly are.
500	When they next wake, all this derisiön Shall seem a dream, and fruitless visiön.	= scorn, ridicule.[1,6] = an unprofitable or idle illusion or sight.[2,6]
502	And back to Athens shall the lovers wend,	502: ***the lovers*** = all four of the noble mortals who have spent the night in the woods; Lysander and Hermia will be back together again, and Helena will be with Demetrius (whose love for Helena, we should note, Oberon has chosen not to reverse). ***wend*** = make their way.
	With league whose date till death shall never end.	503: with a bond (***league***)[2] whose duration (***date***)[2,5] will last unbroken until death; Schmidt suggests ***league*** bears a sense of "mutual love".[6]
504	Whiles I in this affair do thee employ, I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy:	= task.[1] = ie. go to. = ie. beg for.
506	And then I will her charmèd eye release From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.	506-7: only after Titania agrees to turn over the Indian boy will Oberon reverse the spell that has caused her to fall in love with Bottom (the ***monster***, thanks to his ass's head).
508		
	Puck. My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,	
510	For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast, And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger:	510-1: poetically, because night is ending and day is approaching fast. **Line 510:** the line seems to be saying that the dragons, representing night, are flying swiftly through the clouds (***cut the clouds full fast***).[1] However, some editors suggest Puck is alluding to the chariot of personified Night, which in mythology was typically drawn by horses, but here are reimagined by Shakespeare to be pulled by dragons. ***night's swift*** = the Folio prints ***night-swift*** here; the OED

		has a separate entry for this compound word, recognizing it perhaps as the "official" option. ***Aurora's harbinger*** = ie. the brightly-shining planet Venus, the morning star, and forerunner (***harbinger***) of the dawn; ***Aurora*** was the goddess of the dawn.
512	At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,	512-3: ***At whose…churchyards*** = as dawn approaches, the ghosts who haunt the night return to their graves. ***Troop*** (line 513) = go, walk.[1]
514	Troop home to churchyards: damnèd spirits all, That in crossways and floods have burial,	513-4: ***damned…burial*** = Puck refers to the bodies of: (1) suicides, who were buried at crossroads (***crossways***),[1] denied proper internment in consecrated ground because of the sinful nature of their self-murders; thus they were considered ***damned***, unable to enter Heaven;[19] and (2) those who drowned at sea (***floods***), their bodies lost; because these unfortunates never received proper burial rights, their spirits were doomed to wander the earth, it was thought, for one hundred years.[19] ***damned spirits all*** = despite the wording, the ***damned spirits*** are distinct from the *ghosts* of line 512 who get to return to the churchyards.
	Already to their wormy beds are gone:	= ie. graves.
516	For fear lest day should look their shames upon, They wilfully themselves exíle from light,	516-8: the damned spirits deliberately avoid daylight to hide their sinful crimes (***shames***) in darkness. ***exile*** = sometimes stressed on the second syllable, as here, in Shakespeare's work.
518	And must for aye consort with black-browed night.	518: and must forever (***for aye***) keep company (***consort***)[1] with dark night. ***black-browed*** = dark-faced.[1]
520	***Ober.*** But we are spirits of another sort:	= a different kind.
	I, with the morning's love, have oft made sport;	521: contrasting himself with the constrained spirits described by Puck in the previous speech − those who cannot tolerate the light − Oberon explains how he plays and amuses himself when the sun (***the morning's love***) comes up. There have been other interpretations of this line: for example, some commentators believe that ***morning's love*** is a figurative description of Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, whom Oberon is describing as having courted.[4] ***oft made sport*** = often found diversion;[1] a common expression.
522	And, like a forester, the groves may tread	522: ***forester*** = an officer having charge for a forest.[1] ***the groves may tread*** = ie. "I can walk through the woods".
524	Even till the eastern gate all fiery-red, Opening on Neptune, with fair blessèd beams, Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams. −	523-5: poetically, even until the red dawn breaks over the sea and the sun's rays turn the sea's green waters to golden yellow. ***Even*** = pronounced *E'en*, a monosyllable. ***eastern gate*** = Shakespeare imagines the eastern horizon as a gate through which the sun rises at dawn. ***Opening on Neptune*** = the *gate*, or eastern horizon, of line 523 opens onto the sea; ***Neptune*** was the god of the sea.

with fair blessed beams = describes the *morning's love*, or sun, of line 521.
his (line 525) = ie. Neptune's.
streams (line 525) = waters.

But notwithstanding, haste, make no delay:
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. −
Here comes one.

Re-enter Lysander.

Lysan. Where art thou, proud Demetrius? speak thou now.

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

Lysan. I will be with thee straight.

Puck. Follow me then
To plainer ground.

[*Exit Lysander, as following the voice*.]

Re-enter Demetrius.

Demet. Lysander, speak again:
Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled?
Speak in 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,
And wilt not come? Come, recreant; come, thou child,
I'll whip thee with a rod. He is defiled
That draws a sword on thee.

Demet. Yea, art thou there?

Puck. Follow my voice: we'll try no manhood here.

[*Exeunt Puck and Demetrius*.]

Re-enter Lysander.

Lysan. He goes before me and still dares me on:
When I come where he calls, then he is gone.

526: = hurry.
527: "we can still accomplish this task before (***ere***) day breaks."

532: = ie. Lysander and Demetrius.

534: = Puck addresses himself in this line.

541, 545-6: Puck impersonates Demetrius.
drawn = ie. with sword drawn.[4]

= right away, at once.

546: = flatter or smoother.[1,5]

554: = perhaps should be repunctuated as so:

"Speak! [*pause*] In some bush?"[9]

556-560: Puck now impersonates Lysander.

558: = synonym for "coward".[1]

559: ***whip thee with a rod*** = "flog you with a stick;" Puck, as Lysander, threatens to punish Demetrius as if he were a ***child*** (line 558).
559-560: ***he is…on thee*** = any man who bothers to fight with Demetrius is automatically dishonoured (***defiled***);[1] it was a common trope that combatants should only take on worthy opponents.

564: = "we will not put our courage to the test, ie. will not fight, on this ground here."

The villain is much lighter-heeled than I;
I followed fast: but faster he did fly;
That fall'n am I in dark uneven way,

And here will rest me.

[*Lies down*.]

Come, thou gentle day!
For if but once thou shew me thy grey light,

I'll find Demetrius, and revenge this spite.

[*Sleeps*.]

Re-enter Puck and Demetrius.

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

Demet. Abide me, if thou dar'st; for well I wot,
Thou runn'st before me, shifting every place,
And dar'st not stand, nor look me in the face.
Where art thou now?

Puck. Come hither: I am here.

Demet. Nay then, thou mock'st me. Thou shat buy this dear,

If ever I thy face by daylight see.
Now, go thy way. Faintness constraineth me

To measure out my length on this cold bed:

By day's approach look to be visited.

[*Lies down and sleeps*.]

Re-enter Helena.

Helena. O weary night, O long and tedious night,
Abate thy hours; shine comforts from the east,
That I may back to Athens by daylight,
From these that my poor company detest:
And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye,

Steal me awhile from mine own company.

[*Lies down and sleeps*.]

Puck. Yet but three? Come one more;
Two of both kinds makes up four. −

= ie. swifter.
= flee, run away.
574: Lysander, exhausted, finds himself on a dark and irregular (***uneven***) path.[1]

577: this stage direction is only in the Folio.

579-581: Lysander apostrophizes the day.
= ie. show. = ie. first light of dawn.

= vexation;[2] Lysander is now peeved that Demetrius is avoiding him, thus frustrating Lysander's attempt to confront him.

= could mean "face" or "await".[1,2] = know.

= properly, "to here".

596: ***shat*** = shalt, a common alternate form. This is the Quarto's reading. The Folio prints "*shalt*", but there is no reason to emend *shat* to *shalt*, if one is following the Quarto's language.
buy this dear = pay dearly for this.

598-9: ***Faintness…visited*** = Demetrius' weakness and light-headedness compel (***constraineth***) him to lie down.

599: to lie down on the cold ground.
measure out my length = the expression "to measure (or measure out) one's length" meant "to lie down".[1]

600: Demetrius apostrophizes Lysander, warning him that Demetrius will confront him at day's arrival.

= shorten.[4] = "shine your encouraging and cheering rays".[5]
= ie. go back, return.

610: a common conceit: sleep allows one to temporarily escape one's miseries.
611: a lovely metaphor for the unconsciousness of sleep, and the relief it brings.

615: Hermia is still missing.
= ie. two men and two women.

Here she comes, curst and sad. = shrewish, ill-tempered.

Cupid is a knavish lad, = mischievous.
Thus to make poor females mad. = drive poor women crazy. Puck is commenting on how irrational love can be, and humorously blames Cupid, whose arrows are traditionally thought to strike people seemingly at random.

Re-enter Hermia.

Herm. Never so weary, never so in woe. = grieved, sorrowful.
Bedabbled with the dew, and torn with briers: = made wet.[1]
I can no further crawl, no further go:
My legs can keep no pace with my desires. 626: "my legs cannot go as fast as I want them to go."
Here will I rest me, till the break of day: = myself.
Heavens shield Lysander, if they mean a fray! = protect. = Lysander and Demetrius intend to fight.

[*Lies down and sleeps*.]

Puck. On the ground
Sleep sound:
I'll apply
Your eye, = ie. to your; most editions emend this line to "*To your eye*".
Gentle lover, remedy.

[*Squeezing the juice on Lysander's eyes*.]

When thou wak'st,
Thou tak'st
True delight
In the sight
Of thy former lady's eye: = ie. Hermia's.
And the country proverb known,
That every man should take his own, 646: this proverbial expression was used in the 16th century as a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 3:8-15, which explained how each man shall be rewarded − or not − according to the work and effort he puts into any project. Puck perverts the proverb, giving it the sense, "every man should end up with his own woman."

In your waking shall be shown: 647: "when you wake up, everything will become clear."

Jack shall have Jill: 648: the names ***Jack*** and ***Jill*** were used in the 16th century as a generic boy-girl pairing. "*Jack shall have Jill*" was one of John Heywood's old epigrams, appearing in both his 1546 and 1555 books of proverbs.
In *Love's Labour's Lost*, a character laments, "*Our wooing doth not end like an old play; / Jack hath not Jill.*"

Nought shall go ill: 649: nothing shall go wrong.

The man shall have his mare again, 650: a restatement of the point made in lines 646 and 648 − that each man should end up possessing his own woman − but Puck humorously uses ***mare*** (a female horse) to stand in for "woman".

And all shall be well.

[*Exit Puck*.]

END OF ACT III

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The same part of the woods.

Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, and Hermia, lying asleep.

Enter Titania and Bottom; Pease-blossom, Cobweb, Mustardseed, and other Fairies attending; Oberon behind unseen.

The Scene: the four sleeping mortal young lovers remain on-stage from the previous scene.

Entering Characters: the Fairy Queen is still in love with ***Bottom***, whose ass's head is still in place.

The fairy named Moth is neither named nor assigned any lines in this scene.

Titania continues to speak in iambic pentameter to Bottom, regardless of the absurdity of her situation and the idiocy of Bottom's running commentary.

Titan. Come sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,

1-4: Titania pampers Bottom with loving tenderness.
= lovely, loveable.[1,4] = caress, stroke.[1,4]

And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,

3: ***musk-roses*** = species of rose with large, white flowers possessing a musk scent.[2]
in = on.
sleek = smooth and glossy;[6] but the OED credits Shakespeare with introducing the sense, "covered with smooth hair or fur", applied specifically to animals.

And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

= beautiful.

Bottom. Where's Pease-blossom?

Pease. Ready.

Bottom. Scratch my head, Pease-blossom. − Where's Mounsieur Cobweb?

= French form for the prefix "Mister".

Cob. Ready.

Bottom. Mounsieur Cobweb, good mounsieur, get you your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle: and good

16-17: ***red-hipped humble-bee*** = bumble-bee with red markings;[6] see the note above at Act III.i.252. We observe that once again, a suggestion is being made to slaughter a bee.

mounsieur, bring me the honey-bag. Do not fret yourself too much in the action, mounsieur: and,

18: ***honey-bag*** = honey-stomach, the bee's nectar-carrying pouch; see the note above at Act III.i.252.
18-19: ***Do not…action*** = Bottom reassures Cobweb he need not strain himself in carrying out this mission.
fret = vex, trouble.[1]

good mounsieur, have a care the honey-bag break not; I would be loth to have you overflown with a honey-

= flowed over,[1,3] ie. covered with honey should the honey-bag burst or break.

bag, signior. Where's Mounsieur Mustardseed?

Must. Ready.

Bottom. Give me your neaf, Mounsieur Mustardseed.

= fist, clenched hand;[1,2] perhaps meaning only "hand", for Bottom to shake; ***neaf*** appears in only one other Shakespeare play − in *Henry IV, Part II*, in which Pistol says,

"*Sweet knight, I kiss thy neaf*."

Pray you, leave your curtsy, good mounsieur.

= "please, do not be overly formal;" as Mustardseed offers his hand to Bottom, he may bow or offer some other deferential gesture, which Bottom dismisses as unnecessary.

Must. What's your will?

Bottom. Nothing, good mounsieur, but to help Cavalery Cobweb to scratch. I must to the barber's,

32: ***Cavalery*** = a title of courtesy: cavalier, chevalier;[2,4,5] the OED identifies ***cavalery***, which appears in both the Quarto and the Folio, only as a variant of the word ***cavalry***.

Cobweb = this should say **Pease-blossom**; Cobweb has been sent to collect a honey-bag.

to = ie. go to.

mounsieur; for methinks I am marvellous hairy about the face; and I am such a tender ass, if my hair do

= sensitive or delicate dolt;[2,6] the humour here of course arises from the fact that Bottom never learns that his head has been transformed into that of a literal ass.

but tickle me, I must scratch.

Titan. What, wilt thou hear some music, my sweet love?

= ie. "would you like to".

Bottom. I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the tongs and the bones.

= crude, rustic musical instruments;[4] the humour here stems from Bottom's complete ignorance of the courtly instruments Titania has in mind.

The precise nature and use of ***tongs*** and ***bones*** is not clear. The ***bones*** were probably pieces of actual animal bone; ***tongs*** may be related to the tools of the same name, like oversized pincers, used to grab or grip objects, and may refer specifically to fireplace tongs. Musical or rhythmic sound may have been produced by striking the tongs, which may have been made of metal.[2]

The Folio prints the stage direction here, "*Musicke Tongs, Rurall Musicke*", suggesting that some such primitive music plays throughout the following dialogue.

Titan. Or, say sweet love, what thou desir'st to eat.

Bottom. Truly a peck of provender: I could mounch

44: ***peck*** = a unit of dry measure equivalent to a quarter of a bushel.[1]

provender = general term used for dry foods or fodder such as hay or oats.[1]

mounch = variant of "munch";[1] the Folio prints "*munch*".

your good dry oats. Methinks, I have a great desire to a bottle of hay: good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow.

46: ***bottle of hay*** = bundle of hay;[4] a common collocation.

good hay…fellow = the sense is, "nothing beats good, sweet hay;" ***fellow*** = equal.[2]

Titan. I have a venturous fairy that shall seek
The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee new nuts.

= adventurous, bold.[1]

= possibly a disyllable.

Bottom. I had rather have a handful or two of dried peas. But, I pray you: let none of your people stirt me:

= wake abruptly, rouse;[1,2]

stirt = ***stirt*** (or *stirte*, as it appears in the Quarto) was a variant of "start", and as such is perfectly acceptable. However, modern editions usually print "*stir*", which

		is the word that appears in the Folio ("*stirre*", actually).
	I have an exposition of sleep come upon me.	= malapropism for "disposition".[5]
54		
	Titan. Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms. −	= entwine, wrap.[1]
56	Fairies, be gone, and be always away.	= ie. "be off, in all directions." (Stevenson, p. 99);[5] the wording appears the same in both the Quarto and the Folio, but in modern editions is usually emended to "*be all ways away*." An audience would hear "always" as "all ways".
58	[*Exeunt Fairies*.]	
60	So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle	60-61: ***So doth…entwist*** = Titania seems to be suggesting that the ***woodbine*** wraps itself around the ***honeysuckle***; however, 16th century literature makes it clear that woodbine and honeysuckle were considered the same plant.
	Gently entwist: the female ivy so	61-62: ***the female…elm*** = the image of ivy climbing an elm tree appears occasionally in 16th and 17th century literature.
62	Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.	***female ivy*** = Stevenson suggests the ***ivy*** is ***female*** because it "clings to the elm" (p. 99).[5]
		Enrings = encircles.[1]
		barky fingers = the elm's branches are imagined to be bark-covered fingers.
	O, how I love thee! how I dote on thee!	
64		
	[*They sleep*.]	
66		
	Enter Puck.	
68		
	Ober. [*Advancing*.]	
70	Welcome, good Robin. See'st thou this sweet sight?	70: ***Robin*** = we remember that Puck was also called Robin Goodfellow.
		this sweet sight = ie. Titania sleeping beside Bottom.
	Her dotage now I do begin to pity:	= ie. Titania's foolish infatuation (for Bottom).
72	For meeting her of late, behind the wood,	= ie. Titania. = recently.[1]
	Seeking sweet favours for this hateful fool,	73: ***favours*** = love-tokens, likely flowers as gifts;[4,5] the Folio here prints "*savours*".
		this hateful fool = ie. Bottom; ***hateful*** = repulsive.[1]
74	I did upbraid her, and fall out with her;	= argue.
	For she his hairy temples then had rounded	= encircled.[1]
76	With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers.	76: note the line's alliteration.
		coronet = garland.[1]
	And that same dew, which sometime on the buds	77-80: Oberon describes the ***dew*** as appearing on flowers,
78	Was wont to swell, like round and orient pearls,	first like lustrous (***orient***) pearls, then like tears.
		sometime = formerly.
		buds = ie. of flowers.
		wont = accustomed.
		orient pearls = an extremely common 16th and 17th century collocation.
	Stood now within the pretty flouriets' eyes,	79: ***flouriets'*** = appears to be a variant of "flowerets", ie. small flowers (of the coronet); we note that the OED does

not recognize this form, which appears nowhere else in contemporary English literature outside of this play.

eyes = the ***eye*** of a flower was the colorful spot in its center.[1]

80 Like tears, that did their own disgrace bewail.

80: the flowers are imagined as crying for shame that they are being used to adorn the head of the monstrous Bottom.

When I had, at my pleasure, taunted her,

= ie. "as much as I desired".

82 And she, in mild terms, begged my patience,

= gentle. = pleaded with Oberon to show forbearance.

I then did ask of her her changeling child;

83-84: ***I then…gave me*** = Oberon took advantage of his superior position at this moment to get Titania to finally give up to him the Indian child.

straight (line 84) = at once, straightaway.

84 Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent

= ie. she sent her fairy.

To bear him to my bower in Fairy Land.

86 And now I have the boy, I will undo

= ie. now that.

This hateful imperfection of her eyes.

= ie. the loathsome spell; ***imperfection*** = fault.[6]

88 And, gentle Puck, take this transformèd scalp

88-89: ***take this…swain*** = ie. remove Bottom's ass's head. Oberon's reference to the ***scalp*** of ***the head*** doesn't really make sense, as Bottom's entire head must be returned to its original state.

From off the head of this Athenian swain;

this Athenian swain = ie. Bottom; ***swain*** could mean both (1) yokel or rustic; and (2) a country lover; either way, Oberon's contempt for Bottom is clear.

90 That he, awaking when the other do,

= ie. others.

May all to Athens back again repair,

= return.[4]

92 And think no more of this night's accidents,

92-93: the mortals will only remember the events of the night as having occurred in a dream.

But as the fierce vexation of a dream.

accidents = unfortunate events.[1]

fierce vexation = wild and extravagantly troublesome occurrences.[1,2,5]

94 But first I will release the Fairy Queen. −

95-98: Oberon, returning to the meter of magic, lifts the enchantment from Titania's eyes.

Be as thou wast wont to be;

wast wont = ie. was accustomed.

96 See as thou wast wont to see:

Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower

98 Hath such force and blessèd power. −

97-98: literally, Diane's flower can overpower Cupid's flower. The goddess ***Diane*** was famously a virgin; thus, metaphorically, the point here is that, by removing Titania's love for Bottom, chastity triumphs over desire.

An excellent argument has been made that ***Dian's bud*** is referring here to the specific tree, *agnus castus*, commonly called the "chaste tree." There is a Medieval poem, *The Flower and the Leaf* (once attributed to Chaucer) in which we find these lines:

In her hand the branch she beareth this,
That agnus castus men call properly;
And all the ladies in her company,
Which ye see of that herb chaplets wear,
Be such as have kept alway maidenhead.[8]

A 1552 work, *A Book of the Property of Herbs*, says this of *agnus castus*: "*The virtue of this herb is, it will keep men and women chaste*."

There may also be a more literal interpretation, if we understand ***Dian's bud*** to indirectly refer to the juice of the flower (see lines Act II.i.217 and III.ii.496 above) Oberon is using to reverse the effects of the juice of the love-in-idleness (***Cupid's flower***).

Now, my Titania, wake you, my sweet queen. = ie. "wake up".

Titan. My Oberon, what visions have I seen!
Methought I was enamoured of an ass. = enflamed with love for.[1]

Ober. There lies your love. 104: Oberon indicates Bottom, still wearing the ass's head.

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

Ober. Silence awhile. − Robin, take off this head: −
Titania, music call; and strike more dead
Than common sleep of all these five the sense. 110-1: ***and strike…sense*** = ie. "let the senses of these ***five*** people (the four young lovers plus Bottom) in their sleep become more deeply oblivious than they are in ordinary sleep."

five = the Quarto and Folio both print *fine* here, but this seems to clearly be an error for ***five***. This was in fact a common typographical occurrence: the letter *v* was usually represented with a *u*, and numerous examples can be found of the *u* having been flipped upside-down.

Titan. Music, ho, music: such as charmeth sleep!

[*Music, still.*] 115: music plays continuously; the music may be soft and sustained.[7]

Puck. Now, when thou wak'st, with thine own fool's eyes peep. 117: Puck addresses the sleeping Bottom.
peep = look, see.[6]

Ober. Sound, music! − Come, my queen, take hands with me, 119-126: note the play's second rhyming octet.
And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be. 120: like a mother rocking a cradle, the fairies ***rock the ground*** to keep the Athenians sleeping; compare the earlier scene in which the stamping fairies jolt the ground so as to knock over one of the tradesmen who has scattered at the appearance of the transformed Bottom: see above at Act III.ii.30.

Now, thou and I are new in amity, = ie. on friendly terms again.
And will tomorrow midnight, solemnly = ceremoniously.[2]
Dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly, = festively.[5]
And bless it to all fair prosperity. 124: will bless Theseus' house so that everything in it will prosper and enjoy good fortune.

There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be 125-6: all three marriages − Lysander to Hermia; Demetrius to Helena; and Theseus to Hippolyta − will take place in great merriment (***jollity***).[1,6]
Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity.

Puck. Fairy King, attend, and mark: = listen and make note of.[2]
I do hear the morning lark. 129: the lark was frequently mentioned for its early morning song.

Ober. Then my queen, in silence sad,

= solemn silence.[3]

Trip we after [the] night's shade:
We the globe can compass soon,

132-3: Oberon proposes that they circle (***compass***) the earth, always following the darkness (***night's shade***)[1] as night itself retreats around the earth.
Trip = move lightly, skip, or dance.[1,6]
the = appears only in the Folio.

Swifter than the wandering moon.

= the moon and planets were frequently described as ***wandering*** because, unlike the stars that follow a fixed nightly path, the moon and planets trace a changing course across the sky.

Titan. Come my lord, and in our flight,
Tell me how it came this night,
That I sleeping here was found,
With these mortals on the ground.

[*Exeunt*.]

[*Wind horn*.]

143: a horn is sounded or blown off-stage.
The Folio adds here the amusing extra stage direction, "*Sleepers lie still;*" Stevenson speculates that this instruction was included to remind the actors playing the sleeping Athenians not to arise here: it is a later sounding of the horns (see lines 193-5 below) that will wake them, not this one!

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and train.

Entering Characters: we have not seen ***Theseus***, Duke of Athens, since the play's opening scene. ***Hippolyta***, we remember, is the Amazon queen whom Theseus intends to marry; and ***Egeus*** is the aggrieved father of Hermia, whom he wants to marry Demetrius.

Thes. Go one of you, find out the forester:

= ie. find. = officer in charge of the forest.

For now our observation is performed.

148: the rites (***observation***)[2] are concluded; the reference is to May Day celebrations (see lines 183-4 below).

And since we have the vaward of the day,

= beginning, early part;[3,4] day is just breaking.

My love shall hear the music of my hounds. −

150: Theseus intends to go on a hunt with Hippolyta, and expects his betrothed to enjoy the baying of the hunting dogs.

Uncouple, in the western valley, let them go: −

= an instruction to one of the attendants to unleash one or more pairs of hounds.

Dispatch I say, and find the forester. −

= make haste, hurry.

[*Exit an Attendant*.]

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

= ie. go up.

And mark the musical confusiön
Of hounds and echo in conjunctiön.

157-8: a clever and satisfying auditory image of the baying of the hounds and the echoes of their cries intersecting to create a discordant sound.

160-6 (below): Hippolyta establishes her own hunting credentials by recounting a hunt she attended with a couple of legendary heroes (**Hercules** and **Cadmus**), focusing especially on describing in glowing terms the baying of the hunting dogs, whose voices fill the entire landscape. We

note that this episode was invented by Shakespeare: no classical myth pairs Hercules and Cadmus in any such hunt.

160 ***Hippol.*** I was with Hercules and Cadmus, once,

160: ***Hercules*** = greatest hero of myth, most famous for completing the Twelve Labors, a series of almost impossible tasks, such as slaying the Nemean lion and cleaning the Augean stables.

Cadmus = legendary founder and king of the city of Thebes; Cadmus is best-known for slaying the Ismenian dragon, whose teeth he sowed in the ground; the teeth grew into a band of fully-grown soldiers, five of whom survived to help Cadmus found Thebes.

When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear,

161: ***Crete*** = large island in the Aegean Sea.

bayed = pursued, drove, or brought to bay (ie. cornered).[1]

162 With hounds of Sparta: never did I hear

= see the note at line 168 below.

Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,

163: ***gallant chiding*** = splendid barking or brawling noise.[1,2]

164 The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seeme[d] all one mutual cry. I never heard

163-5: ***besides the…cry*** = the cries of the hounds, together with their echoes arising from every part of the landscape, seemed to merge into a single all-encompassing sound.

besides the groves = ie. in addition to (the sounds coming from) the woods.

fountains = springs.

Seemed = the Quarto and Folio both print "*Seeme*".

mutual = common.[2,6]

166 So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

166: these oxymorons emphasize the simultaneous cacophony and beauty of the cries of the baying hounds.

168 ***Thes.*** My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind:

168: the connection between Sparta and its hunting dogs seems to have first appeared in English literature in Golding's *Metamorphosis*: "*his hounds espied him where he was ... this latter was a hound of Crete, the other was of Spart*.

Then, Shakespeare might also have seen the quality of Spartan hounds praised in the 1581 translation of Seneca's ten plays; in *Hippolyta* (usually called *Phaedra* today), there is a reference to "*the Spartan dogs, eager of prey and of courageous kind*." Subsequent Elizabethan literature (post-publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that is) is littered with references to Spartan hunting dogs.

169-176 (below): Theseus goes on to delineate some of the desirable qualities possessed by his dogs.

So flewed, so sanded; and their heads are hung

169: ***So flewed*** = with great *flews*, large and overhanging chaps or jowls.[1]

170 With ears that sweep away the morning dew;

so = could mean "equally" (OED, sense III.15).[1]

sanded = sandy-coloured, referring to the dogs' coats.[1]

169-170: ***their heads…dew*** = Theseus emphasizes the dogs' large drooping ears which drag along the ground as they track a scent.

Crook-kneed, and dew-lapped, like Thessalian bulls:

171: ***Crook-kneed*** = with bent legs, bandy-legged.[6]

dew-lapped = "with folds of loose skin hanging about the neck." (Crystal, p. 124).[2]

Thessalian bulls = Thessaly, a province of northern

		Greece, was well-known for its bulls.[5]
172	Slow in pursuit; but matched in mouth like bells,	172-3: ***match…under each*** = "the voices of the hounds were like a chime of bells, forming a descending scale of notes" (Stevenson, p. 100).[5] We note that the expression ***each under each*** is unique to Shakespeare and this play, not appearing elsewhere in 16th or 17th century literature.
	Each under each. A cry more tuneable	= "pack of hounds".[1] = tuneful, melodious.[2,5]
174	Was never hollowed to, nor cheered with horn,	174: ***hollowed to*** = accompanied by crying or shouting; ***hollowed*** was a common alternate form of the hunting term *holla'd*: *to holla* means "to call after the hounds".[1] ***cheered with horn*** = urged forward or encouraged by use of the hunting horn.[1]
	In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.	
176	Judge when you hear. − But, soft! what nymphs are these?	176: ***soft*** = wait a moment. ***what nymphs are these*** = Theseus stumbles upon the sleeping Athenians; ***nymphs*** = specifically, the maidens, Helena and Hermia.[1]
178	***Egeus.*** My lord, this is my daughter here asleep,	= ie. Hermia.
	And this Lysander, this Demetrius is,	
180	This Helena, old Nedar's Helena.	= ***Nedar*** is the name of Helena's father; see Act I.i.133.
	I wonder of their being here together.	= marvel at.
182		
	Thes. No doubt, they rose up early, to observe	183-5: Theseus assumes the young Athenians were up early
184	The rite of May: and hearing our intent,	to observe May Day festivities, and came to the forest knowing that the duke would also be there to celebrate. ***they rose up early*** = festivities to honour May Day usually began right after midnight.[9] ***in grace of our solemnity*** = "to do us honour us in these rites".[5]
	Came here, in grace of our solemnity.	
186	But speak, Egeus, is not this the day	186-7: today is the deadline for Hermia to decide whether to marry Demetrius (as her father wishes), enter a convent, or face death.
	That Hermia should give answer of her choice?	
188		This day must thus mark the appearance of the new moon, which Theseus stated back at Act I.i.195 was to be Hermia's day of decision; however, the new moon also signals the wedding-day for Theseus and Hippolyta (Act I.i.1-3). Whether four days have actually been presented in the play has been a source of discussion and disagreement for centuries!
	Egeus. It is, my lord.	
190		
	Thes. Go, bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns.	= ask.
192		
	[*Horns and shout within.*	= off-stage.
194	*Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, and Hermia wake and start up.*]	= here likely meaning "suddenly sit up", as Theseus will shortly ask them to stand.[1]
196		
	Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine is past:	197: ***Good morrow*** = customary morning greeting.
198	Begin these wood-birds but to couple, now?	197-8: ***Saint Valentine…now*** = Theseus humorously addresses the young folks: he compares their pairing up to that of birds, which traditionally were said to select their

mates on February 14, Saint Valentine's Day (***Saint Valentine***). Chaucer had written, "*For this was on seynt valentyns day / Whan euery birde cometh te chese (*choose*) his make* (mate)."
these wood-birds = metaphorically, the young Athenians; ***wood-birds*** = birds of the woods.

Lysan. Pardon, my lord.

Thes. I pray you all, stand up. − = please.
I know you two are rival enemies. = ie. Demetrius and Lysander.

How comes this gentle concord in the world,
That hatred is so far from jealousy,
To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity? 204-6: ie. "how is it that there is such a state of peace here, that you two, who share a mutual hatred, are now so free from suspicion (***jealousy***) that you can sleep near each other, unafraid of the other's hostility (***enmity***)?"[5]

Lysan. My lord, I shall reply amazèdly, = with confusion, bewilderedly.[1]
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) = ie. "I want to speak the truth".
And now I do bethink me, so it is; 212: "and now I remember, − yes, that is how it was".
bethink me = recollect.[1,6]

I came with Hermia, hither: our intent = to here.
Was to be gone from Athens, where we might
Without the peril of the Athenian law, − 215: free from the danger posed by Athenian law.[1]
without = outside of, ie. beyond.[1]
the Athenian = pronounced as *th' Athenian*.

Egeus. Enough, enough, my lord; you have enough. 216-7: Egeus, addressing Theseus, interrupts Lysander, having heard enough: Theseus, he feels, has sufficient evidence to punish Lysander (as well as his daughter Hermia) for going against the duke's orders.
I beg the law, the law, upon his head: −

They would have stol'n away, they would, Demetrius,
Thereby to have defeated you and me; 220-2: ***defeated…wife*** = deprived (***defeated***)[2] Demetrius of a wife and Egeus of his right to approve Hermia's choice of husband.
You of your wife, and me, of my consent:
Of my consent, that she should be your wife.

Demet. My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth, = ie. Lysander and Hermia stealing away.[5]

Of this their purpose hither, to this wood,
And I in fury hither followed them, 226-7: Demetrius followed Hermia and Lysander into the woods, and Helena followed Demetrius; note the nice parallelism these lines: Demetrius followed ***in fury***, Helena followed ***in fancy*** (ie. led by her imagined love for Demetrius).[1]
Fair Helena in fancy following me.

But my good lord, I wot not by what power, = know.
(But by some power it is) my love to Hermia,
(Melted as the snow) seems to me now = metaphorically, "now gone".

As the remembrance of an idle gaud, 231-2: Demetrius compares his previous love for Hermia to the infatuation he might have had for a trifling ornament (***idle gaud***)[5] when he was a child − insignificant and trivial.
Which in my childhood I did dote upon: ***dote upon*** = love excessively.

And all the faith, the virtue of my heart, = fidelity.[2] = essence, very substance.[6]
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,

Is only Helena. To her, my lord,
Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia:

= before.

237-9 (below): Demetrius explains the seemingly irrational, repeated changes in his affections through a metaphor: like a person who, when sick, is disgusted by the foods he normally eats, but then regains his proper appetite when he recovers, Demetrius entered a "sick" state the moment he first set eyes on Hermia, and unnaturally fell in love with her; but he is now "healthy", and, properly, once again loves Helena.

But, like a sickness, did I loathe this food;
But, as in health, come to my natural taste,
Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,
And will for evermore be true to it.

= ie. like one who is sick.[9] = metaphorically, Helena.
= having returned.[5] = true preference or appetite.
= his normal food preferences, ie. Helena.

Thes. Fair lovers, you are fortunately met.

242: it is good fortune that the young Athenians have come together like this.

Of this discourse, we more will hear anon. −

243: a common device in Elizabethan drama: rather than force the audience to listen to a rehash of prior events, the authority figure postpones the narration for a later time.
discourse = story, narration.
anon = soon, shortly.

Egeus, I will overbear your will:

244: Theseus will override (***overbear***) Egeus' desire that Hermia marry Demetrius.[1]

For in the temple, by and by, with us,
These couples shall eternally be knit.
And, for the morning now is something worn,
Our purposed hunting shall be set aside. −
Away, with us, to Athens! three and three,
We'll hold a feast in great solemnity. −
Come, Hippolyta.

= presently. = ie. Theseus and Hippolyta.
= united;[1] Theseus plans a triple-marriage!
= because. = somewhat spent.[1,5]
= intended.[1]
= three men and three women, ie. three couples.
= ceremony.[5]

[*Exeunt Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus and train.*]

255*ff* (below): the lovers are disoriented, their perception distorted and vision blurred, as they try to make sense of the night's events.

Demet. These things seem small and undistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turnèd into clouds.

= ie. the details of what exactly has happened. = ie. unclear.
= ie. that seem like or appear to be.

Herm. Methinks I see these things with parted eye,
When every thing seems double.

= divided or separated, hence "unfocused", eyes.[2]

Helena. So methinks:
And I have found Demetrius, like a jewel,
Mine own, and not mine own.

263: Helena is still unsure of where she stands: like a ***jewel*** she has found, Demetrius now belongs to her, but yet another may still have a claim to him.[5]

Demet. Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me

265-6: ***Are you…awake*** = omitted from the Folio.

That yet we sleep, we dream. Do not you think
The Duke was here, and bid us follow him?

Herm. Yea, and my father.

Helena. And Hippolyta.

Lysan. And he did bid us follow to the temple.

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

[*Exeunt Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, and Helena*.]

Bottom. [*Awaking*.]

When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer:
my next is, "Most fair Pyramus." − Hey ho! Peter

Quince? Flute, the bellows-mender? Snout, the
tinker? Starveling? Gods 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 a play, before the
duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious,
I shall sing it at her death.

= Demetrius seeks affirmation of what just happened.

= ie. "asked us to".

= ie. along the way.

281: as he awakens, Bottom immediately resumes rehearsal of the play, as though the intervening supernatural events of the night had never occurred.

283: ***next*** = ie. next cue.
Hey ho! = more commonly written as "heigh-ho".[1] An exclamation usually uttered to express weariness or a sigh, but the sense here is akin to a cry of "yoo-hoo", ie. "where are you?"

285: ***Gods my life*** = ie. "God save my life", an exclamation.
stolen hence = literally, "they have been taken from here", ie. "they are gone!"

286: ***rare*** = striking, unusual.[2]
vision = sight, with perhaps a sense of the supernatural.[1,2]
287: ***past the wit… it was*** = beyond the ability of anyone to describe it.

288-9: ***man is…dream*** = only a fool would try to explain or interpret this dream.
go about to = make an attempt or effort to;[5] ***to*** is omitted in the Quarto, but present in the Folio.

291: ***a patched fool*** = a fool wearing the traditional multi-coloured (***patched***) coat or costume of a jester;[1,5] this is the Folio's reading: the Quarto prints "*patcht a fool*".
offer = make an attempt.[1]

292-5: ***The eye…dream was*** = Bottom humorously confuses the senses and the corresponding organs that experience them. The lines represent Bottom's adopting and thoroughly muddling 1 Corinthians 2:9: "*The thinges which eye hath not seene, neither eare hath heard, neither came into mans heart, are, which God hath prepared for them that loue him*." (Geneva Bible).

295-6: ***I will…dream*** = Quince was the author of the play the tradesmen will perform for the court.

= that is, the dream is so "deep" as to be incomprehensible.

298-300: Bottom's first idea is to sing the ballad of his dream near the conclusion of the play to be presented by the mechanicals for Theseus; but on further thought, he

decides it would be more charming or acceptable (***gracious***)[2,5] to perform it during Thisbe's death scene!

There are two difficulties in interpreting lines 298-300:

(1) Bottom says he will sing the ballad in ***a play***, not *the play*; does he have a different play in mind? Some early commentators have wondered if ***a play*** should read "*our play*".

(2) as Stevenson notes, ***at her death*** is awkward, since Thisbe has not been mentioned since Act III, leaving the pronoun without a clear antecedent. Some earlier editors have suggested emending "*at her death*" to "*after death*", meaning Bottom will rise from his own death and sing his ballad.[9]

Peradventure = perhaps.[1]

302 [*Exit Bottom.*]

ACT IV, SCENE II.

Athens, Quince's house.
The afternoon of the same day.

The Scene: the mechanicals are gathering in anticipation of their formal performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* before the duke − but Bottom, the leading man, is missing!

Enter Quince, Flute, Snout, and Starveling.

1 2 ***Quin.*** Have you sent to Bottom's house? is he come home yet?

= ie. gone to Bottom's house to fetch him.

4-19 (below): the Quarto assigns the speech at line 4 to Flute, and those at lines 7, 13, and 19 to Thisbe − who was played by Flute. We follow the assignments of the Folio, as is universally done.

4 ***Starv.*** He cannot be heard of. Out of doubt he is transported.

= without doubt; see the note at Act III.ii.372 above.
= transformed;[2] though Bourus suggests Starveling might instead mean, "carried away (by the fairies)" (p. 1123).[7]

6 ***Flute.*** If he come not, then the play is marred. It goes 8 not forward, doth it?

7: ***marred*** = spoiled, ruined.[6]
7-8: ***it goes not forward*** = the play cannot be performed.

10 ***Quin.*** It is not possible. You have not a man, in all Athens, able to discharge Pyramus, but he.

= play (the part of).[2,5]

12 ***Flute.*** No, he hath simply the best wit of any 14 handicraft man in Athens.

= sharpness, brain, intelligence.
= artisan, skilled manual labourer.[1]

16 ***Quin.*** Yea, and the best person too, and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice.

= appearance;[6] though ***person*** could also refer to a part in a play.[1]
= a malapropism; see the next lines, 19-20.

18 ***Flute.*** You must say "paragon": a paramour is 20 (God bless us) a thing of naught.

20: ***God bless us*** = uttered to protect the speaker from any harm or supernatural influence; here, stated to ward off any malevolent effects that might occur as a consequence of saying something wicked (***a thing of naught***).[1,5]

22 *Enter Snug.*

24 ***Snug.*** Masters, the duke is coming from the temple, and there is two or three lords and ladies more 26 married. If our sport had gone forward, we had all

26-27: ***If our sport…men*** = if the play (***sport***)[1] were

been made men.

actually to be performed (which now seems uncertain, with the leading man absent), the men's fortunes would be made. Snug, imagining great rewards from the duke, overestimates the value and importance of the play.[5]

made men = men with assured success in life.[1]

28

29-34 (below): Flute rues that Bottom will not only miss out on a day's wages to be paid by the duke for his performance of Pyramus, but that he might now be losing a lifelong daily pension, granted as a reward for his work!

Flute. O sweet bully Bottom! Thus hath he lost

= term of endearment.[1]

30 sixpence a day during his life; he could not have

= a day's wages for a labourer, imagined by Flute to be paid to Bottom as a pension from the duke; a 1599 text alludes to "*the poore labouring man, that worketh for a groate or sixe pence a day*".

scaped sixpence a day. And the duke had not given

31: ***scaped*** = ie. avoided getting paid, ie. Bottom would have inevitably collected this amount.[6]

and = if.

32 him sixpence a day for playing Pyramus, I'll be hanged. He would have deserved it: sixpence a day,

34 in Pyramus, or nothing.

= ie. for playing.

36 *Enter Bottom.*

38 ***Bottom.*** Where are these lads? where are these hearts?

= good fellows.[4]

40

Quin. Bottom! O most courageous day! O most

= a malapropism, but what word Quince intended here is unknowable.[9]

42 happy hour!

= fortunate.

44 ***Bottom.*** Masters, I am to discourse wonders: but ask me not what; for if I tell you, I am no true Athenian. I

= relate, recount.[2]

46 will tell you every thing right as it fell out.

= exactly as it happened.[5] Note how Bottom comically contradicts himself.

48 ***Quin.*** Let us hear, sweet Bottom.

50 ***Bottom.*** Not a word of me. All that I will tell you is, that the Duke hath dined. Get your apparel together,

= from.

= eaten. = ie. costumes.

52 good strings to your beards, new ribands to your

52: ***good strings…beards*** = ie. the strings were used to tie on prop beards.

ribands = ie. ribbons, a common variant.

pumps, meet presently at the palace, every man look

= heelless or low-heeled shoes.[1] = promptly, immediately.[1]

54 o'er his part. For the short and the long is, our play is

= in sum.[1]

preferred. In any case let Thisbe have clean linen;

55: ***preferred*** = "presented for acceptance".[1] As we will see in the early part of Act V, Theseus's Master of the Revels, Philostrate, has reviewed and approved a list of entertainments for the duke to choose from; hence, Ridley's paraphrase of ***preferred*** as "on the short list" captures the sense perfectly.[3]

let Thisbe…linen = Bottom is concerned for the actors' hygiene; ***linen*** = undergarments.[1]

56 and let not him that plays the lion pare his nails: for they shall hang out for the lion's claws. And, most

58 dear actors, eat no onions, nor garlic: for we are to

	utter sweet breath: and I do not doubt but to hear	= speak their lines with pleasant breath.
60	them say, it is a sweet comedy. No more words. Away, go, away!	
62		
	[*Exeunt*.]	
	END OF ACT IV.	

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Athens: the palace of Theseus.
The evening of the same day.

The Scene: the play's story-lines are complete: the Fairy King and Queen have made up, and all the Athenian couples, including Theseus and Hippolyta, are married. All that remains is the performance of the craftsmen's play. The result in one of the funniest scenes in all of Shakespeare.

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Philostrate, Lords, and Attendants.

Entering Characters: Philostrate is the official in charge of Theseus' entertainment.

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

= ie. "that which", referring to the story the young folks recounted of the night's events

3-23 (below): in this lengthy speech, Theseus expresses skepticism about the lovers' story, suggesting that love can distort how people see and understand what really happens. Note how Theseus more than once compares lovers to those who are insane.

Thes. More strange than true: I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.

= ie. can never.[5]

4: ***antique fables*** = fantastic fictional tales;[1,4] ***antique*** was an alternate form of *antic*. The Folio prints "*anticke*".
fairy toys = illusory and trifling stories.[1,4]

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

= tumultuous or excited minds, ie. overactive imaginations.[1,5]

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.

6: ***shaping fantasies*** = "imaginations that create new things" (Stevenson, p. 102).[5]
6-7: ***that apprehend…comprehends*** = whose minds can perceive or conceive (***apprehend***) things that rational thought cannot truly understand (***comprehend***).[1,4,5]

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:

9: ie. are composed (***compact***)[2,4] entirely of imagination.

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:

10-11: ***One sees…madman*** = the point is, a lunatic's perception is exaggerated and unreal.

That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,

= equally mentally ill.[1,5]

See Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.

12: sees the apex of beauty in the dark complexion of an Egyptian, ie. a gypsy.[3,4]
Helen's beauty = ***Helen*** is Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world.
brow of Egypt = a good example of a *synecdoche*, a figure of speech by which a part (here, ***brow***) is used to represent the whole (face or person).

13-18 (below): the poet works in a sort of inspired madness and fury to give shape and form, and a name and place, to imagined ideas, turning the unreal into the real.
There is humour here in the idea of Shakespeare mocking those who practice his own profession!

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

= state of delirium.[1] = ***rolling*** eyes were a sign of frenzy.

Doth glance from Heaven to earth, from earth to Heaven.

14: the poet's eyes dart restlessly everywhere.

And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen

15-17: ***And as…shapes***: and in his mind's eye, the poet first gives outline or figure to (***bodies forth***)[1] things that do not exist (that is, he visualizes them), then, by writing, converts them to concrete forms.

Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation, and a name.

17-18: ***and gives…a name*** = and gives the insubstantial and non-existent a place to exist (***local habitation***) and a name;[1] ***local*** = localized, relating to a location.[1,2]

As an example, Stevenson observes that Shakespeare − a poet − gave the imaginary character Bottom a name and a place to live, situating him in Athens (p. 103).[5]

Such tricks hath strong imaginatiön,

19: "the imagination has such clever contrivances (***tricks***)".[1]

That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;

20-21: that if one's mind merely imagines (***apprehends***) something pleasurable, then it inevitably conjures up or incorporates (***comprehends***) a mental image of a person or thing (the ***bringer***) that can provide that pleasure.[1,2,5]

This is the second time in the same speech that Theseus has contrasted *apprehension* with *comprehension*.

Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

22-23: ie. similarly, ***fear*** is as capable as joy of causing the mind to imagine things.[5]

supposed = ie. perceived or thought to be.

25-28 (below): Hippolyta points out that the young lovers' individual accounts of the events of the night were in such agreement, that, considered together, they lend credibility to the stories' truth.

Hippol. But, all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,

= ie. told and retold (by each of the participants).[1]

26: the sense is, all of their minds experienced the alterations of reality the same way; ***transfigured*** = changed, transformed.[1]

More witnesseth than fancy's images,

27: provides evidence of being more than creations of the imagination (***fancy's images***).[3,4]

And grows to something of great constancy:

28: ie. the stories, considered together, are very consistent.

grows to = ie. becomes.

constancy = coherency, consistency.[3,4]

But howsoever, strange and admirable.

29: ***howsoever*** = nevertheless.[3]

strange = remarkable, singular.[2]

admirable = wonderful, to be wondered at.[1,3,5]

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

Enter Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, and Helena.

Joy, gentle friends, joy and fresh days of love
Accompany your hearts!

Lysan. More than to us
Wait in your royal walks, your board, your bed!

38-39: Lysander wishes a joy to the royal couple even greater than that wished by Theseus upon the young lovers.

Wait in = attend.

board = meals, feasting.[2,5]

bed = where the conjugal rights of marriage are enjoyed.[1]

40

41-46 (below): impatient for the night to arrive − he is presumably eager to consummate his marriage − Theseus asks what entertainments will be presented to help pass the time.

Thes. Come now: what masques, what dances shall we have,

= entertainments typically comprised of allegorical characters and dancing.

42 To wear away this long age of three hours,

= while away the long period of time.[1]
wear away = precursor to ***while away***, which did not appear until the early 17th century.

Between our after-supper and bed-time?

= the time after supper.[1]

44 Where is our usual manager of mirth?

= alliteratively referring to Philostrate, the Master of the Revels.

What revels are in hand? Is there no play,

= entertainments. = here, present.[2]

46 To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?
Call Philostrate.

47: in the Folio, Theseus calls Egeus rather than Philostrate; then, all the ensuing speeches delivered in this scene by Philostrate were assigned to Egeus.

48

Philo. Here, mighty Theseus.

50

Thes. Say, what abridgement have you for this evening?

= pastime, entertainment.[1]

52 What masque, what music? How shall we beguile
The lazy time, if not with some delight?

52-53: ***beguile…time*** = "distract ourselves so that we no longer notice how slowly time is moving".
lazy time = time seems sluggish because it passes so slowly.
delight = source of pleasure.[1]

54

Philo. There is a brief, how many sports are ripe.

55: "here (***There***) is a list (***brief***) of the various entertainments (***sports***) that have been prepared, or are ready to be presented (***are ripe***)."[1,2,5]
Instead of ***ripe***, the Folio prints "*rife*", which can mean "ready", so it too is acceptable.

56 Make choice, of which your highness will see first.

58 [*Giving a paper*.]

58: ie. Philostrate hands the list to Theseus; stage direction not in Quarto or Folio.

60*ff* (below): Theseus rejects several of the offerings before settling on the presentation of the craftsmen.
In the Folio, it is Lysander who reads aloud the titles of the short entertainments, to which Theseus only responds, yay or nay.

60 ***Thes.*** [*Reads*.]
The battle with the Centaurs, to be sung,

61-64: ***The battle with the Centaurs*** = the song was probably about the well-known mythological episode in which the king of the Lapiths invited the ***Centaurs*** (the famous race of hybrid creatures featuring human upper and equine lower halves) to his own wedding; the Centaurs got drunk at the wedding feast, and their leader Eurytus attempted to abduct the bride. A great battle ensued between the Centaurs and the humans, during which Theseus killed Eurytus and saved the bride.
However, there was another unrelated story in which

62 *By an Athenian eunuch to the harp? −*
We'll none of that. That have I told my love,
64 In glory of my kinsman Hercules.

Hercules, on his way to find and kill the Erymanthian boar (his fourth labour), met some Centaurs. The Centaurs got drunk on some wine in their possession, and became so aggressive and violent that Hercules was forced to fight them off.

It is possible that Theseus knows the song would be about the first story, but is too modest to want to listen to a recounting of his own heroics; instead, he pretends to expect the song to be about the second story, which he then states needs no repeating, since he has already told this story to Hippolyta.

an Athenian eunuch = Elizabethan and Jacobian literature is well populated with eunuchs being trotted out to sing for the entertainment of others; their high-pitched voices were presumably highly-prized.

my kinsman Hercules = any familial relationship between the two heroes would have been very distant.

[*Reads*.]

The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals,
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage? −

66-67: Dionysus, also called Bacchus, was the god of wine. His female followers, variously called Maenads, Bacchantes, or (as here) ***Bacchanals***, honoured him by engaging in frenzied dances and rites while seemingly possessed by the god. According to one story, Orpheus (***the Thracian singer***), the famous musician who could move the trees and stones, encountered the Maenads during one of their celebrations, and they tore him apart in their drunken (***tipsy***) frenzy.

That is an old device: and it was played,
When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.

68-69: Theseus has previously seen this story presented in a play.

device = play or masque, theatrical show.[1]

Line 69: Theseus alludes to the aftermath of the famous assault on the city of Thebes by seven heroes, six of whom were killed in battle; when the Thebans rejected an appeal to bury the dead, Theseus led an Athenian army to Thebes to recover the bodies. In one tradition, Theseus defeated the Thebans in battle and forced them to give up the bodies of the fallen warriors; hence, Theseus refers to himself as ***conqueror***.

[*Reads.*]

The thrice three Muses, mourning for the death
Of Learning, late deceased in beggary? −

71-72: the third entertainment option is allegorical in nature: the nine (***thrice three***) ***Muses*** (sister deities who were said to be the protectresses of the arts) metaphorically mourn the end of personified ***Learning***, who died in poverty (***beggary***). The conceit highlights the neglect and undervaluing of study and knowledge.

It has been surmised that these lines refer either to

(1) Edmund Spenser's poem *The Teares of the Muses* (1591), in which the nine Muses lament the neglect of learning and the arts, or

(2) Shakespeare's fellow author and playwright Robert Greene, who had died in extreme poverty in 1592.

That is some satire, keen and critical,
Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony.

73-74: Theseus rejects this entertainment, because its biting (***keen***)[2] satire and censorious (***critical***)[5] tone are not appropriate or suitable for (***sorting with***)[1,4] a wedding celebration.

[*Reads*.]

76-80 (below): Theseus is struck by the contradictions and utter lack of sophistication in the description, presumably

written by Peter Quince, of the tradesmen's play.

76 *A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus*

= long,[1] with perhaps an additional sense of wearying and tiresome; but it is clear in this context that ***tedious*** is meant to be a direct contradiction to ***brief***, as shown by Theseus' follow-up questions in line 78; Shakespeare later used ***tedious*** in a similar sense in *All's Well That Ends Well* ("*that is the brief and the tedious of it*") and *Richard III* ("*it is better to be brief than tedious*)".

And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth? −
78 Merry, and tragical? Tedious, and brief?
That is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow.

= there is clearly a problem here; ***wondrous*** is always a two-syllable word in Shakespeare, so a syllable is missing from the line; and the supposed antithesis of ***strange snow*** is not convincing. Numerous emendations have been proposed by earlier editors, the most common being, "*wondrous strange **black** snow*."

80 How shall we find the concord of this discord?

80: ie. "how can we make these contradictory words agree?"[5]

82*ff* (below): unlike Theseus, who is bemused by the title and description of the tradesmen's play, Philostrate, who has seen the men rehearse (see line 89 below) (this would be part of his job − to review any of the court's entertainment beforehand, just as Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Revels reviewed and approved plays before they could be performed publicly), pulls no punches expressing his disdain for their version of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

82 ***Philo.*** A play there is, my lord, some ten words long;

= deliberate understatement by Philostrate, to exaggerate the brevity of the play.

Which is as brief as I have known a play:
84 But, by ten words, my lord, it is too long:
Which makes it tedious. For in all the play,

= Philostrate means both (1) long, and (2) wearisome.

86 There is not one word apt, one player fitted.

86: the sense is, none of the lines is skillfully written, and none of the tradesmen makes a suitable (***fitted***)[5] actor.

And tragical, my noble lord, it is;
88 For Pyramus, therein, doth kill himself.
Which when I saw rehearsed, I must confess,

87-90: ***And tragical…water*** = in a technical sense, the play is a tragedy, since the leading man dies, but Philostrate's ensuing tears were those of laughter, not sadness.

90 Made mine eyes water: but more merry tears
The passion of loud laughter never shed.

90-91: ***but more…shed*** = the tears of laughter he shed had never been exceeded before, ie. were unlike any he had previously experienced; Philostrate emphasizes how hilarious he found the play.
passion = emotion.[5]

92
Thes. What are they, that do play it?

= who.

94
Philo. Hard-handed men, that work in Athens here,

= having hard or rough hands, from engaging in manual labour.[1]

96 Which never laboured in their minds till now:

= who.

And now have toiled their unbreathed memories,

97: and are now exhausting or straining their unpracticed (***unbreathed***)[1,4] mental faculties, ie. these men are not used to using their brains, though ***memories*** could also have a secondary sense relating to memorizing lines.[5]

toiled = fatigued with work.[2]

98 With this same play, against your nuptial.

= in anticipation of.

100 ***Thes.*** And we will hear it.

= ie. "I"; Theseus uses the royal "we".

102 ***Philo.*** No, my noble lord,
It is not for you: I have heard it over,

= ie. not suitable.[5] = ie. heard the entire play.
heard it over = Shakespeare seems to have coined an expression analogous to still-common expressions such as "read it over" and "look it over".

104 And it is nothing, nothing in the world;

= worthless, of no value. = suggests, "at all".
is nothing in the world = an expression familiar from Bible translations of 1 Corinthians 8:4, such as the Geneva Bible: "*an idol is nothing in the world."*

Unless you can find sport in their intents
106 Extremely stretched, and conned with cruël pain,
To do you service.
108

105-7: ***sport*** = amusement.
intents = in lines 105-7, Shakespeare employs an interesting bit of parallel structure: ***intents*** has a double sense, because the craftsmen
(1) find their ***intents***, meaning "efforts" or "endeavours", stretched to the limit (***Extremely stretched***), especially as they work under great hardship (***cruel pain***) to memorize (***conned*** = memorized) their parts (line 106);[1,5] and
(2) *intend* to honour and serve Theseus (line 107).[3,4]

Thes. I will hear that play.
110 For never anything can be amiss,
When simpleness and duty tender it.

110-1: for nothing (***never anything***) can be inappropriate or out of order (***amiss***) when it is offered (***tender*** = offer) in all humility (***simpleness***) and out of loyalty (***duty***); Theseus is pleased to accept and approve the men's performance because of the sincerity and goodwill in their hearts, rather than choosing to take offense at their coarseness or lack of polish.

112 Go bring them in, and take your places, ladies.

114 [*Exit Philostrate*.]

116 ***Hippol.*** I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,
And duery, in his service, perishing.
118

116-7: Hippolyta dislikes seeing these lowly people (***wretchedness***)[2] so overburdened (***o'ercharged***),[1] nor does she wish to watch them fail (***perishing*** = coming to nothing)[6] in their painful efforts to serve Theseus by performing the play.
duery = ie. duty, an occasionally-used variant; ***duery***, which is the word appearing in the Quarto, is not listed in the OED as a variant of ***duty***; and, because the Folio prints ***duty*** here, it has always been assumed that the Quarto's ***duery*** was a typesetter's error.
However, there are numerous examples of ***duery*** being used for *duty* in the 16th and 17th centuries: (1) in the influential *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566), we find a reference to "*the bounden duery that i*" have "*to my Lorde the duke;*" and (2) from John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583), we find an admonition to "*the common people: whose duery is, to beare their good mindes &; true obedience, to the aforesayd ministers of god*."

Thes. Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.
120

Hippol. He says they can do nothing in this kind.

121: ie. Philostrate said the men could not competently perform this type of play.

Thes. The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.

123: with a bit of *noblesse oblige* that does him credit, Theseus suggests he and Hippolyta ought to be gracious and grateful to the men for trying, no matter how inept the performance may be.

Our sport shall be to take what they mistake:

124: "our entertainment (***sport***) shall exist in their blunders, which we will accept graciously;" Theseus wants Hippolyta to appreciate the goodwill and sincerity in which the men perform.[5]

And what poor duty cannot do, noble
Respect takes it in might, not merit.

125-6: "And though they are unable to provide the level of performance (***poor duty***) to which we are accustomed, our generous consideration (***noble Respect***) accepts it according to the performers' abilities (***might***), rather than by its actual worth (***merit***)."[2,5,6]

127-137 (below): in this lengthy digression, Theseus explains how he has seen even the most highly learned and eloquent speakers become tongue-tied when addressing him, yet he always generously accepts the speeches according to the spirit and goodwill in which they are given, no matter how ineptly delivered.

Where I have come, great clerks have purposèd

127: "in places I have visited, great scholars (***clerks***) have intended".[4,5]

To greet me with premeditated welcomes;

= carefully prepared speeches of welcome.[5]

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,

= in which.[5]

Make periods in the midst of sentences,

130: ie. pause right in the middle of sentences, as if they were punctuated with periods, or full-stops,

Throttle their practised accent in their fears,

= cut short or stammer (***Throttle***) their rehearsed speeches.[1]

And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,
Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,

132-3: ***And in…welcome*** = and in the end, they stopped talking entirely (hence, ***dumbly***), never having given Theseus the welcome they had intended.

Out of this silence, yet, I picked a welcome:

= discerned.[1]

And in the modesty of fearful duty,
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.

135-7: Theseus sees the same honour bestowed on him from a humble and timid (***fearful***) speech as from a presumptuous (***saucy***)[2] and bold and fearless (***audacious***)[2] one.
modesty = shyness, or absence of arrogance.[3,6]
rattling = lively, voluble.[1]

Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity,
In least speak most, to my capacity.

138-9: the combination of affection (***Love***) and silent sincerity (***tongue-tied simplicity***) expresses the most while saying the least (***In least***), to Theseus' understanding or in his opinion (***capacity***).[1,5,6]

Re-enter Philostrate.

Philo. So please your Grace, the Prologue is addressed.

= ready to begin.[4,5]

Thes. Let him approach.

[*Flourish of trumpets*.]

147: the play is about to begin! This stage direction appears only in the Folio.

Enter Quince for the Prologue.

149: Peter Quince takes the role of the Prologue; in Elizabethan plays, the part identified as the Prologue was typically performed by a single actor on-stage.

151-160 (below): the Prologue is disastrously delivered by Quince: he pauses and stops where he should not, and rushes through periods and commas when he should. The hilarious result is that he ends up either muddling his message or saying the complete opposite of what he intends.

In attempting to interpret or make sense of Quince's speech, we must keep in mind that he has no intention to deliver his lines as he does; the issue, then, is how might his audience understand his lines. We offer some paraphrases below.

You may enjoy trying to work out what the "correct" punctuation *should* be. One possible such version of the "correct" speech is presented in an appendix at the end of this play.

Note the Prologue's rhyming scheme: *abab* for the first eight lines, then concluding with a rhyming couplet; In this sense, it functions as sort of a mini-sonnet, since a classical Shakespearean sonnet is comprised of three quatrains following the *abab* pattern, before concluding with a rhyming couplet.

Prol. If we offend, it is with our <u>good will</u>.

151: "If we offend you, it is with enthusiasm or willingness (***good will***)[1,6] that we do so."

That you should think, we come not to offend,

152-3: ***That you…good will***: "you should believe that we came here but to offend you willingly."

But with good will. To <u>shew</u> our <u>simple skill</u>,
That is the true <u>beginning of our end</u>.

153-4: ***To shew…end*** = the sense may be taken to be, "to present our average or limited, or absence of, abilities (***simple skill***)[1,6] is our true purpose (***end***)."[1]

shew = common alternate form of *show*.

beginning of our end = might be interpreted to mean "the Prologue represents the start of the conclusion of the show"; ***end*** might also suggest "demise" or "downfall".

Consider then, we come but <u>in despite</u>.

= with scorn.

We do not come, as <u>minding</u> to <u>content</u> you,

156-7: ***We do…intent is*** = the audience might take this to mean something like, "we do not come here intending (***minding***)[2] to please (***content***) you, this is our true intent", but the sentence stalls, not really making much sense.

Our true intent is. All for your delight,
We are not here. That you should here <u>repent</u> you,

157-8: ***All for…here*** = "we are not here to delight you."
158-9: ***That you…at hand*** = "so that you shall regret (***repent***) being here, the actors are close by (ie. ready to perform)."

The actors are at hand: and, by their show,
You shall know all, that you are like to know.

159-160: ***and, by…know*** = and through their performance, you will learn all that you are likely to learn."

151-160 (above): Shakespeare may have gotten the idea for the mispunctuated speech from *Ralph Roister Doister*, Nicholas Udall's well-known comic play of a few decades earlier.

Here is the beginning of a certain love letter from Udall's

		play, as written: *Sweet mistress, whereas I love you; nothing at all* *Regarding your richesse and substance − chief of all* *For your personage, beauty, demeanour, and wit* *I commend me unto you; never a whit* *Sorry to hear report of your good welfare...* Here is how the letter was actually read aloud to its intended receiver: *Sweet mistress, where as I love you nothing at all −* *Regarding your substance and richesse chief of all;* *For your personage, beauty, demeanour and wit,* *I commend me unto you never a whit.* *Sorry to hear report of your good welfare.*
162	***Thes.*** This fellow doth not stand upon points.	162: Theseus has punned on the common expression ***stand upon points***, whose regular meaning is "act scrupulously" or "insist pedantically on following details"; at the same time, ***points*** also refers to punctuation marks − specifically full stops, such as periods, question marks and exclamation points − so that Theseus' secondary sense is "concern himself with following the punctuation correctly."[1]
164	***Lysan.*** He hath rid his prologue like a rough colt: he	164-5: ***He hath…stop***: the wordplay continues: ***rid*** means both (1) ridden, as on a horse; and (2) managed or controlled; the double-sense applies to the Prologue: like a rider who cannot control an untamed and spirited young horse, Quince has failed to manage, or deliver, his prologue correctly. The simile concludes with a pun on ***stop*** (line 165): like the rider who doesn't know how to get the horse to pull up, Quince doesn't understand how to use the period (***stop***) correctly. ***rough colt*** = unruly or improperly broken-in young horse.[1]
	knows not the stop. A good moral, my lord: it is not	= maxim or lesson (to be drawn here).[1]
166	enough to speak; but to speak true.	= correctly.[1]
168	***Hippol.*** Indeed he hath played on his prologue like a child on a recorder; a sound, but not in government.	169: ***recorder*** = a simple, flute-like instrument, but played vertically.[1] ***a sound…government*** = making noise, but without control (***government***), ie. the child is not playing a proper tune.[1,5]
170		
	Thes. His speech was like a tangled chain; nothing	171-2: ***His speech…disordered*** = like a chain that is not damaged (***impaired***) but is nonetheless in a badly snarled state (***disordered***), ie. ***tangled***, the speech has all the words, but the punctuation is not in order.[1]
172	impaired, but all disordered. Who is next?	
174	*Enter Pyramus and Thisbe, Wall, Moonshine, and Lion.*	**Entering Characters:** the rest of the cast enters the stage: ***Bottom*** as Pyramus; ***Flute*** as Thisbe; and ***Snug*** as the Lion. Quince had assigned the parts of Thisbe's father and mother to ***Snout*** and ***Starveling***, but neither of these characters will have a chance to be acted for Theseus. Instead, Snout plays the Wall (explicitly identifying himself

so at line 212 below), and Starveling could play the Moonshine.

Finally, Quince had assigned himself the secondary role of Pyramus' father, who will also not appear during the performance.

In the Folio, there is a stage direction appearing prior to the entrance of the play's performers, "*Tawyer with a trumpet before them*." *Tawyer* was a real actor named William Tawyer, who was to pretend to play a fanfare introducing the players.[9]

176

177-201 (below): in Quince's second speech, Prologue tells the story that will be presented on-stage:

The lovers Pyramus and Thisbe can only meet by talking through the gaps of a wall (lines 179-184); one night, the lovers agree to meet at the tomb of Ninus (185-8); Thisbe, the first to arrive at the tomb, is frightened by a lion, but drops her cloak as she runs away (190-2); Pyramus arrives to find Thisbe's cloak, which the lion, chewing, had soaked with blood, and assumes Thisbe has been killed (193-5), at which discovery he kills himself (196-7); Thisbe returns to find Pyramus dead, and uses his knife to kill herself as well (198-9).

The Prologue's second speech consists once again of a mix of quatrains with an *abab* rhyming scheme and rhyming couplets − except for line 189, which has no matching line with which to rhyme.

Prol. Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;

178 But, wonder on, till truth make all things plain.

177-8: the sense is, the audience may be curious about the upcoming performance, but everything will soon become clear.

Gentles = ladies and gentlemen, gentlefolk.[2]

perchance = perhaps.

wonder at = marvel at, are astonished by, watch in fascination.[1,2]

This man is Pyramus, if you would know:

180 This beauteous lady Thisbe is certain.

This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present

181-2: Snout appears as the Wall; his props are mortar used to construct a wall (***lime***) and the plaster (***rough-cast***) which coats it (see Act III.1.87 above).[1,6]

doth present = represents, plays the part of.[2]

182 Wall, that vile Wall, which did these lovers sunder:

182: ***vile*** = bad, base, villainous (because it keeps Pyramus and Thisbe apart).[1]

sunder = separate, ie. keep apart.

And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content

183: ***chink*** = slit, slight opening.[1]

content = resigned, accepting (from necessity).[1]

184 To whisper. At the which, let no man wonder.

= let no one be surprised at this.

This man, with lantern, dog, and bush of thorn,

186 Presenteth Moonshine. For if you will know,

185-6: ***This man…Moonshine*** = the actor playing the moon, or moonshine, bears traditional attributes of the Man in the Moon:

lantern = this is the reading of the Quarto; the Folio prints *lanthorne* (see Act III.i.76 above).

dog = there seems to be a tradition of the Man in the Moon owning a dog.[21] In Shakespeare's ***The Tempest***, in response to Stephano's joking claim that he was the Man in the Moon, Caliban says, "*My mistress show'd me thee and*

		thy dog and thy bush." ***bush of thorn*** = the traditional bundle of sticks carried by the Man in the Moon; see Act III.i.75-76 above.
	By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn	187-8: ***By moonshine…tomb*** = the lovers considered it no disgrace or shame (***think no scorn***)[1] to meet at night at the tomb of Ninus.
188	To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.	= court each other, make love.[1]
	This grizly beast (which Lion hight by name)	189: ***grizly*** = fear-inducing, horrible to behold; a variant of ***grisly***.[1] ***hight*** = is called; an archaic word.[1,4]
190	The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,	190: ***trusty*** = reliable,[1] because she kept her appointment. ***coming*** = arriving. ***by night*** = during the night.[1]
	Did scare away, or rather did affright:	191: ie. the lion frightened Thisbe.
192	And as she fled, her mantle she did fall:	= cloak. = ie. let fall.[4]
	Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.	= note the amateurish recycling of the adjective ***vile***.
194	Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth, and tall,	= shortly thereafter. = fine, goodly.[2,4]
	And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain:	195: ***trusty*** is reused; and Quince humorously misapplies ***stain***, describing the mantle itself as having been killed.
196	Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade, He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.	196-7: Shakespeare pokes fun at the overuse of alliteration (which has a long and respectable history in English literature) sometimes still seen in Elizabethan poetry.[5] ***broached*** = stabbed (the original meaning of "to broach" was "to stab").[1] ***boiling*** = overflowing with passion or emotion.[1]
198	And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,	= lingering (***tarrying***) in the shade of a mulberry tree.
	His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,	199: ***His dagger…died*** = picked up Pyramus' knife and killed herself. ***For all the rest*** = ie. as for the rest of the story.
200	Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain,	= ie. the two lovers.
	At large discourse, while here they do remain.	= tell in full or thoroughly.[1,2]
202		
	Thes. I wonder, if the lion be to speak.	= ie. will.
204		
	Demet. No wonder, my lord: one lion may, when	
206	many asses do.	
208	[*Exeunt Prologue, Pyramus, Thisbe, Lion, and Moonshine*.]	208-9: only Wall remains on-stage.
210		
		211-220 (below): note how Snout's speech is hilariously filled with redundancy.
	Wall. In this same interlude it doth befall,	= short and light dramatic presentation.[1,2] = happens.
212	That I, one Snout by name, present a wall:	= the Quarto incorrectly prints *Flute* here. = represent, play.
	And such a wall, as I would have you think,	
214	That had in it a crannied hole or chink:	= full of crannies;[1] redundant with ***hole or chink***.
	Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe,	
216	Did whisper often very secretly.	

This loam, this rough-cast, and this stone doth show,

217-8: Snout is overloaded with props!
loam = a compound used for plaster; see Act III.i.86 above.
rough-cast = another compound used for plaster; see Act III.1.87 above.
stone = represents the stones from which a wall may be built.

That I am that same wall: the truth is so.
And this the cranny is, right and sinister,
Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.

219-220: Snout demonstrates the crannies along the wall by spreading the fingers of his right and left (***sinister***) hands.
sinister = stressed on its second, or middle, syllable.
fearful = frightened, timid; literally "full of fear".

Thes. Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?

222-3: who could ask for plaster to speak any better than this?
lime and hair = "a kind of plasterer's cement to which hair is added to bind the mixture closely together." (OED, *lime*, *n1*, sense *3c*).

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

= talk.[1]

Thes. Pyramus draws near the wall: silence.

Re-enter Pyramus.

232*f*: the play-within-a-play continues to employ quatrains with an *abab* rhyme scheme.

Pyra. O grim-looked night! O night, with hue so black,
O night, which ever art, when day is not:
O night, O night, alack, alack, alack,
I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot.
And thou O wall, O sweet, O lovely wall,
That stands't between her father's ground and mine,
Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,
Show me thy chink, to blink through, with mine eyne,

= grim looking, forbidding.[1] = colour.
= is.
= expression of grief.
235: has Thisbe forgotten to appear at the wall tonight?
= ie. property.
= peep or look.[1] = my eyes (***eyne*** is archaic).
Note the line's silly internal rhyme of ***chink*** with ***blink***.

[*Wall holds up his fingers*.]

Thanks, courteous wall. Jove shield thee well for this.

243: ***Jove shield…this*** = Quince's variation on the common formula, "God protect thee."
Jove = Roman king of the gods; an anachronism, since the story of Pyramus and Thisbe took place in ancient Babylon, well before Rome existed.
shield = protect.

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.

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

= having senses, capable of perception.[3,4]

Pyra. No, in truth sir, he should not. "Deceiving me"

251-4: Bottom (playing Pyramus) takes Theseus' joke literally, and breaks the theatre's "fourth wall" by addressing him directly!

is Thisbe's cue: she is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall. You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you: yonder she comes.

= see.
= happen exactly.[1,5]
= there.

Re-enter Thisbe.

Thisbe. O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me.
My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones;

Thy stones, with lime and hair knit now again.

260: this line could be taken unintentionally as quite bawdy, as ***stones*** was a slang term for a man's testicles.[1]

261: ***knit*** = joined together.[6]
For ***knit now again***, the Folio prints ***knit now in thee***, which is probably preferable for its rhyme with line 259.

Pyra. I see a voice: now will I to the chink,
To spy and I can hear my Thisbe's face. −
Thisbe?

= ie. go to.

= see if. In this speech, Bottom has confused ***see*** and ***hear***.

Thisbe. My love thou art, my love I think.

Pyra. Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace:

= ie. thy love.[4]

And, like Limander, am I trusty still.

270: ***Limander*** = generally taken as a malapropism for **Leander**, the well-known lover of Greek myth who nightly swam across the Hellespont in Asia Minor to visit his beloved, **Hero** (see the next annotation below).[4,5]
An early commentator, however, suggested that ***Limander*** is actually a mistake for *Alisander*, a common alternate spelling for *Alexander*; in this case, the reference would be to **Prince Paris of Troy,** who was frequently called **Alexander**. It was with Paris that **Helen of Troy** eloped, precipitating the Trojan War. In this reading, Thisbe's comparison of herself to *Helen* in line 272 would not be erroneous.
trusty = dependable.
still = always.

Thisbe. And I, like Helen, till the Fates me kill.

272: ***And I*** = ie. "and I too remain reliable".
Helen = blunder for **Hero**.
till the Fates me kill = ie. "until I die." The ***Fates*** were the three sister-deities who controlled the course and length of every individual's life.

Pyra. Not Shafalus to Procrus, was so true.

Thisbe. As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you.

274-6: though mangling the names, the lovers allude to the devoted married couple of Greek myth, Cephalus, an Athenian hunter, and his wife Procris. In separate stories, each suspected the other of infidelity, but ultimately, their love for each other was affirmed.

Pyra. O kiss me, through the hole of this vild wall!

= vile, a common variant.

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

280: again, easily heard as bawdy.

Pyra. Wilt thou, at Ninny's tomb, meet me straightway?

= Bottom, as Pyramus, repeat's Flute's error of Act I.iii.131.

Thisbe. 'Tide life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

= come life, come death, ie. "no matter what happens to me".[3]
'tide = betide, ie. happen, befall.[2]

[*Exeunt Pyramus and Thisbe.*]

Wall. Thus have I, Wall, my part dischargèd so;
And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

= fulfilled, performed.[2]

[*Exit Wall.*]

Thes. Now is the moon used between the two neighbours.

293-4: so reads the Quarto; in the Folio, Theseus says, "*Now is the morall downe between the two neighbours*." Neither reading makes much sense. Of the numerous emendations that have been proposed, Alexander Pope's seems the soundest, taking ***moral*** to be a corruption of ***mural***, an archaic word meaning "wall":[1] "*Now is the mural down between the two neighbours*."

Durham observes that ***mure*** was another word meaning "wall" (but was more common than *mural)*, suggesting the possible reading, "*Now is the* ***mure all*** *down between the neighbours*." This interpretation is supported by the fact that Shakespeare used the word ***mure*** in another play, *Henry VI, Part II*.

Other editors, seemingly throwing their hands in the air, simply insert ***wall*** into the line: "*Now is the wall down between the two neighbours*." Regardless, given Demetrius' response, Theseus should be commenting on the wall, not the moon.

Demet. No remedy, my lord, when walls are so wilful, to hear without warning.

296-7: ***No remedy…to*** = the sense is, "what can you do, when walls are so refractory (***wilful***)[6] as to…"

The question is: *as to* do what? The final clause here, ***to hear without warning***, has attracted numerous interpretations: ***warning*** can mean:

(1) "summoning",[1] so the line could be interpreted as "*to listen in when it has not been asked to*". Shakespeare used ***warn*** in this sense in *Richard III*: "*And sent to warn them to his royal presence*;" or

(2) "informing", suggesting, "*to hear what went on without letting the lovers' parents know what they are doing.*"[7]

Elsewhere, one may find assertions (3) that ***hear*** means "speak"; and (4) that ***to hear without warning*** conveys the idea of eavesdropping.

(5) finally, Bourus suggests that the clause refers to the proverbial expression, "walls have ears", but there is no evidence of any such proverb appearing in print before the 17th century.

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

Thes. The best, in this kind, are but shadows: and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

301: ***The best…shadows*** = even the finest plays of this sort (***in this kind***) are only illusions (***shadows***), ie. only reflections or imitations of real life.

301-2: ***and the worst…them*** = and the worst performances are not so bad if the audience uses its imagination to smooth over their deficiencies.[5]

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

304-5: it must be Theseus' imagination that is improving the play, not the actors'.

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

307-8: ie. "if we judge (***imagine***)[6] the actors no more harshly than they judge themselves, then they may be accepted as praiseworthy (***excellent***)[9] men."

Here come two noble beasts, in a man and a lion.

= the ***man*** may be the Man in the Moon.

Re-enter Lion and Moonshine.

313-320 (below): reflecting the men's concern that a

realistically-acted lion might be too terrifying for their audience, Snug, following the consensus the men reached back at Act III.i.59, proactively reassures the women in the audience that he is, in fact, harmless.

Lion. You ladies, you (whose gentle hearts do fear
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor)

314: ***monstrous mouse*** = ***monstrous*** is a bit over-the-top as a way to describe a tiny ***mouse***.

creeps on floor = ***creeps*** may seem to be a comically misapplied word here − we think of serpents and worms *creeping* − but surprisingly, mice were also frequently described as "creeping" in contemporary literature; the OED tells us that ***creep*** could mean moving "close to the ground, as a short-legged reptile" (sense *1a*).

May now, perchance, both quake and tremble here,
When lion rough, in wildest rage, doth roar.
Then know that I, as Snug the joiner, am
A lion fell, nor else no lion's dam;

= perhaps.

317-8: Another sentence with uncertain meaning. One problem is the intended meaning of ***fell***; a second is the unusual, indeed unique, construction, ***nor else no***, which appears nowhere else that I could find in 16th-17th century literature.

(1) it would make most sense for ***fell*** to bear its now-lost meaning of "skin" or "hide"; thus, following Snug's attention-getting warning of lines 313-6, he can reassure the audience that he is but a lion's skin, not a real lion.

The last clause (***nor else no lion's dam***) may then mean, "nor am I a lion's mother (***dam***)", ie. a lioness. A more unusual interpretation has been to view Snug as the "offspring" inside the "pregnant" hide, when he suggests he is no lion's mother; see Furness, p. 224).[9]

(2) ***fell*** here might instead bear its more common sense of "cruel, savage"; but then the last clause becomes much harder to explain: "I, Snug the joiner, am a savage lion...but I am (or am not?) a lion's mother." The logic of the lines collapses with this interpretation.

For, if I should, as lion, come in strife,

319: ***as lion*** = as a real lion, ie. a more realistic lion.

in strife = contentiously, combat-ready.[1]

Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.

= "it would be a great misfortune for me", ie. he could expect to be killed, as should any lion appearing suddenly in a crowd of humans. The usual expression was "*'twere pity* ***of*** *my life*."

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

322: Theseus wryly approves of the lion's kindly concern for the audience.

of a good conscience = ie. possessing a well-developed sense of right and wrong; a common expression.[1]

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

= at playing or performing.

Lysan. This lion is a very fox, for his valour.

327: a fox was known for its cunning, but not ***valour***.[5]

Thes. True: and a goose for his discretion.

329: ***goose*** was a common term for a foolish person; such a person possesses no good judgment (***discretion***).

Demet. Not so, my lord; for his valour cannot carry

331-2: ***his valour…discretion*** = the sense is, Lion's courage is too feeble to support, ie. compensate for, his lack of

judgment.

332 his discretion: and the fox carries the goose.

= allusion to the fox literally stealing away a goose from a barnyard to make a meal.

334 ***Thes.*** His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valour; for the goose carries not the fox. It is well:

334-5: ***His discretion…valour*** = Lion's judgment (which is lacking) cannot make up for his (absence of) courage.
= "that is enough of that."

336 leave it to his discretion, and let us listen to the moon.

= Theseus humorously employs a still common expression, here meaning, "let Lion decide how to act", as a way to redirect attention to the next character to speak, the Moonshine.

338 ***Moon.*** This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present; –

338: ***lanthorn*** = ie. lantern; as mentioned previously, the sides of a lantern were made of horn, so that ***lanthorn*** developed as a variant spelling.[4]
horned moon = the crescent-shaped moon, a common collocation.[1]
present = represent.[5]

340 ***Demet.*** He should have worn the horns on his head.

340: Demetrius makes the inevitable Elizabethan joke about the horns which were said to grow on the forehead of a cuckold.

342 ***Thes.*** He is no crescent, and his horns are invisible, within the circumference.

342-3: this Man in the Moon does not have the shape of a crescent; and if he does have any "horns", they cannot be seen within the lantern.
the circumference = ie. its bounds or periphery.[1,6]

344 ***Moon.*** This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present,

345: Moon repeats line 338, perhaps because he sensed the interruption.

346 Myself, the man ith moon, do seem to be.

= ie. "in the"; the OED does not recognize ***ith*** as a distinct word, though it appears regularly in contemporary literature. There is, however, an entry for ***i'th'***. Modern editors generally substitute "*i' th'*" here.

348 ***Thes.*** This is the greatest error of all the rest: the man should be put into the lanthorn. How is it else
350 the man ith moon?

352 ***Demet.*** He dares not come there, for the candle; for,

352: ***come there*** = ie. enter the lantern.[5]
for the candle = ie. because of the burning candle inside.[5]

you see, it is already in snuff.

= Demetrius puns: (1) a candle's ***snuff*** is the burnt or used-up portion of its wick; and (2) the common expression ***to be in snuff*** meant "*to take offense*".[1,5]

354 ***Hipp.*** I am aweary of this moon. Would he would
356 change.

355-6: ***would he would change*** = "I wish he would change;" Hippolyta, punning, expresses her desire for the character of the Man in the Moon to be gone.
change = word commonly used to describe the moon cycling through its various phases.[1]

358 ***Thes.*** It appears, by his small light of discretion, that

358-9: ***It appears…wane*** = more wordplay: the Moon's judgment and discernment (***discretion***) seem weak and getting weaker. Shakespeare brilliantly intertwines the literal language of astronomy: ***in the wane*** (line 359) refers to a moon decreasing in illumination, hence its ***small light***, which also (1) alludes to the dim light produced by the lantern, and (2) points out the Moon's minimal level of good

		judgment.
	he is in the wane: but yet in courtesy, in all reason,	= ie. according to sound judgment or logic; a common expression.
360	we must stay the time.	= the sense is, "wait this out."
362	***Lysan.*** Proceed, Moon.	
364	***Moon.*** All that I have to say, is to tell you, that the lanthorn is the moon; I, the man ith moon; this	364-6: as Wall did before him, Moon breaks character to explain − of course, quite unnecessarily − himself and his props!
366	thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog, my dog.	
368	***Demet.*** Why, all these should be in the lanthorn; for all these are in the moon. − But silence: here comes	
370	Thisbe.	
372	*Re-enter Thisbe.*	
374	***Thisbe.*** This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?	= Flute, as Thisbe, still can't pronounce ***Ninus'*** correctly.
376	***Lion.*** [*Roaring*] Oh –	
378	[*Thisbe runs off.*]	
380	***Demet.*** Well roared, Lion.	
382	***Thes.*** Well run, Thisbe.	
384	***Hippol.*** Well shone, Moon. Truly, the moon shines with a good grace.	= in a pleasing manner.[1]
386		
388	[*The Lion shakes Thisbe's mantle, and exit.*]	
390	***Thes.*** Well mouzed, Lion.	= ie. moused, meaning "handled as a cat would a mouse, clawing and tearing it;" ***mouze*** was a rare alternate form of "mouse".[1]
392	***Demet.*** And then came Pyramus.	
394	***Lysan.*** And so the lion vanished.	
396	*Re-enter Pyramus.*	
398	***Pyra.*** Sweet Moon, I thank thee, for thy sunny beams.	= Pyramus' use of ***sunny*** for the moon is probably an unintentional *faux pas*, though the OED tells us that ***sunny*** could mean simply, "resembling the sun in brightness".[1]
	I thank thee, Moon, for shining now so bright;	
400	For, by thy gracious, golden, glittering beams,	400: note the comically exaggerated alliteration. ***beams*** = appears here in both the Quarto and Folio. Editors generally view this second ***beams*** as an error (since ***beams*** was used to end line 398), and emend it to "*gleams*", which (1) completes the rhyme with *beams*, and (2) adds to the grotesque alliteration of the line. We may note that both "*glittering beams*" and "*glittering gleams*" were common collocations in the late 16th and 17th centuries. On the other hand, as Furness points out, it is exactly because ***beams*** is so obviously wrong here that it should be retained: after all, why would we expect Bottom to recite his lines correctly?
	I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight. −	401: ie. "I expect to see my most faithful Thisbe." ***take*** = the Folio prints "*taste"* here; as a clear mis-

		match with ***sight***, "*taste*" may be the preferred reading.
402	But stay: O spite!	= wait. = "oh, cruel fate!" − a cry of anguish.
	But mark, poor knight,	403: ***mark*** = observe. ***knight*** = meaning himself; ***knight*** is anachronistic for a story taking place in ancient Babylon.
404	What dreadful dole is here?	= grief.[5]
	Eyes, do you see!	
406	How can it be!	
	O dainty duck, O dear!	= a ridiculous term of endearment for Thisbe in this context. Quite a few later 17th century authors adopted this original expression in their works.
408	Thy mantle good,	408: ie. "your good cloak".
	What, stained with blood?	
410	Approach ye Furies fell!	410: Pyramus summons the Furies, a trio of avenging goddesses from classical mythology who pursued and tormented murderers to punish them. Pyramus assumes that Thisbe has been killed by a person, and calls on the Furies to take their revenge on the supposed slayer. ***ye*** = often used as the plural form of "you". ***fell*** = cruel.
	O Fates come, come,	411-3: in his grief, Pyramus calls on the ***Fates*** to take his own life. The Fates, as mentioned previously, were three sister deities who determined the length of humans' lives. The first Fate, Clotho, spun the thread of life; Lachesis measured the portion assigned to each person; and Atropos cut the thread with her shears to terminate each life.
412	Cut thread and thrum,	= the tufted, unwoven ends of a weaver's thread that remain attach to a loom.[1,5]
	Quail, crush, conclude, and quell!	413: Pyramus is prepared to be utterly destroyed! Note the line's mixed alliteration. ***Quail*** = destroy, put an end to.[1] ***conclude*** = bring to an end.[1] ***quell*** = kill.[1]
414		
	Thes. This passion, and the death of a dear friend,	= suffering or strong emotion,[1] ie. extreme grief. = lover.[2]
416	would go near to make a man look sad.	= would come close to, ie. might just about.
418	***Hippol.*** Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.	= a curse upon.
420	***Pyra.*** O, wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame?	420: Pyramus apostrophizes personified Nature. ***wherefore*** = why. ***lions frame*** = create lions.
	Since lion vild hath here deflowered my dear.	421: ***vild*** = vile. ***deflowered*** = a likely malapropism; Pyramus probably intends ***deflowered*** to mean something like "ruined" or "destroyed"; however, the word also bears a strong erotic overtone, unintentionally suggesting that the lion has sexually violated or ravaged Thisbe.[1,6]
422	Which is − no, no − which was the fairest dame	422: ***Which*** = ie. who. ***was*** = with ***was***, Pyramus emphasizes that Thisbe no longer ***is***.
	That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer.	= had a pleasant face or expression.[1]

Come tears, confound;

Out sword, and wound

The pap of Pyramus:

Ay, that left pap,
Where heart doth hop:

[*Stabs himself.*]

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

[*Exit Moonshine.*]

Now die, die, die, die, die.

[*Dies.*]

Demet. No die, but an ace for him; for he is but one.

Lysan. Less than an ace, man; for he is dead, he is nothing.

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

Hippol. How chance Moonshine is gone before?
Thisbe comes back, and finds her lover.

Thes. She will find him, by starlight. Here she comes, and her passion ends the play.

Re-enter Thisbe.

Hippol. Methinks she should not use a long one, for

424: Pyramus apostrophizes his tears, calling on them to bring him to ruin or destroy him (***confound***). Pyramus' phrasing is sloppy: while it was common to describe a person as "confounded in (or with) tears", it is strained to make the ***tears*** themselves the actors or causers of destruction.

425-8: Pyramus calls on his sword to stab him in the breast.

= again, not really the most appropriate term to use here; ***pap*** usually referred to a woman's breast or nipple; however, Shakespeare did use ***pap*** for a man's breast in *Love's Labour's Lost*: "*Proceed, sweet Cupid: thou hast thumped him with thy bird-bolt under the left pap*."

428: leap, skip.[1]
Like ***pap*** in the previous two lines, the use of ***hop*** seems incongruous, even if not completely incorrect: there are a couple of examples in late 16th century literature in which one's heart was said to "hop".

436-7: Pyramus is likely bidding his tongue to lose its power of speech and the moon to disappear, but the wording once again is somewhat nonsensical. Regardless, Moonshine takes Pyramus' instruction literally and exits.

445: Demetrius puns on ***die***, referring to the gaming cube: Pyramus only rolls a "one" (***ace***), since he is but one man.[5] Stevenson also suggests that ***ace*** was probably pronounced similarly to "ass", adding an extra layer of meaning to "***for he is but one***" (also see lines 450-1 below).

447: ***an ace*** = one.
447-8: ***he is nothing*** = that is, nothing − ie. zero − is less than one.

= ie. prove to be, ie. turn out to be.

453-4: Hippolyta notices that the Moonshine has exited prematurely: how else will Thisbe find Pyramus' body?

= violent grief.[1]

461-2: still impatient, Hippolyta hopes that Thisbe will not

such a Pyramus: I hope she will be brief.

give such a lengthy death speech as did Pyramus.

461-2: ***for such a Pyramus*** = this Pyramus is not worthy of a major death scene from Thisbe.

Demet. A moth will turn the balance, which

464-5: ***A moth…better*** = it is a very close-run thing as to who was the better performer, Pyramus or Thisbe.

A moth will turn the balance = a mote (ie. the tiniest thing imaginable, a speck of dust, an atom) will tip the balance; ***moth*** was a common alternate form of *mote*.[1]

which...which = whether...or.[5]

Pyramus, which Thisbe, is the better: he for a man,
God warrant us; she for a woman, God bless us.

465-6: ***he for…bless us*** = one interpretation has been, "from such a man, may God protect (***warrant***) us; and from such a woman, may God also protect (***bless***) us."[1,9] Another gloss might be, "either Pyramus, the man, is better − may God protect us! or Thisbe, the woman, is better − may God protect us!"

This entire line is omitted from the Folio.

warrant = the Quarto prints "*warnd*" (ie. warned), but this is generally emended to ***warrant***; Shakespeare used a variation of this expression in *As You Like It*: "*Lord warrant us!*"

Lysan. She hath spied him already, with those sweet eyes.

= seen.

Demet. And thus she means, videlicet: −

471: ***means*** = laments, mourns.[1] Some editors gloss ***means*** as "moans", but this is not precisely correct, per the OED. Others have taken ***means*** in its common sense of "signifies", suggesting, perhaps, that Demetrius intends to interpret Thisbe's lines, but this reading is not convincing.

videlicet = Latin for "that is to say", ie. *viz*.[1,5]

473-499 (below): you may wish to pick out the various rhyme schemes employed in these lines.

Thisbe. Asleep, my love?
What, dead, my dove?
O Pyramus, arise,
Speak, speak. Quite dumb?
Dead, dead? A tomb

476-7: ***dumb / tomb*** = the Quarto's spellings of the lines' last words − *dumbe* / *tumbe* − signal an intended rhyme in Elizabethan pronunciation (probably both rhyming with modern *thumb*), now lost in modern spelling.

Must cover thy sweet eyes.
These lily lips,
This cherry nose,

479-480: Thisbe misspeaks: it is the lips which are ***cherry*** (red); the nose is ***lily*** (white).

These yellow cowslip cheeks

481: the ***cowslip*** is a common wild plant producing ***yellow*** flowers.

In contemporary literature, we find occasional instances of ***cheeks*** described as ***yellow*** to indicate unhealthiness; in *Henry IV, Part II*, Shakespeare's Lord Chief Justice lists "*a yellow cheek*" as a characteristic of old age.

Are gone, are gone:
Lovers make moan:

= lament, a common expression.[1]

His eyes were green, as leeks.

484: there are multiple references in Shakespeare's plays to the attractiveness of green eyes: e.g., in *Romeo and Juliet*,

the nurse says, "*An eagle, madam, / Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye / As Paris hath*."

It was actually quite common to compare an object's greenish colour to that of ***leeks*** in contemporary literature; only its application here to Pyramus' ***eyes*** seems hardly flattering.

O sisters three,

485-490: as did Pyramus before her, Thisbe summons the ***three sister*** deities called the Fates.

Come, come, to me,
With hands as pale as milk,
Lay them in gore,
Since you have shore
With shears, his threed of silk.

487-490: an imperative imploring the Fates to figuratively immerse their hands in Pyramus' blood and gore, since they have already cut his thread of life. Thisbe's intent is to contrast the Fates' stark white hands and the bloody mess that is Pyramus.

shore = in contemporary usage, the usual past participle form of "shear" was "has (or have) shorn"; the construction "have shore" appears to be unique, found only here, in Shakespeare.

threed = ie. thread, a common alternate form, likely pronounced to rhyme with "feed"; the Folio prints *thred*, however, suggesting a modernized pronunciation.

Tongue, not a word:
Come trusty sword,
Come blade, my breast imbrue:

491: ie. "I will say no more."

= stain, ie. with blood.[1]

[*Stabs herself.*]

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

[*Dies.*]

Thes. Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

Demet. Ay, and Wall too.

507-510 (below): the Quarto assigns this speech admonishing Theseus and the noble audience to Lion. The Folio, however, gives it to Bottom, who would presumably have to stand up (Pyramus having died earlier in the scene) to address the spectators. Given Bottom's complete lack of inhibition, and the fact that he has already broken the fourth wall once, it may make more sense to assign the speech to him.

Lion. No, I assure you, the wall is down, that parted

507-8: ***that parted their fathers*** = ie. the wall which separated the properties belonging to the fathers of Pyramus and Thisbe.

their fathers. − Will it please you, to see the Epilogue, or to hear a Bergomask dance between two of our company?

508-510: ***Will it…company*** = Bottom asks if Theseus would like to see the Epilogue or watch a dance: (1) the Epilogue would be spoken by a single actor, matching the Prologue who opened the play; (2) Elizabethan dramas often concluded with a staged dance.

Bergomask dance = a rustic dance, supposedly one

imported from Bergamo, a province of the state of Venice.[1]
between two = ie. performed by two.

Thes. No Epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs
no excuse. Never excuse: for when the players are all
dead, there need none to be blamed. Marry, if he that
writ it had played Pyramus, and hanged himself in
Thisbe's garter, it would have been a fine tragedy: and

so it is truly, and very notably discharged. But come,
your Bergomask: let your Epilogue alone.

[*A dance*.]

= please.
= explanation, as a way to clear the actors of blame.
= common exclamation, derived from the Virgin Mary.
= band worn around the leg to keep one's stockings from falling.[1]
= excellently performed.[6]
518: Theseus surprisingly accepts the actors' offer of a dance, but declines the Epilogue.

522*f* (below): Theseus, having dispensed with the day's silly entertainment, returns to speaking in verse, signaling the re-elevation of his language.

The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve:

Lovers to bed, 'tis almost fairy time.

522: the bell's clapper (***iron tongue***) has counted to (***told***) twelve, ie. has chimed twelve times.

523: ***Lovers to bed*** = Theseus orders the couples to retire and enjoy the first carnal pleasures of marriage.
'tis almost fairy time = the human world should withdraw, before the time for the supernatural takes over!

I fear we shall out-sleep the coming morn,
As much as we this night have overwatched.

= ie. oversleep in the morning.
525: ie. because they have remained awake too long.
overwatched = "watched all through" (OED).

This palpable-gross play hath well beguiled
The heavy gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed.

526-7: ***This…night*** = the sense is, "though obviously crude or awful (***palpable-gross***),[1,2,5] the play did a good job of helping to pass the time."
beguiled…of night = helped while away the night.
The heavy gait of night = night is personified as moving slowly and sluggishly; ***heavy gait*** = slow motion.[1]

A fortnight hold we this solemnity,
In nightly revels, and new jollity.

528: the wedding celebrations or festivities (***solemnity***) will continue for two weeks.
= merrymaking or feasts. = forms or sources of enjoyment.

[*Exeunt*.]

531: thus ends the humans' part of the play.

Enter Puck.

533: Puck may be carrying a broom; see lines 553-4 below.

535*f* (below): Puck poetically describes various attributes of the night.

Puck. Now the hungry lion roars,

535: I can find no reason, mythological or literary, for Shakespeare to associate lions specifically with the night.

And the wolf beholds the moon;

= ***beholds***, which appears in both the Quarto and the Folio, is usually emended to ***behowls***; even the OED assumes that Shakespeare intended ***behowls*** here, crediting him with inventing this new word.

Whilst the heavy ploughman snores,

= drowsy.[1] = one who drives a plough, ie. farm labourer.[1]

All with weary task foredone.

= wearying.[1] = work. = exhausted (past tense of *fordo*).[1]

Now the wasted brands do glow,

= torches (or pieces of firewood) that have burnt themselves out.
wasted = reduced in substance.[1]

Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,
Puts the wretch that lies in woe,
In remembrance of a shroud.

540-2: Puck alludes to the night-owl, whose call was considered an omen of evil; the sorrowful (***in woe***) soul lying in bed, hearing the screech, is reminded of death and mortality through the mental image of a ***shroud***.
In remembrance of = brings to mind.[2]

Now it is the time of night,
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide.

543-6: Puck revives the play's earlier imagery of ghosts leaving their graves to wander during the night.
gaping = opening.
sprite = common monosyllabic variant for *spirit*.
glide = move smoothly and without apparent effort.[1]

And we fairies, that do run,
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,

547-550: being night revelers, the fairies flee the rising sun, accompanying Hecate's chariot as they follow the receding darkness; ***team*** refers to the horses pulling her car.[1,4]
triple Hecate's = ***Hecate*** was a powerful female goddess of magic and the night; she was described in myth as having either three heads or three bodies; Elizabethan writers typically portrayed her as having three heads or faces.

Now are frolic: not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallowed house.

551: ***frolic*** = frolicsome, merry.[3,4]
551-2: ***not a mouse…house*** = Puck's job is to protect the sanctity of the household (likely Theseus' palace, where the various newly-married couples are safely ensconced in their respective bedrooms).

I am sent, with broom, before,
To sweep the dust behind the door.

553-4: Puck has also been assigned the job of cleaning the palace. It has been noted that fairies were "great lovers and patrons of cleanliness and propriety", rewarding those who kept things clean, while punishing those who were slovenly "by pinching them black and blue" (Thiselton-Dyer, p. 18).[19]

Enter Oberon and Titania with all their train.

= attendants.

Ober. Through the house give glimmering light,
By the dead and drowsy fire.

558-9: Oberon instructs the fairies to faintly illuminate the house as the fire dies down.
drowsy = lethargic.[1]

Every elf and fairy sprite,
Hop as light as bird from brier,
And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it trippingly.

= spirit.
= skip or dance. = ie. "leaping from a".
= in a light-footed or nimble manner.[1]

Titan. First rehearse your song by rote,

565: Titania instructs the fairies to learn and practice their song from memory (***by rote***).

To each word a warbling note.
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
Will we sing and bless this place.

566: ie. to give each word a tuneful note.[1]

[*Song and dance*.]

570: any specific song Shakespeare or the performing troupe had in mind here has long been lost.[9]

Ober. Now, until the break of day,

Through this house, each fairy stray.

= wander, roam.[1]

To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessèd be:

574-5: the likely meaning is that the Fairy King and Queen will approach the bed of Theseus and Hippolyta to bless it.
bride-bed = the bed upon which newlyweds consummate their marriage.[1]

And the issue, there create,
Ever shall be fortunate:
So shall all the couples three
Ever true in loving be:

576-7: any children (***issue***) conceived (***create*** for "created") on this bed will be lucky and prosperous.[1]

And the blots of Nature's hand
Shall not in their issue stand.
Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despisèd in nativity,

580-5: the children resulting from this marriage will be born without defect or disfigurement.

583-4: disfigurements appearing on offspring were considered ominous or portentous (***prodigious***).[1]
Despised in nativity = looked on with scorn or disfavour if present at birth.

Shall upon their children be.
With this field-dew consecrate,
Every fairy take his gait,
And each several chamber bless,

586-8: each fairy should visit various bedrooms in the palace and bless them with the hallowed or sanctified (***consecrate***)[1] dew (perhaps a form of fairy holy-water)[4] from the field.
take his gait = go his way.[1]
several chamber = separate or individual bedroom.[1,2,5]

Through this palace, with sweet peace,
Ever shall in safety rest,
And the owner of it blest.
Trip away; make no stay:
Meet me all, by break of day.

592: "get going, moving lightly; wait no longer."

[*Exeunt Oberon, Titania, and train*.]

597-612 (below): with the final speech of the play, Puck addresses the audience with the traditional (and always slightly pathetic) appeal for the spectators' approval. Note that four separate times Puck uses the words ***mend*** or ***amend*** to signify his willingness to compensate for or remedy any faults of the play.

Puck. If we shadows have offended,

= spirits.[5] = annoyed or displeased (you).[1]

Think but this (and all is mended),
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.

598-602: "just pretend you fell asleep and dreamed the whole thing."
mended = made well.

And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearnèd luck
Now to scape the serpent's tongue,

= insignificant and trivial subject matter.[1,2,6]
= producing no more than.[5]
= ladies and gentlemen. = condemn (us or the play).[1]
= make amends.[1]

606-7: "if we have such undeserved good fortune as to escape your hisses;" a nice metaphor of the ***serpent's tongue*** producing the hissing sound that signals an

		audience's displeasure.
608	We will make amends, ere long:	= soon.
	Else, the Puck a liar call.	= otherwise.
610	So, good night unto you all.	
	Give me your hands, if we be friends:	= applause.[4]
612	And Robin shall restore amends.	= make atonement for any offense, set matters right.[1,6]
614	[*Exit Puck.*]	
616	FINIS	

APPENDIX.

Peter Quince, as the author of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, is responsible for delivering the Prologue to his royal audience in Act V of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Unfortunately for Peter, he completely bungles his first speech (perhaps out of some initial stage-fright). The errors occur because he fails to follow the lines' punctation: instead, by stopping when he should not stop, and reading straight through the pauses, he delivers a message that is the opposite of that he intended.

The published texts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* only print the *erroneous* versions of the Prologue. It is up to the reader to attempt to reconstruct the "correct" punctuation in the first speech.

Below, on the left, we reproduce the first Prologue as it was actually delivered by Quince; on the right, a possible "correct" version of the Prologue − how the author of *Pyramus and Thisbe* might have originally written it.

(Note: the lines are renumbered 1-10 to facilitate comparison).

[The "correct" version was created using a combination of the proposals suggested by Stevenson[5] and the Variorum edition[9] of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.]

The Prologue's first speech, as delivered (see Act V, lines 151-160):

1 If we offend, it is with our good will.
2 That you should think, we come not to offend,
3 But with good will. To shew our simple skill,
4 That is the true beginning of our end.
5 Consider then, we come but in despite.
6 We do not come, as minding to content you,
7 Our true intent is. All for your delight,
8 We are not here. That you should here repent you,
9 The actors are at hand: and, by their show,
10 You shall know all, that you are like to know.

How Quince may have originally, and correctly, punctuated the first Prologue when he wrote it:

1 If we offend, it is with our good will
2 That you should think we come not to offend;
3 But with good will to show our simple skill:
4 That is the true beginning of our end.
5 Consider then: we come; but in despite
6 We do not come. As, minding to content you,
7 Our true intent is all for your delight.
8 We are not here that you should here repent you.
9 The actors are at hand; and by their show
10 You shall know all that you are like to know.

FOOTNOTES.

Footnotes in the text correspond as follows:

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5. Stevenson, O.J., ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Toronto: The Copp Clark Company Limited, 1918.
6. Schmidt, Alexander. *Shakespeare-Lexicon*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007 (originally published 1902).
7. Bourus, Terri, ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *The New Oxford Shakespeare, Complete Works*, edited by Gary Taylor *et al.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
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17. *Learn Bees* website. *How Do Bees Make Wax?* Accessed 11/22/2025: https://learnbees.com/how-do-bees-make-wax/.
18. Reynolds, Lou Agnes, and Paul Sawyer. "*Folk Medicine and the Four Fairies of A Midsummer-Night's Dream*." Shakespeare Quarterly 10, no. 4 (autumn 1959):
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20. Sugden, Edward. *A Topographical Dictionary to the Works of Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists*. Manchester: The University Press, 1925.
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Optional Textual Changes.

The texts of the Scripts prepared for our website, *www.ElizabethanDrama.org,* generally lean towards retaining the language of the plays' earliest editions. This includes keeping archaic words and language that modern editors tend to modernize and correct. On the other hand, where obvious errors in typography have occurred, the emendations suggested by early and modern editors are usually accepted.

This edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is based on the text of the Quarto printed in 1600. The play appeared again in the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare's works. Comparison of the two editions shows a number of variations in wording and word choice, though not enough of them exist so as to cause the reader to lose sleep, wondering if he or she is missing anything by choosing one text over the other.

You will find below a fairly comprehensive list of changes a director may wish to consider applying to the text of our play, in order to make the language more sensible. These emendations are of several types:

(1) modernization of archaic words;

(2) substantive alternate wording found in the Folio; and

(3) commonly-accepted emendations suggested by later editors and commentators.

Explanations for all these possible emendations can be found in the annotations to the play.

An asterisk (*) indicates an emendation based on alternative wording in the Folio.

Universal Emendations:

1. modernize ***shew(s)(ed)*** to ***show(s)(ed)*** everywhere:
   2.1.197; 2.2.152; 3.2.448, 580; 5.1.153.
2. modernize ***vild*** to ***vile*** everywhere:
   5.1.278, 421.
3: modernize ***murther(er)*** to ***murder(er)*** everywhere:
   3.2.31, 70, 74.
4. modernize ***lanthorn*** to ***lantern*** everywhere:
   5.1.338, 345, 349, 365, 368.

Act I, Scene i.

1. line 11: emend ***Now bent*** to ***New-bent***.
2. line 165: omit ***Ay me***.*
3. line 170: emend ***to love*** to ***to low***.
4. line 176: emend ***friends*** to ***merit.****
5. line 200: emend ***remote*** to ***removed***.*
6. line 235: emend ***Your words I['d] catch*** to ***yours would I catch***.
7. line 239: emend ***I'll*** to ***I'd***.
8. line 255: emend ***Helena*** to ***Helen*** (or)
   emend ***is no fault of mine*** to ***is none of mine***.*
9. line 275: emend ***swelled*** to ***sweet***.
10. line 278: emend ***strange companions*** to ***stranger companies.***

Act I, Scene ii.

1. line 108: modernize ***shrike*** to ***shriek***.
2. line 132: modernize ***perfit*** to ***perfect***.*
3. line 147: modernize ***perfit*** to ***perfect***.*

Act II, Scene i.

1. line 51: emend ***filly foal*** to ***silly foal***.*
2. line 55: modernize ***dewlop*** to ***dewlap***.
3. line 60: modernize ***loffe*** to ***laugh***.
4. line 82: emend ***steppe*** to ***steep***.*
5. line 106: emend ***pelting*** to ***petty***.*
6. line 112: modernize ***murrion*** to ***murrain***.
7. line 124: emend ***chin*** to ***thin***.
8. line 226: emend ***stay*** and ***stayeth*** to ***slay*** and ***slayeth***.
9. line 293: emend ***I'll*** to ***I***.*
10. line 303: the original line as printed is:

    Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

    Optional change 1: reverse the clauses:

    Welcome, wanderer. Hast thou the flower there?

    Option change 2: revise the punctuation:

    Hast thou the flower there, welcome wanderer?

Act II, Scene ii.

1. line 4: modernize ***leathren*** to ***leather***.
2. line 75: emend ***we can make of it*** to ***can you make of it***.*
3. line 76: emend ***interchained*** to ***interchanged***.*
4. line 102: emend ***found*** to ***find***.*
5. line 212: modernize ***swoun*** to ***swoon***.

Act III, Scene i.

1. line 43: emend ***toote*** to ***to 't***.*
2. line 76: emend ***lantern*** to ***lanthorn***.*
3. line 87: emend ***or*** to ***and***.

Act III, Scene ii.

1. line 24: modernize ***minnick*** to ***mimic***.
2. line 109: modernize ***bankrout*** to ***bankrupt***.
3. line 510: emend ***night's swift*** to ***night-swift***.*
4. line 554: repunctuate "***Speak in some bush.***" to "***Speak!*** **[pause]** ***In some bush?***"
4. line 596: modernize ***shat*** to ***shalt***.*
5. line 635: emend ***Your eye*** to ***To your eye***.

Act IV, Scene i.

1. line 32: emend ***Cobweb*** to ***Pease-blossom***.
2. line 44: modernize ***mounch*** to ***munch***.*
3. line 52: emend ***stirt*** to ***stir***.*
4. line 56: emend ***always*** to ***all ways.***
5. line 73: emend ***flavours*** to ***savours***.*
6. line 79: modernize ***flouriets*** to ***flowerets***.
7. lines 265-6: omit ***Are you sure*** / ***That we are awake?****
8. line 298: emend ***a play*** to ***our play***.
9. line 300: emend ***at her death*** to ***after death***.

Act IV, Scene ii.

1. line 52: modernize ***ribands*** to ***ribbons***.

Act V, Scene i.

1. line 47: emend ***Philostrate*** to ***Egeus***.*
2. Reassign the speeches of lines 49, 55, 82, 95, 102,

and 143 to Egeus.*
3. line 55: emend ***ripe*** to ***rife***.*
4. Reassign the following pairs of lines to Lysander:
   61-62; 66-67; 71-72; 76-77.*
5. line 78: emend ***strange snow*** to ***strange black snow***.
6. line 117: modernize ***duery*** to ***duty***.*
7. line 185: emend ***lantern*** to ***lanthorn***.*
8. line 189: modernize ***grizly*** to ***grisly***.
9. line 261: emend ***knit now again*** to ***knit now in thee***.*
10. line 293: emend ***moon used*** to any of:
    (a) ***mural down***;
    (b) ***mure all down***; or
    (c) ***wall down***.
11. lines 346, 350 and 365: emend ***ith*** to ***i' th'***.
12. line 390: modernize ***mouzed*** to ***moused.****
13. line 400: emend ***glittering beams*** to ***glittering gleams***.
14. line 401: emend ***take*** to ***taste***.*
15. lines 465-6: omit ***he for a man...God bless us***.*
16. line 490: modernize ***threed*** to ***thread***.*
17. Reassign the speech beginning at line 507 to Bottom.*
18. line 536: emend ***beholds*** to ***behowls***.