

Cover border taken from the First Folio (1623)

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# A Midsummer Night's Dream

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## Introduction

This volume of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* consists of two versions of the play. The first is the original, based on the *Globe* edition of 1860, which was in turn based on the Folio of 1623. And this, further, was a reprint of a still earlier edition, the Fisher Quarto of 1600. The second version is a translation of the original into contemporary English. In both versions the spelling and punctuation have been updated, and the names of the characters have been spelled out in full for easier reading. Insights from modern scholars have been included in both versions.

The translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not meant to take the place of the original. Instead, it is an alternative to the notes usually included in modern editions. In many editions these notes interfere with the reading of the play. Whether alongside or below the original text, the notes break the rhythm of reading and frequently force the reader to turn back to an earlier page or jump ahead to a later one. Having a translation that runs parallel to the original, line for line, allows the reader to move easily from Elizabethan to contemporary English and back again. It's simply a better way to introduce Shakespeare.

Also, this translation is suitable for performance, where notes are not available to the audience. Admittedly, a well-directed and well-acted production can do much to clarify Shakespeare's language. And yet, there will be numerous references and lines whose meanings are not accessible to many on a first hearing. What, for instance, does Egeus mean when he accuses Lysander of having "stolen the impression of her fantasy"?

### Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's language does present problems for modern readers. After all, four centuries separate us from him. During this time words have acquired new meanings or have dropped from the language altogether, and sentence structures have become less fluid. But these are solvable problems.

First of all, most of the words that Shakespeare used are still current. For those words whose meanings have changed and for those words no longer in the language, modern equivalents are found in this translation. For a small number of words—chiefly names of places and mythological characters—a glossary can be found on page 178.

The meaning of words is one problem. The position of words is another. Today, the order of words in declarative sentences is almost fixed. The subject comes first, then the verb, and finally, if there is one, the object. In Shakespeare's

## Introduction

time, the order of words, particularly in poetic drama, was more fluid. Shakespeare has Egeus say,

Full of vexation come I

Whereas we would usually arrange the words in this order,

I come full of vexation

Later in the play, Lysander tells Hermia about his aunt,

From Athens is her house remote seven leagues

We would probably say,

Her house is a remote seven leagues from Athens

This does not mean that Shakespeare never uses words in what we consider today as normal order. As often as not, he does. Here, for instance, are Flute and Quince in conversation,

FLUTE What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?

QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

When Shakespeare does invert the order of words, he does so for a reason or for a variety of reasons—to create a rhythm, to emphasize a word, to achieve a rhyme. Whether a play is in verse, as most of this play is, or in prose, it is still written in sentences. And that means that, despite the order, all the words needed to make complete sentences are there. If you are puzzled by a sentence, first look for the subject and then try rearranging the words in the order that you would normally use. It takes a little practice, but you will be surprised how quickly you acquire the skill.

Shakespeare sometimes separates sentence parts—subject and verb, for example—that would normally be run together. Here are some lines spoken by Titania, describing her friend, the mother of the changeling child,

Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait

Following (her womb then rich with my young squire),

Would imitate...

Between the subject *she* and the verb *would imitate* come two prepositional phrases and a parenthetical comment that interrupt the normal sequence. Again, look for the subject and then the verb and put the two together. You'll find, however, that your rearranged sentence, while clear, is not as rhythmical as Shakespeare's.

# Act One

**Scene 1** [*Athens. The hall in the palace of the duke*]

THESEUS *and* HIPPOLYTA *enter and take their seats, followed by*  
PHILOSTRATE *and* ATTENDANTS

THESEUS Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour  
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in  
Another moon—but O, methinks how slow  
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,  
Like to a step-dame, or a dowager, 5  
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA Four days will quickly steep themselves in night:  
Four nights will quickly dream away the time:  
And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night 10  
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS Go, Philostrate,  
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments,  
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth,  
Turn melancholy forth to funerals: 15  
The pale companion is not for our pomp.

*Exit* PHILOSTRATE

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,  
And won thy love doing thee injuries:  
But I will wed thee in another key,  
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling. 20

# Act One

## Scene 1 [*Athens. The hall in the palace of the duke*]

THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA enter and take their seats, followed by

PHILOSTRATE and ATTENDANTS

THESEUS Now, fair Hippolyta, our wedding day

Draws quickly near: four happy days bring in

A new moon, but oh, I think how slow

This old moon fades! It delays my desires,

Like a stepmother or a widow,

5

Eating away a young man's inheritance.

HIPPOLYTA Four days will quickly loose themselves in night:

Four nights will quickly dream away the time:

And then the crescent moon, like a silver bow

Newly bent in the heavens, shall watch the night

10

Of our celebration.

THESEUS Go, Philostrate,

Stir up the youths of Athens to merriments,

Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth,

Send melancholy out to funerals:

15

That pale fellow is not for our feast.

*Exit PHILOSTRATE*

Hippolyta, I wooed you with my sword,

And won your love by warfare:

But I'll wed you to a different tune,

With splendor, celebration, and grand display.

20

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*Enter EGEUS, with his daughter HERMIA, followed by LYSANDER  
and DEMETRIUS*

EGEUS Happy be Theseus, our renowned Duke!

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

EGEUS Full of vexation come I, with complaint

Against my child, my daughter Hermia.

Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,

25

This man hath my consent to marry her.

Stand forth, Lysander. And, my gracious Duke,

This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child.

Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,

And interchanged love-tokens with my child:

30

Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,

With feigning voice, verses of feigning love:

And stolen the impression of her fantasy

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

Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats, messengers

35

Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth.

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

40

Consent to marry with Demetrius,

I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:

As she is mine, I may dispose of her,

Which shall be either to this gentleman,

Or to her death; according to our law

45

Immediately provided in that case.

Act One, Scene 1

*Enter EGEUS, pulling along his daughter HERMIA by the arm, followed by*

*LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS*

EGEUS Much happiness to you, honored Duke Theseus.

THESEUS Thanks, good Egeus, how are you?

EGEUS I come here with anger to complain

About my child, my daughter Hermia.

Step forward, Demetrius. My noble lord, 25

This man has my consent to marry her.

Step forward, Lysander. And, my gracious Duke,

This man has stolen the heart of my child.

You, you, Lysander, you have given her poems,

And interchanged love tokens with my child, 30

You've serenaded her by moonlight at her window

With a false voice, singing phony love songs

And slyly stamped yourself on her imagination

With bracelets of your hair, rings, toys, fanciful trifles,

Knickknacks, novelties, flowers, candy—strong 35

Persuaders to an inexperienced young girl.

With your cleverness you have stolen my daughter's heart,

Turned the obedience, which she owes me,

To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,

If she will not here before your Grace 40

Consent to marry Demetrius,

I ask for the ancient privilege of Athens:

As she is mine, I may decide her fate,

Which shall be either to marry Demetrius

Or be put to death, according to the law 45

That applies in such cases.



## Act Two

**Scene 1** [*The palace wood, a league from Athens*]

*Enter* PUCK (ROBIN GOODFELLOW) *and a* FAIRY

PUCK How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

FAIRY Over hill, over dale,

Thorough bush, thorough briar,

Over park, over pale,

Thorough flood, thorough fire,

5

I do wander everywhere,

Swifter than the moon's sphere,

And I serve the Fairy Queen,

To dew her orbs upon the green.

The cowslips tall her pensioners be;

10

In their gold coats spots you see;

Those be rubies, fairy favors:

In those freckles live their savors.

I must go seek some dewdrops here,

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

15

Farewell, thou lob of spirits: I'll be gone.

Our queen and all her elves come here anon.

PUCK The King doth keep his revels here tonight.

Take heed the Queen come not within his sight,

For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,

20

Because that she as her attendant hath

A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king.

She never had so sweet a changeling,

## Act Two

**Scene 1** [*The palace wood, a league from Athens*]

*Enter* PUCK (ROBIN GOODFELLOW) *and a* FAIRY

PUCK Hey, spirit! Where are you going?

FAIRY Over hill, over dale,

Through bush, through briar,

Over park, over rail,

Through flood, through fire,

5

I do wander everywhere,

Swifter than the moon's sphere,

And I serve the Fairy Queen,

By dewing fairy rings upon the green.

The tall cowslips her bodyguards be;

10

In their gold coats the spots you see

Are rubies, fairy presents;

In those spots live their sweet scents.

I must go seek some dewdrops here,

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

15

Farewell, you clumsy clown; I'll disappear.

Our Queen and all her elves will soon be here.

PUCK The King will have his frolics here tonight.

Be sure the Queen doesn't come within his sight.

For Oberon is both fierce and wrathful

20

That she has as an attendant faithful—

A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king.

She never had so sweet a changeling.

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And jealous Oberon would have the child  
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild; 25  
But she, perforce, withholds the loved boy,  
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.  
And now they never meet in grove or green,  
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,  
But they do square, that all their elves, for fear, 30  
Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

FAIRY Either I mistake your shape and making quite  
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite  
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he  
That frights the maidens of the villagery, 35  
Skim milk, and sometimes labor in the quern,  
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,  
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm,  
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?  
Those that "Hobgoblin" call you and "Sweet Puck," 40  
You do their work, and they shall have good luck.  
Are not you he?

PUCK Thou speakest aright;  
I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile 45  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;  
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl  
In very likeness of a roasted crab,  
And, when she drinks, against her lips I bob, 50  
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.  
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,

Act Two, Scene 1

And jealous Oberon now wants the child  
As his own attendant, to range the forest wild. 25  
But she insists on keeping the boy,  
Crowns him with flowers; he's her joy.  
So now they never meet in grove or green,  
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,  
Without a fight—and all their elves, for fear, 30  
Creep into acorn cups and hide in there.

FAIRY Either I mistake your shape and features quite  
Or else you are that clever roguish sprite  
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are you not he  
Who frightens maidens in the villagery? 35  
You steal the cream and work the corn mill  
So the breathless housewife labors for nil,  
And sometimes you make sure the beer yeast fails,  
Mislead night wanderers and laugh at their wails?  
Some call you "Hobgoblin" and "Sweet Puck," 40  
For you do their work and bring them good luck.  
Aren't you he?

PUCK You have it right;  
I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
I joke with Oberon and make him smile 45  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
By neighing like a young female foal;  
And sometimes I hide in a gossips' bowl,  
In the very likeness of a roasted apple,  
And when she drinks with it she'll grapple, 50  
And on her withered chin spill the ale.  
The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale

# Glossary

The following terms are taken from the translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The scene and line numbers are given in parentheses after the terms, which are listed in the order they first occur.

## Act One

**Athens** (scene 1, scene description): the capital and cultural center of Greece, named for the goddess Athena

**Theseus** (scene 1, line 1): Duke of Athens, a hero of ancient Greek legend, described as the son of Poseidon

**Hippolyta** (scene 1, line 1): a queen of the Amazons, a mythical race of women warriors; she was captured by Theseus

**Diana** (scene 1, line 91): the moon goddess and a symbol of chastity

**first of May** (scene 1, line 169): May Day, a celebration at the start of spring

**Cupid** (scene 1, line 172): the son of Venus and the god of love; he is pictured as a child, blindfolded, holding a bow and arrows

**Venus** (scene 1, line 174): the goddess of love and beauty

**Dido** (scene 1, line 176): Queen of Carthage, deserted by Aeneas

**Aeneas** (scene 1, line 177): Trojan hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*, legendary founder of Rome

**Pyramus and Thisbe** (scene 2, line 11): tragic lovers in an episode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

**Hercules** (scene 2, line 24): the son of Zeus and Alcmene; a hero of extraordinary strength, he performed twelve seemingly impossible tasks demanded by Zeus' wife Hera

**Phoebus' car** (scene 2, line 30): the chariot of the sun god, Phoebus Apollo

**bellows-mender** (scene 2, line 36): worker who repairs the apparatus used to draw air through a valve to encourage a fire or to produce music in an organ

**tinker** (scene 2, line 55): a mender of pots and pans

**joiner** (scene 2, line 58): a cabinet maker

**French-crown-color** (scene 2, line 86): golden

## Glossary

### Act Two

**Puck** (scene 1, line 1): a mischievous sprite or goblin

**fairy rings** (scene 1, line 9): circles of darker grass in a field, thought to be the dancing ground of fairies

**changeling** (scene 1, line 23): usually, a child left in place of a baby kidnapped by fairies; here it refers to the stolen child

**Amazon** (scene 1, line 71): a member of a mythical tribe of warrior women; here refers to Hippolyta

**Perigenia...Aegle...Ariadne...Antiope** (scene 1, lines 79-81): lovers whom Theseus betrayed and deserted

**morris board** (scene 1, line 99): an area of grass marked out in squares for a popular country game called nine men's morris

**Apollo...Daphne** (scene 1, line 235): in the story as told by Ovid, the sun god Apollo pursued Daphne who, to escape him, changed into a laurel tree

**Philomel** (scene 2, line 13): a name for the nightingale, derived from the girl in Greek mythology who had once been changed into a bird

### Act Three

**Ninus' tomb** (scene 1, line 90): according to Ovid's version of the story, the meeting place of Pyramus and Thisbe; Ninus was the legendary founder of the city of Nineveh

**cuckoo** (scene 1, line 131): the cry of the cuckoo bird is said to be close to the word *cuckold* and therefore a mocking of men with unfaithful wives

**Ethiop** (scene 2, line 261): a dark-skinned African

**Aurora's mate** (scene 2, line 405): Cephalus, beloved of Aurora, goddess of the dawn, and a famous hunter with whom Oberon chased game

### Act Four

**tongs and the bones** (scene 1, line 29): primitive musical instruments used in rural areas

**Cadmus** (scene 1, line 114): legendary founder of the city of Thebes