

A NOISE WITHIN SPRING 2021

STUDY GUIDE

William Shakespeare's

# A Midsummer Night's Dream

April 4-May 16, 2021





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*All the best,*

Alicia Green  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION



Pictured: Carolyn Ratteray, Evan Lewis Smith, and Veralyn Jones, *Gem of the Ocean* 2019. PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

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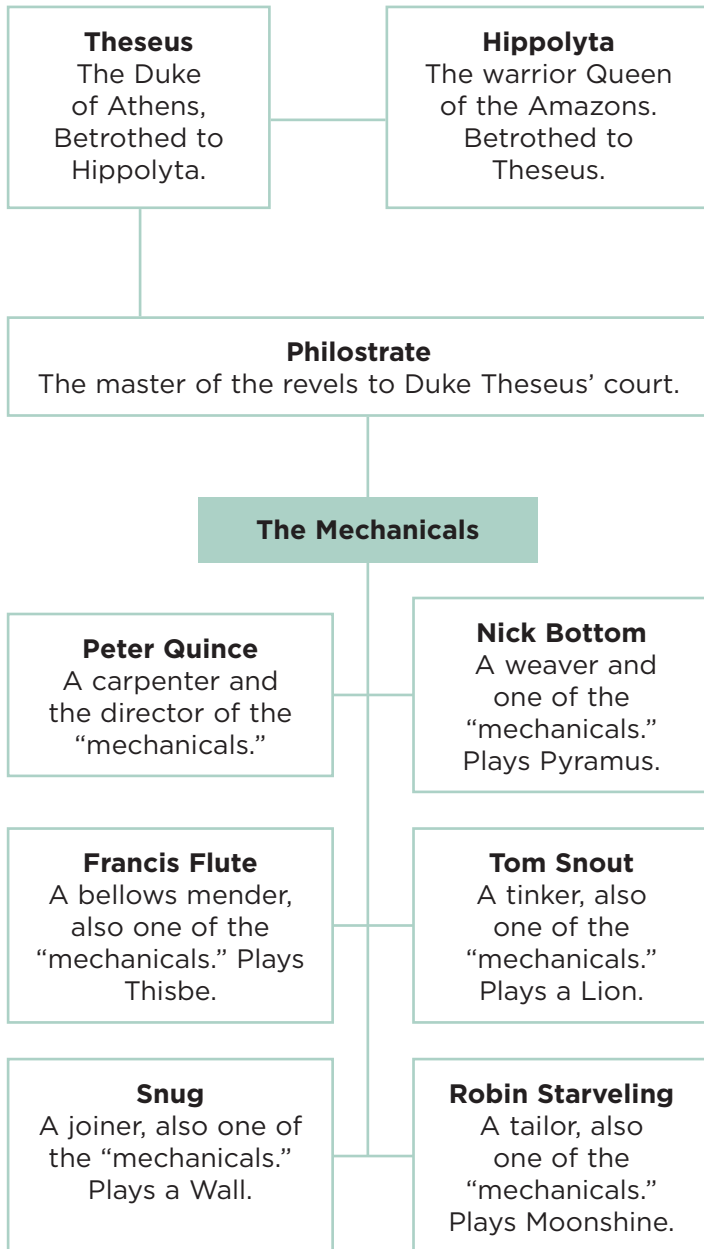
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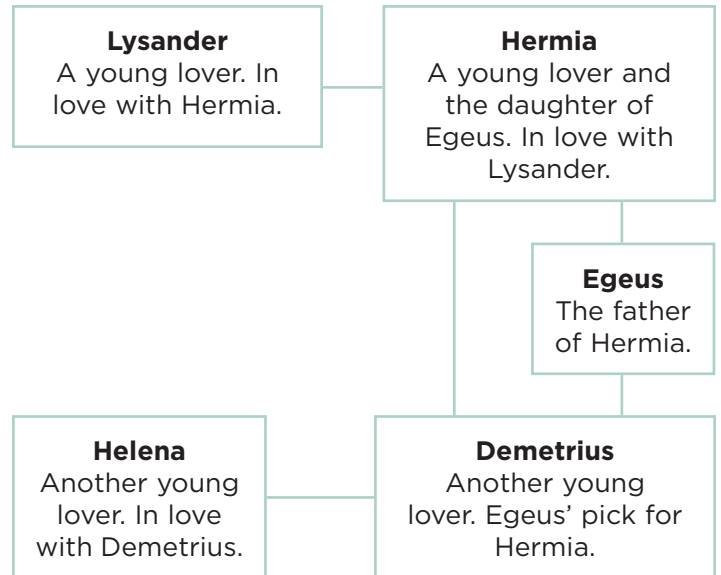
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# CHARACTER MAP

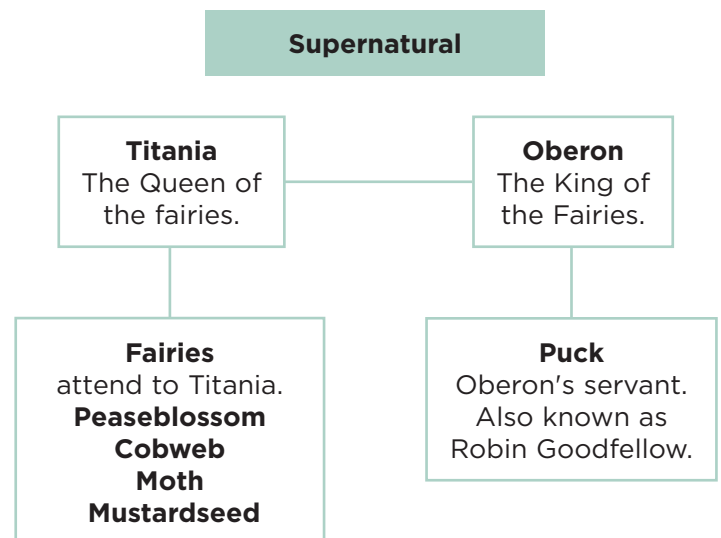
## ATHENIAN COURT



## THE LOVERS



## THE FAIRIES





## SYNOPSIS

**Theseus, Duke of Athens**, after conquering the warrior Amazons in battle, is in turn conquered by the charms of their Queen, Hippolyta, and they are now planning to marry. To speed the time until their wedding night, Theseus orders amusements to be staged. In the spirit of loyalty, Bottom the weaver and other tradesmen decide to prepare a play for the Duke and Queen.

The preparations are interrupted by Egeus, an Athenian, who brings his daughter, Hermia, and her two suitors before Theseus, entreating him to command Hermia to wed Demetrius.

Hermia begs to be allowed to marry Lysander, whom she loves. Theseus orders Hermia to obey her father under penalty of death or confinement in a convent. Hermia and Lysander, thinking that the decree is too harsh, agree to secretly meet in a nearby forest and escape to another city. They tell their plans to Helena, the former lover of Demetrius who still dotes on him. To win back his love, Helena informs Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's escape plan.

Meanwhile, in the forest, the fairy king and queen, Oberon and Titania, are at odds. Out of spite, Oberon asks Puck to obtain a special love potion to pour on Titania's sleeping eyes. This will cause her to love the first thing she sees upon waking. Just then, Oberon sees Demetrius looking for the meeting place chosen by Hermia and Lysander. Instead, much to his distaste, Demetrius meets Helena. Upon seeing Helena's distress from being rejected by Demetrius yet again, Oberon asks Puck to smear Demetrius' eyes with the love potion so that he may love Helena. But, when Lysander and Hermia arrive, Puck mistakenly smears Lysander's eyes with the love potion, and, as Helena wanders by, Lysander falls in love with her and abandons Hermia.

This same enchanted spot in the forest is the place selected by Bottom and his company of tradesmen for the final rehearsal of their play. The mischievous Puck magically crowns Bottom with the head of an ass, which terrifies the other players into running away. Puck takes Bottom near Titania, who awakes and gazes upon this human-turned-ass, falling instantly in love.



*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Robert Fowler, c.1900

The four lovers are greatly confused. Oberon finds that Puck put the potion on Lysander's eyes and not Demetrius', so Oberon uses another potion on Demetrius. When Demetrius wakes up, he sees the neglected Helena being wooed by Lysander. His own love for her returns, and he is ready to fight Lysander to win back the love of Helena. Helena, having been so often rejected, thinks that both men are mocking her, and Hermia is dazed by the rejection of her lover, Lysander. Puck prevents conflict by causing the four to wander around in the dark forest until they tire and fall asleep. Puck corrects his mistake by smearing Lysander's eyes to undo the love potion. This way, when everyone wakes up, Lysander will love Hermia and Demetrius will love Helena.

Titania entertains Bottom as her true love until Oberon, whose anger has cooled, removes the spell from her eyes. Bottom is restored to his human form and rejoins his friends in Athens. On an early morning hunting trip, Theseus comes upon the four lovers in the forest. When all is explained, Theseus withdraws his order to Hermia and grants permission for her to marry Lysander, also allowing Helena to marry Demetrius.

A wedding feast for all three couples is spread at the Duke's palace. Bottom's acting troupe comes to the wedding feast and presents the "comic" tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe, which is performed in a wondrous and hilarious style. After the company retires for the night, the fairies dance through the palace to spread blessings and goodwill on the three couples. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

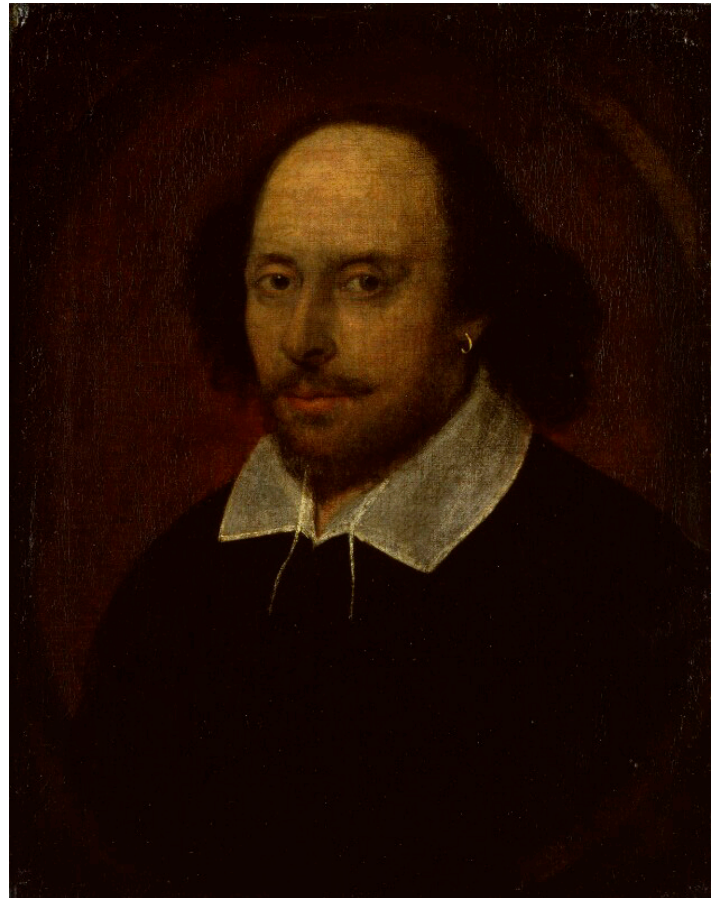
**William Shakespeare**, a poet, playwright, and actor, was born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. While Shakespeare's plays and poetry have endured the test of time and are among the most well-known works in Western literature, very little documentation of Shakespeare's life exists beyond public records of his birth, death, marriage, and financial transactions.

Shakespeare's education began at home. The fact that Shakespeare's mother was the executor of her father's will suggests that she was literate. Shakespeare would have grown up hearing fairytales and fables from his parents. He would have learned to read the Bible at home. In addition to his home education, Shakespeare most likely attended the King's New School, a grammar school in Stratford, where his studies would have been almost exclusively in Latin.

When Shakespeare was 18, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 years old. The two had a rushed marriage because Anne was already pregnant at the time of the wedding. The couple welcomed their first child, Susanna, six months after the ceremony. Anne later gave birth to twins Hamnet and Judith; however, Hamnet died when he was just eleven years old.

From 1585 to 1591, not much is known about Shakespeare's life, with this period often referred to as the "lost years." However, it is clear that he moved to London to pursue theatre at some point during this time (probably around 1587). In 1592, Shakespeare had established his reputation as an actor and playwright in London. In that same year, it is believed that the Lord Strange's Men, a prominent acting company at the time, performed one of Shakespeare's plays—most likely *Henry VI, Part I*. Shakespeare later became an original member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the two theatrical companies legally approved to perform within London city limits at the time. During his time as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare wrote many of his best known works.

In 1599, Shakespeare became the chief shareholder of the Globe Theatre, a newly built performance space in London. His plays were regularly performed there until 1613, when a fire that began during a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* burned the theatre down. The Globe was rebuilt by 1614 but was destroyed again in 1644, two years after the Puritan English government closed all theatres.



*William Shakespeare associated with John Taylor, c. 1600-1610.*

Over the course of about twenty years, Shakespeare created a staggering body of work including 154 sonnets, 3 narrative poems, and 38 plays that continue to be performed around the world today. Sometime between 1610 and 1612, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, where he died in 1616 at the age of 52. It is believed that he died on the same day he was born, April 23rd. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon. ♦



## TIMELINE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

- 1564** William Shakespeare is born on April 23 in Stratford-upon-Avon to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden.
- 1582** William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. Their marriage license is issued on November 27<sup>th</sup>.
- 1583** Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, is born in May, just six months after the wedding of Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. Susanna is baptized on May 26<sup>th</sup>.
- 1585** Anne Hathaway gives birth to twins Hamnet and Judith. They are baptized on February 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- 1585-1591** "The Lost Years." No records of Shakespeare's life during this period exist. At some point, he moves to London.
- 1590-1592** Shakespeare begins to write plays during this time. His earliest works are *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Richard III*. The exact dates these plays were written and first performed is unknown.
- 1592** While it is unclear when Shakespeare left Stratford-upon-Avon, by this time, Shakespeare has established a reputation in London as an actor and a playwright. A plague breaks out in London and theatres are closed.
- 1593** Shakespeare writes *Venus and Adonis*, a long, narrative poem based on Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
- 1594** Theatres re-open after the plague. Shakespeare becomes a founding member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men. *The Comedy of Errors* is performed for the first time.



*The Original Globe Theatre, artist unknown.*

- 1596** Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies at age 11.
- 1599** The Globe Theatre opens in London. Shakespeare becomes a shareholder of the theatre.
- 1600-1610** Shakespeare writes several of his most prolific tragedies including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*.
- 1603** Queen Elizabeth I dies and King James I ascends the throne. He becomes the patron of Shakespeare's theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, who change the name of their company to The King's Men in honor of King James I.
- 1604** Shakespeare writes *Othello*, which is performed for the first time in court on November 1<sup>st</sup> by The King's Men. Richard Burbage—the leading actor of the company—originates the role of Othello, presumably wearing blackface makeup to indicate Othello's race.
- 1609** Shakespeare's sonnets are published. Shakespeare is believed to have written the sonnets at some point during the 1590s.
- 1613** The Globe Theatre burns down during the first performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.
- 1614** The Globe Theatre is rebuilt.
- 1616** Shakespeare dies at the age of 52 in Stratford-upon-Avon. It is believed he died on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity.
- 1623** John Heminges and Henry Condell collect and publish Shakespeare's plays in *Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*. This publication is also known as The First Folio.



Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT: **ELIZABETHAN SOCIETY**

### Social Structure

Shakespeare was a prominent playwright during the late Elizabethan Era. This historical era began in 1558, when Queen Elizabeth I became the ruling monarch of England. The structure of English society during this period was rigid and provided little opportunity for social mobility for members of lower classes. Opportunities for social advancement for women and people of color were even more limited.

In Elizabethan society, a person's birth often determined their social status. The tiers of Elizabethan social structure can be broken down as follows from highest to lowest status:

- The Queen
- The Court
  - Made up of the English Nobility
- Merchants
  - Tradespeople with limited royal connections. Individuals in this social class often took positions in town councils and local government.
- Livery Companies
  - Institutions that controlled what was bought and sold. Companies specialized in certain products such as wine, cloth, and jewelry.
- Apprentices
  - Young men who paid workers in Livery Companies in exchange for experience learning trades.
- The Poor
  - The lowest status of citizen. By 1569, a welfare system was in place in the City of London to help the able poor find food and work.

### Women in Elizabethan England

While Queen Elizabeth I famously decided not to marry, instead ruling England as the sole monarch, women in Elizabethan England at large were not granted the same liberties as men of the time. For example, women were only able to inherit property under rare circumstances, such as being a widow or an only child; however, they could never inherit their father's titles. Any property belonging to a woman's family would be passed down to the family's eldest son. A woman's financial status and stability depended entirely on the men in her life. In childhood and adolescence, girls depended on their fathers for financial backing, and in marriage, women depended on their husbands. While girls were able to attend grammar school, they were not allowed to attend university. Much of a young woman's education centered on how she might be a proper wife.

### Arranged Marriages in Elizabethan England

As mentioned above, women in Elizabethan England were treated as property. Marriage was the way that women were moved from the control of their father to their husbands. Marriage was often arranged so that both families would benefit, socially and/or financially. Often, the couples met for the first time on their wedding day. ♦

Edited from:

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/the-social-structure-in-elizabethan-england>

<https://www.elizabethi.org/contents/women/>



# LOVE TROUBLE: THE LIGHT AND DARK OF A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

CHARLES ISHERWOOD | THE NEW YORK TIMES

It should not be strange to encounter any of Shakespeare's plays at any time of the year, so firmly ensconced are they in the canon. And yet there's something a little startling in the arrival of a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" opening in November, as Julie Taymor's upcoming production at Theater for a New Audience will. The play is among Shakespeare's most beloved and most frequently produced, but it has mostly become a rite of summer, often performed outdoors, with picnickers sharing bottles of wine and children romping on grass.

The title, naturally, has something to do with the play's usually being relegated to the sticky months. But "Dream" is also one of the most surefire comedies ever written, and it features not one, not two, not three, but four journeys (of sorts) ending in lovers' meeting. Shakespeare comedies often conclude with nuptials in the offing, but this play offers a stage full of contented lovers, gathering to watch a hilariously amateurish enactment of a love story—the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe—that ends rather more unhappily.

That scene is among the most reliably hilarious in any Shakespeare play, and so is the scene in which Lysander and Demetrius, now both passionately declaring their love for a bewildered Helena, are joined by a dumbfounded Hermia, and a four-way game of verbal fisticuffs ensues. These passages rarely fail to engender merriment, which is another reason why "Dream" has become so popular: it's the rare production, amateur or professional, that doesn't nail at least these bits.

Plus: fairies flitting around the stage, the wonderfully dopey Bottom, perhaps the greatest of Shakespeare's comic doofuses, and a fairly breezy running time.

But what struck me most upon a recent re-reading of the play was not the dizzy joyousness of its



*Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing* by William Blake, c. 1786

comedy, and the sunlit ending, but instead the darkness from which all this benevolence emerges. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" may have earned its high berth on the Shakespeare hit parade because it's a bundle of high-spirited hijinks, but its view of love—the primary theme of the play—is decidedly divided. I noticed, among other things, how variations on the word "hate" recurs with startling frequency, and how each of the four romances depicted is shadowed by moments of betrayal, cruelty, deception—or worse.

Consider the often-breezed-by opening moments, in which Theseus, the Duke of Athens, and his beloved Hippolyta, are preparing for their nuptial festivities. Rather bluntly, in what is just his second speech, Theseus recalls, "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword, and won thy love doing thee injuries." (Some versions of the story have Theseus capturing Hippolyta while waging war on the Amazons.)

Yikes! Not exactly what you'd expect a fellow to bring up during the wedding planning. Of course his next lines are a gallant vow to wed her in "another key," but the strange note of violence between men and women that has been so quickly struck will recur again and again throughout the play.

## LOVE TROUBLE CONTINUED...

It is only moments later, in fact, that Theseus is threatening a young woman with death, when Egeus comes to the Duke to demand that his daughter Hermia obey his wish that she marry Demetrius, a desire she insists on flouting due to her love for Lysander.

Love, it appears in this most love-struck play, can get you in deep, potentially fatal trouble. As in much of Shakespeare, the human heart and its movements are depicted as arbitrary, fickle, unreasonable and prey to outside influences. But few of his works offer as many and as memorable examples of the manner in which love can go awry.

In the realm of the fairies, too, love is inconsistent and inspires brutality when it is thwarted. The fairy king and queen, Oberon and Titania, are already mid-quarrel when they arrive on the scene. The primary beef between them is Oberon's rather arbitrary demand that Titania hand over one of her young attendants. The boy means much to her—in a moving, lyrical speech she describes how his mother, a great friend, died in childbirth—but Oberon's insistence on being given the “changeling boy” seems motivated only by a desire to assert his power.

And of course the method by which Oberon punishes Titania for her refusal to grant his whim—by bewitching her into making love to an ass—is peculiarly perverse and humiliating (albeit, of course, very funny).

While you might chalk up the discord in these relationships to the usual spats between long-partnered adults, the play shows that young lovers can be equally wanton in their loves, equally brutal in their passions. An uncomfortable note of humiliation is struck again when Helena pleads to Demetrius, “Use me but as your spaniel—spurn me, strike me.” He'll have none of that, even: “For I am sick when I do look on thee.”

Small wonder, then, that when Lysander and Demetrius, under the influence of that fairy dust, both suddenly switch their amorous desires from Hermia to Helena, Helena believes their oaths of love are cruel jokes. “Can you not hate me, as I know you do,” she wails, “but you must join in souls to mock me, too?”

In the playing, of course, much of the venomousness comes across—as it should—as hyperbolic, and therefore comic. And it's of course true that Titania, Lysander, and Demetrius have all been led into their romantic follies not by the yearnings of their own

hearts, but by the manipulations of magic.

After the young lovers have been put to sleep and the proper love matches made by another sprinkling of the magic potion, Oberon says, “When they next wake, all this derision shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,” and so of course it does. The play's last two acts enact a reconciliation between all the warring lovers, and the fatal follies of love are merrily mocked when the Rude Mechanicals make such a delightful hash of the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe.

The genre of romantic comedy would not, of course, exist if the progress of love were depicted without a few speed bumps along the road; the speed bumps supply the jokes. But seeing “Romeo and Juliet” and “Midsummer Night's Dream” in close proximity, illuminates how differently love is depicted in both plays (despite their being written in close proximity).

In the tragedy, love is depicted as an ennobling emotion, one that brings Romeo and Juliet to a sudden maturity and inspires them to flights of superlative lyricism. Their love is pure and uninflected by doubt, thwarted only by outside circumstances and the enmity between their families.

In the comedy, by contrast, the lovers spend as much time warring with each other as they do offering lyric speeches of devotion. (Actually, the play is rather short on those). Love is depicted as a volatile thing, a source of confusion and contrariness as much as harmony.

It's only after many trials have been endured—and the female characters, in particular, have been subject to considerable amounts of humiliation and abuse—that the men and women of “Midsummer Night's Dream” can rest easily in the arms of their romantic partners. Or should I make that uneasily? ♦

Edited from:

Isherwood, Charles. “Love Trouble: The Light and Dark of ‘A Midsummer Night's Dream’.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 31 Oct. 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/10/31/theater/the-light-and-dark-of-a-midsummer-nights-dream.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/31/theater/the-light-and-dark-of-a-midsummer-nights-dream.html).



## A 16TH CENTURY OVID: **THE INFLUENCE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY** ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

EMILY GRAY | INQUIRIES JOURNAL, VOL. 9

**William Shakespeare** is commonly believed to be the single greatest writer and poet of the English language, as well as one of the most distinguished and esteemed dramatists in the entire world. With the majority of the writing of his known works occurring between 1589 and 1613, both Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies were heavily influenced by the resurgence in popularity of classical mythology, particularly the works of the Roman writer Ovid that took place during the early-Elizabethan period.

Following Arthur Golding's "monumental translation" of the fifteen books comprising the *Metamorphoses* in their entirety in 1567, the English people began to regard Ovid as an unparalleled mythographer and a valuable source of literary inspiration (Roe 32). As Shakespeare's plays are fraught with mythological allusions, it is obvious that the great English playwright is no exception to this way of thinking.

The abundance of mythic allusions present in nearly all of Shakespeare's works are evidence of the continued cultural influence of Greek and Roman mythology in the period during which he wrote. At the same time, they highlight the importance of the readers' previous knowledge of classical mythology in order to fully experience Shakespeare's work. When examined with special attention to the classical mythological influence, Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* epitomizes the dynamic role of classical mythology in literature.

Believed to be written between 1590 and 1595, this play is representative of the humorous and playful treatment of mythology that characterizes Shakespeare's earlier works. Like his contemporaries, Shakespeare found in Ovid, and by extension the whole of classical mythology, a "treasure-house of fascinating stor(ies)" with previously established and easily recognizable plots and morals (Root 8). The influence of these selected allusions, although treated whimsically, adds a deeper level of meaning to an otherwise light-hearted production, while simultaneously affecting the readers' interpretation of this comedic work.

Easily the most prominent and well-developed allusion in all of Shakespeare, the presence of the rude mechanicals' version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* leads to the "delicious burlesque" of an originally somber Ovidian story (Root 11). As told in Book Four of *Metamorphoses*, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is the tragic tale of the two most beautiful



Ovid, copper engraving c. 1600

Babylonian youths who have fallen in love with each other and desire to move towards marriage. Because their fathers have forbidden their romance, the young lovers are resigned to communicating solely through the hole in their shared wall.

This separation and secrecy only makes their passions burn hotter, finally causing them to make plans to meet under cover of night outside the city. When she reaches the rendezvous point, Thisbe is frightened by a lion and drops her veil. Pyramus, seeing the blood-stained shawl lying on the ground, assumes his beloved to have been killed and commits suicide. Shortly thereafter, Thisbe returns and, finding Pyramus' corpse, follows suit and kills herself (Kline). While the gravity of this story is undeniable, Shakespeare manipulates and satirizes the same features that cast Ovid's original as a romantic tale to show the production of the tradesmen as a complete farce, thereby forcing readers to confront the wider influence that this myth wields over the remainder of the play.

Shakespeare introduces the inversion and manipulation of traditional mythology from the first moment Bottom and his fellow tradesmen begin contemplating performing a play for the Duke's upcoming wedding. When searching for a suitable drama, Peter Quince proposes that the hodgepodge troupe put on a play entitled "*The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and*

## A 16TH CENTURY OVID CONTINUED...

*Thisbe*" (1.2.8-9). This obvious combination of paradoxical adjectives in the title of the mechanicals' play can be viewed as Shakespeare's deliberate attempt to add an element of humor to the otherwise grave narrative, accordingly setting the stage for the rest of the group's equally entertaining and disastrous performance. Shakespeare goes on to include such verbal absurdities as Bottom's line, "I see a voice; now will I to the chink/ to spy an I can hear my Thisbe's face" (5.1.190-191) and his unnecessary description of the night as being "ever art when day is not" (5.1.169).

By making it impossible for Bottom and his colleagues to be taken seriously as their respective classical characters, Shakespeare forces readers to search for echoes of Ovid's classical mythology in a different source within his own play. In the gauche version of the myth presented by Bottom's ensemble of rude mechanicals, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe parodies the relationship of Lysander and Hermia. Just as Pyramus and Thisbe's youthful love has been prohibited by their fathers, Hermia's stern, controlling father, Egeus, has proscribed her from marrying her chosen suitor and is insisting that she submit to his will by marrying Demetrius (1.1.22-27).

Throughout the drama, Shakespeare's repeated and extensive incorporation of elements from classical mythology into *A Midsummer Night's Dream* adds a second level of meaning to that already present in the text of the play. By calling upon iconic characters from antiquity in the forms of Theseus and Hippolyta, Shakespeare is able to successfully invoke the influence of these characters' respective and entangled myths to not only give readers a truer sense of his own characters, but also to provide context for their actions within the comedy.

Through his inclusion of the distorted and caricatured telling of Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe, the playwright requires readers to look elsewhere for the gravitas traditionally associated with this tragic tale. In doing so, Shakespeare lends a sense of seriousness and legitimacy to his account of the relationship between Lysander and Hermia that would otherwise be overshadowed by the lunacy and hilarity of their misadventures in the woods. Ultimately, the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* over the writings of Shakespeare is neither confined to his casting of Theseus and Hippolyta nor to the theme of young love depicted by Hermia and Lysander but is felt, albeit in varying degrees of significance and strength, over the course of the



*Pyramus and Thisbe* by Lucas van Leyden, 1514



*Scene from A Midsummer Night's Dream Titania and Bottom* by Edwin Landseer, c. 1960

entire play. ♦

Edited from:

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## THEMES AND MOTIFS

Theme refers to the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The principal themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are: The Difficulties of Love • Magic • Dreams • Order and Disorder • Jealousy

### THE DIFFICULTIES OF LOVE

The most apparent example of the difficulties of love is the plight of Hermia and Lysander. Indeed, Lysander and Hermia discuss the problem in Act I, Scene I, when Lysander remarks:

The course of true love never did run smooth

But there is also potential trouble between Theseus and Hippolyta, the soon-to-be-married Duke of Athens and Queen of the Amazons. This courtship was unconventional, to say the least, since Hippolyta became the intended bride of the Duke only after he defeated her in battle and took her from her homeland. While Theseus states:

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 reveling.  
—Theseus, Act I, Scene I

We never hear Hippolyta's answer due to the entrance of Egeus stating his problems with Hermia and Lysander.

And let us not forget the other couple made unhappy due to the conflict raised by Egeus. Hermia has been promised to Demetrius, who dotes on her. But, Hermia's friend—Helena—also dotes on Demetrius, who had once pledged his love to her before he fell in love with Hermia and won Egeus' approval to marry her.

The last illustration of the difficulties of love is within the fairy community where Oberon and his wife Titania are fighting and estranged. The wrongs and accusations that are talked about between the two seem to be many, but the major conflict in the action of the play has to do with a changeling boy whom Titania has and whom Oberon wants.

### MAGIC

There is magic afoot in the Fairy Kingdom. Oberon wishes to make use of his magic to torment Titania for the injuries she has done him in denying his request for the changeling child and for reconciliation.

Oberon sends Puck, his servant, to find a certain flower which was struck by Cupid's arrow:

The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid  
Will make man or woman madly dote  
Upon the next live creature that it sees.  
—Oberon, Act II, Scene I

While Oberon is planning to use this magic to get revenge on Titania, he overhears a conflict between Helena and Demetrius, during which Helena pledges her love and Demetrius begs her to leave him alone to pursue Hermia. Oberon unintentionally complicates the human plot by commanding Puck to

Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove.  
A sweet Athenian lady is in love  
With a disdainful youth. Anoint his eyes;  
But do it when the next thing he espies  
May be the lady. Thou shalt know the man  
By the Athenian garments he hath on.  
Effect it with some care, that he may prove  
More fond on her than she upon her love.  
—Oberon, Act II, Scene I

Puck also uses his magic to transform Bottom, an actor in the play within the play—which will be performed for the Duke's marriage celebration—giving him the head of an ass. As a combination of this magic and Oberon spreading the magic potion on Titania's eyes, Bottom becomes the creature most beloved of Titania as the fairy queen awakes.

### DREAMS

The contrasting of dream and reality in Shakespeare's world is clear in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the forest world there are dreams abound and reality is suspended as Oberon and Puck begin to influence the behavior of the Athenians, Helena, Lysander, Hermia, and Demetrius.

## THEMES AND MOTIFS CONTINUED...

They all fall asleep in the forest and Puck influences the behavior of Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius. Hermia awakes, deserted by the others, and declares:

Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best  
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!  
Aye me, for pity! What a dream was here!  
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.  
Methought a serpent eat my heart away,  
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.

—Hermia Act II, Scene II

Indeed, the dream reflects the reality of Lysander's transferred affections, thanks to Puck's magic.

Titania awakes from her potion-induced "dream" believing she has been

Enamored of an ass  
— Titania, Act IV, Scene I

which has indeed been the case as she doted on Bottom, transformed by Puck. And leaving no doubt, Puck ends the plays by cautioning:

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear,  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding than a dream,  
Gentles, do not reprehend,  
If you pardon we will mend.

—Puck, Act V, Scene I

### ORDER AND DISORDER

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* also deals with the theme of order and disorder. Egeus' family is threatened by his daughter's wishes to marry against his will; however, the social order of the state demands that a father's will should be enforced. When the city dwellers find themselves in the wood, away from their ordered and hierarchical society, order breaks down and relationships are fragmented. Puck aided in this disorder when he put the love potion on the incorrect people. The relationships, however, are soon rebuilt in the free atmosphere of the wood before the characters return to society.

The order of nature is also broken and restored within the Fairy's realm. The argument between the Fairy King and Queen result in the order of the seasons being disrupted:

The spring, the summer,  
The chiding autumn, angry winter change  
Their wonted liveries, and the mazèd world  
By their increase knows not which is which.

— Titania, Act II, Scene I

Only after Oberon and Titania's reconciliation can all of this be made right. Without the restoration of natural order, the happiness of the play's ending could not be complete.

### JEALOUSY

The theme of jealousy is most notable between the four lovers. In the beginning of the play, Helena becomes jealous of Hermia because she manages to gain the affection of both Lysander and Demetrius, while Helena is in love with Demetrius. Demetrius is then jealous of Lysander, whom Hermia is in love with. When the love potion makes Lysander fall for Helena, Hermia falls into her own jealous rage.

Jealousy is also present in the fairy world. In Act II, we learn that King Oberon and Queen Titania have fallen in love with Hippolyta and Theseus, respectively. They both accuse each other of loving another person:

**Titania:**

But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,  
Your buskined mistress and your warrior love,

**Oberon:**

How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,  
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?

—Act II, Scene I

This ends with Oberon commanding Puck to cast a love potion on Titania so that she falls back in love with him. This is the catalyst for the rest of the chaos.

### For Discussion:

Have students follow the five themes throughout the play as they read the text, to determine where the themes intersect and where they become confused.

Ask students to determine which, if any, is the main theme and which are the sub-themes. When



## THEMES AND MOTIFS CONTINUED...

are the themes used to move the action along and when are they actual pieces of the storyline which are necessary for our understanding of the tale Shakespeare is telling? ♦

The discussion points suggested here relate to the English-Language Arts Content Standards Grades Nine & Ten, Sections 3.0 Literary Response and Analysis and 3.1 Structural Features of Literature.

## VERSE AND PROSE

### VERSE is language with a set rhythm.

The majority of Shakespeare's plays are written in verse for two primary reasons: tradition and memorization. Since the beginning of theatre, plays had been written in verse, and verse is easier to memorize than prose. Shakespeare was one of the first playwrights to utilize both prose and verse when it suited him. Shakespeare used verse to denote members of the nobility and the upper class.

Shakespeare used a verse form called blank verse. While blank verse does not contain rhyme, each line has an internal rhythm and a regular rhyme pattern, like a heartbeat.

Shakespeare is known for utilizing iambic pentameter. An iamb is a poetic foot with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. A pentameter means that there are five feet in a line. An iambic pentameter is then five iambs, forming a ten syllable line with a total of five stressed and five unstressed syllables per line.

#### Verse Example

##### Lysander:

One turf shall serve as pillow for us both;  
One heart, one bed, two bosoms, and one troth.

##### Hermia:

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

—Act II, Scene II

One **turf** shall **serve** as **pil** low **for** us **both**  
One **heart**, one **bed**, two **bo** soms, **and** one **truth**

\*In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the lovers talk to one another in rhyming couplets. When Hermia speaks to her father or Theseus, she does not speak in rhymes.



### PROSE is language without a set rhythm or structure.

Prose is the form used by the common citizens in Shakespearean drama. There is no rhythm or meter in the line. It is everyday language that Shakespeare's audience would recognize as their own language. In Shakespeare's plays, prose is rarely used by nobility or members of the royal family. Prose is what someone speaks when they are reading aloud or when they are crazy or acting crazy.

#### Prose Example

##### Bottom:

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

##### Quince:

Why, what you will.

##### Bottom:

I will discharge it in either your straw-color beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-color beard, your perfit yellow.

—Act I, Scene II

\*note that all of the Mechanicals speak in prose

*The following expressions are a result of William Shakespeare's creativity with words.  
You may have heard some of them used. Or perhaps you have used them yourself.*

make a virtue of necessity  
tower of strength  
elbow room  
merry as the day is long  
vanish into thin air  
for goodness sake  
my own flesh and blood  
what the dickens  
foul play  
not a mouse stirring  
without rhyme or reason

[illegible]



## WORDS COINED BY SHAKESPEARE

### **Accused**—*Richard II*, Act I, Scene I

How Shakespeare used it: the person being charged with a crime or offense. This is the word's first known use as a noun. In this case, Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray are the accuser and the accused. Bolingbroke (the accuser) argues that Thomas Mowbray (the accused) is "a traitor and a miscreant."

"Then call them to our presence; face to face,  
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear  
The accuser and the accused freely speak:  
High-stomach'd are they both, and full of ire,  
In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire."  
—King Richard II

Modern definition: someone charged with a crime or offense (particularly relating to a criminal case).

### **Addiction**—*Othello*, Act II, Scene II

How Shakespeare used it: meaning a strong preference for or inclination towards something. The herald encourages everyone to take pleasure in whatever most delights them or in whatever they are most inclined towards (their addictions).

"It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him."  
—Herald

Modern definition: noun—an intense and destructive need to have or do something excessively.

### **Assassination**—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene VII

How Shakespeare used it: The word assassin was already known, but Shakespeare used assassination to describe a murder, or deed done by an assassin. In this soliloquy, Macbeth contemplates the murder or assassination of Duncan.

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly. If the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come."  
—Macbeth

Modern definition: The act of assassinating someone, where assassinate means to kill someone who is famous or important, often for political reasons.

### **Bedazzled**—*The Taming of the Shrew*, Act IV, Scene V

"Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes, that have been so bedazzled with the sun that everything I look on seemeth green."

—Kate

### **Dwindle**—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene III

How Shakespeare used it: In this scene from *Macbeth*, the first witch tells the other two witches that she has been torturing a sailor whose wife was rude to her and explains to them how she will "drain him dry as hay" until he "dwindle, peak and pine". Dwindle in this sense is used to mean waste away.

"I myself have all the other,  
And the very ports they blow,  
All the quarters that they know  
I' th' shipman's card.  
I'll drain him dry as hay.  
Sleep shall neither night nor day

Hang upon his penthouse lid.  
He shall live a man forbid.  
Weary sev'n'nights nine times nine  
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine."  
—First Witch

Modern definition: to gradually become smaller.

### **Fashionable**—*Troilus and Cressida*, Act III, Scene III

How Shakespeare used it: Ulysses describes time through a series of metaphors and similes. One of the comparisons he makes is with a fashionable host. In this context, fashionable means a host who abides by the most current etiquette—who follows customs that are of the current fashion.

"For time is like a fashionable host that slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, and with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly, grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing."  
—Ulysses

Modern definition: Representing a popular trend or influence, particularly regarding personal styles.

### **Inaudible**—*All's Well That Ends Well*, Act V, Scene III

"Let's take the instant by the forward top; for we are old, and on our quick'st decrees the inaudible and noiseless foot of Time steals ere we can effect them."  
—King of France

## THE ART OF THE **SHAKESPEAREAN** INSULT

When we think of Shakespeare, we usually think of his plays and poetry. However, Shakespeare has also penned some of the most amazing insults. Far more interesting and colorful than the curse words we usually hear in modern conversation, the witty and acerbic Shakespearean insult is truly an art form. Next time you feel additional color is required in your conversation, try something Shakespearean! Go ahead!

Below are a few of Shakespeare's well-known insults:

"Thou art a boil, a plague sore, an embossed carbuncle in my corrupted blood."

"Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell"

"I do desire we may be better strangers"

"I am sick when I do look on thee"

"Poisonous bunch-backed toad!"

"Thou lump of foul deformity"

### ACTIVITY

Make Your Own Insult! Combine one word from each of the three columns, then preface your combination with "Thou" to create your own Shakespearean Insult!

#### COLUMN 1

Artless  
Bawdy  
Bootless  
Churlish  
Clouted  
Craven  
Currish  
Dankish  
Dissembling  
Droning  
Errant  
Fawning  
Fobbing  
Forward  
Frothy  
Gleeking  
Goatish  
Gorbellied  
Infectious  
Jarring  
Loggerheaded  
Lumpish  
Mammering  
Mangled  
Mewling  
Paunchy  
Pribbling  
Puking  
Puny  
Qualling  
Rank  
Reeky  
Roguish  
Ruttish  
Saucy  
Spleeny  
Spongy  
Surly  
Tottering  
Unmuzzled  
Vain  
Venomed  
Villainous  
Warped  
Wayward

#### COLUMN 2

Base-court  
Bat-fowling  
Beef-witted  
Beetle-headed  
Boil-brained  
Clapper-clawed  
Clay-brained  
Common-kissing  
Crook-pated  
Dismal-dreaming  
Dizzy-eyed  
Doghearted  
Dread-bolted  
Earth-vexing  
Fat-kidneyed  
Fen-sucked  
Flap-mouthed  
Fly-bitten  
Folly-fallen  
Fool-born  
Full-gorged  
Guts-gripping  
Half-faced  
Hasty-witted  
Hedge-born  
Hell-hated  
Idle-headed  
Ill-breeding  
Ill-nurtured  
Knotty-pated  
Milk-livered  
Motley-minded  
Onion-eyed  
Pottle-deep  
Pox-marked  
Reeling-ripe  
Rough-hewn  
Rude-growing  
Shard-borne  
Sheep-biting  
Spur-galled  
Swag-bellied  
Tardy-gaited  
Tickle-brained  
Toad-spotted  
Urchin-snouted

#### COLUMN 3

Apple-john  
Baggage  
Barnacle  
Bladder Boar-pig  
Bugbear Bum-bailey  
Canker-blossom  
Clack-dish  
Clotpole  
Coxcomb  
Codpiece  
Death-token  
Dewberry  
Flap-dragon  
Flax-wench  
Flirt-gill  
Foot-licker  
Fustilarian  
Giglet  
Gudgeon  
Haggard  
Harpy  
Hedge-pic  
Horn-beast  
Hugger-mugger  
Lewdster  
Lout  
Malt-worm  
Mammet  
Measle  
Minnow  
Miscreant  
Moldwarp  
Mumble-news  
Nut-hook  
Pigeon-egg  
Pignut  
Puttock  
Pumpion  
Ratsbane  
Scut  
Skainsmate  
Vassal Whey-face

## A BIG SPLASH: A CONVERSATION WITH A NOISE WITHIN'S PRODUCTION TEAM ABOUT THE POOL SET

All three of A Noise Within's Spring 2021 productions are utilizing an onstage pool as the centerpiece to their sets. Sam Sintef, A Noise Within's Production Manager and Resident Artist, and Catherine Lee, A Noise Within's Technical Assistant, discuss the thematic and practical functions of this ambitious set design.

### What history does A Noise Within have with using the same set for multiple productions?

**Sam Sintef:** A Noise Within is no stranger to producing plays that connect thematically with overlapping design concepts. 2015's *The Threepenny Opera* and *Julius Caesar* had the same backdrop constructed of industrial scaffolding. In 2017, *King Lear* and *Man of La Mancha* shared the same curved wall that was 24 ft tall and 54 ft wide. The third attempt at unifying a repertory season within a single scenic design is the most ambitious yet. The idea to have this season based around water started with Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*. Water is an integral aspect of *Metamorphoses*, and it would be nearly impossible to produce it without having a pool. Water informs the physical action of the play and reinforces the themes of transformation and rebirth. These themes are echoed in *An Iliad* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so it made poetic sense to visually unify all three productions with an interchangeable scenic design.

### How is the pool utilized from production to production?

**Sam Sintef:** Water, the most protean of the elements, already lends itself to be able to undergo transformations. It can present itself as a solid, liquid or gas. Onstage it transforms depending on which production is playing. It can be the River Styx in *Metamorphoses*, a stream in the woods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the shoreline of Troy in *An Iliad*. The pool offers new possibilities for staging and allows the actors to tap into a different kind of vulnerability. Actors are able to move in ways that would not be possible on dry land. They can float in the water, fall into the water, and of course swim. The water becomes a scene partner and is another obstacle a character must overcome to achieve their objective.

### What kind of research did you do in preparation to build the set?

**Cathy:** Once we got the announcement of what ANW was doing for the spring—that we are building a pool on stage—we knew there was a lot of research to do. There are a lot of factors we need to consider about a pool on stage, the main one being water. How do we contain the water, onstage and backstage, so that nothing gets damaged? In the house, we have the AC going, so how do we make sure the water is comfortable for the actors to be in? How do we keep the water sanitary?

Fortunately, there have been several theatres who have done the daunting task of making a pool on stage. We were able to get advice from them and we watched some of their online videos of how they did it. We also did our own research; we looked into how hot tubs function, what kind of pool equipment exists on the market, and what kind of math we need to do.

### What are some of the technical considerations of this set?

**Sam Sintef:** From a technical standpoint, there are many factors to consider with having a pool onstage. A cubic square foot of water weighs roughly 62 lbs, so when installing the pool, it is imperative to make sure the stage is properly reinforced to take the additional weight. The frame is insulated with foam to help retain heat and the pool is securely covered with pond liners to minimize leakage. The water is heated to approximately 99 degrees before every performance and is filtered to keep sanitary. Since the pool is being used for 3-4 months, we need to empty it for cleaning and re-fill it every few weeks. There are "heating stations" backstage so the actors can dry off in-between scenes, and the floor is covered with mats, so no one slips. The pool also informed how the other departments approached their designs. Costumes needed to test various fabrics to determine which can endure the cleaning chemicals used in the water. Lighting and sound had to coordinate with scenic to make sure their equipment was placed in water-safe areas. Each Stage Management team was required to be trained on pre-show and post-show procedures. Producing a single show with a pool is exceptional, but producing three productions with a pool creates an unparalleled theatrical experience.



## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **RESEARCH**

### **Purpose:**

These research prompts will help students develop an understanding of the historical and social context of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



### **Prepare:**

To prepare for seeing *Midsummer*, have students break into small groups and research the following topics, either as groups or individually. When they are finished, have students present their findings to the class.

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#### **The Elizabethan Era**

- The social structure hierarchy
- Social norms and morals
- The role of women and women's rights
- Theatre and its role in society
- Prominent theatre companies and playwrights
- Prominent political figures

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#### **Greek and Roman Mythology**

- Theseus and Hippolyta
- Zeus and Hera
- Eros and Cupid
- Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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#### **A *Midsummer Night's Dream***

- Shakespeare's source material for the play
- Performance history

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#### **Love**

- The psychology behind love and marriage
- Typical patriarchal roles

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#### **William Shakespeare**

- His life
- His work
- His legacy

## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES**

### **Purpose:**

These activities will prompt students to think critically about the themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

### REWRITE SHAKESPEARE

In this activity, students will have the opportunity to use their creative writing skills to engage with the text of *Midsummer* by translating a speech from the play into contemporary language.

- Have students read Shakespeare's *Midsummer*, or provide students with a contextual overview of the events in the play.
- Pass out the text of a speech from the play to students. Possible speeches include the following:
  - Helena's Act I, Scene I speech beginning with "How happy some o'er other some can be!..."
  - Puck's Act V, Scene I speech beginning with "If we shadows have offended..."
  - Bottom's Act IV, Scene I speech beginning with "When my cue comes call me, and I will answer..."
- Facilitate a class-wide discussion about the overarching meaning of the speech.
- After the discussion, have students break into groups, and rewrite the speech line by line using contemporary language.
- Allow students to present their translations to the class.
- Lead a discussion about the differences between Shakespeare's original text and the translations. Some questions to ask during this discussion include:
  - What is added or lost in the translations?
  - Is the meaning of the speech still clear? Is the meaning of the speech more clear?
  - How does the process of translating the text add to your understanding of the speech?

### DETECTIVE LOVE

In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore the difficulty of love in *Midsummer* by creating a visual guide to keep track of the different love triangles.

- Facilitate a class-wide discussion about love:
  - How do you define love?
  - How has the definition of love evolved?
  - What are different types of love?
  - Why is love difficult?
  - What is the psychology of love?
- Assign groups of students to each act. Have each group create a board with pictures of each character.
- After reading each act, allow students to connect the pictures of the characters with different colored strings of yarn or arrows to represent who is in love with who. Much like a crime scene investigation board.
- Allow each group to present their completed love board as if they were presenting a case. Ask students to provide reasoning of why the characters are together. Ask students to explain how Puck played a role in the relationships.

## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES** CONTINUED...

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### DREAM JOURNAL

In this activity, students will have the opportunity to discover the role that dreams play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by creating short scenes that unpack how different characters view dreams.

- Facilitate a class discussion about dreams:
  - o What is the psychology of dreams?
  - o What are different definitions of dreams?
  - o What are your dreams?
- While reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, have students notate quotes from characters when they speak about dreams in a journal.
- Allow students to also keep track of their own dreams in the journal (optional)
- After reading the play, have students choose one character and their quotes and create what they believe would be that character's dream. It can be a visual representation, a story, a monologue, a scene, etc.
- Encourage students to consider how the character views dreams. Do they see them as helpful or hurtful? Do they believe in them?
- Allow students to present their creation.

### THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore how jealousy manifests by creating a visual representation of their understanding of jealousy.

- Facilitate a class-wide discussion about jealousy:
  - o What is the definition of jealousy?
  - o What is the psychology of jealousy?
  - o What are some images that come to mind when you think of jealousy?
- After the discussion, instruct students to create an image of how they each view jealousy. This image can be hand-drawn, a collage or collection of printed images, or a combination collage-drawing.
- In creating their images, ask students to incorporate any images they believe are iconic to jealousy.
- Allow students to present their work to the class.

### TELEPHONE

In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore the speed with which information can be distorted as it is spread.

- Have students sit in a circle.
- Designate one leader. This person will come up with a phrase and then whisper that phrase to their neighbor in the circle. That person will then pass what they heard on to their neighbor.
- Each person in the circle will pass what they hear from the previous person in the circle onto the next person in the circle.
- When the phrase has made its way around the circle, the last person to hear the phrase will say what they heard.
- Often, you will discover, the phrase changes as it is passed around the circle.
- Play through these steps a few times.
- Facilitate a discussion about the tendency for information to be distorted or changed as it is passed along.



## ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. How are different aspects of love shown within the different relationship pairings in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Hermia and Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander, Oberon and Titania...
2. What is the purpose of the different settings in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Describe each setting and then choose one, such as the woods, and detail its significance.
3. Describe the parallels between Athens and the Fairy Realm. What is the significance of the fairies and magic? Why did Shakespeare introduce them into the plot?
4. To what extent does the fairies meddling in the relationships of the Athenian lovers and fairy lovers affect your idea of the relationship between love and free will?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ONLINE RESOURCES:

Folger Digital Texts' free online publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: <https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/download/pdf/MND.pdf>

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Educational Resources:

<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

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### BOOKS:

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*Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* by Stephen Greenblatt. Published by W.W. Norton in 2005.

*Beyond a Common Joy: an Introduction to Shakespearean Comedy* by Paul A. Olson. Published by University of Nebraska Press in 2009.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream: an authoritative text, sources, criticism, adaptations* by William Shakespeare and Grace Loppolo. Published by W.W. Norton in 2018.

### FILMS:

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by David Kerr (2016)

### VIDEO CLIPS:

SHAKESPEARE UNCOVERED | The Lovers Untangled in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQSr\\_SAF79A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQSr_SAF79A)

Why should you read "A Midsummer Night's Dream"? - Iseult Gillespie  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCl6o-kbqrs>



## ABOUT THEATRE ARTS: KEY THEATRICAL TERMS

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment.

In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like A Noise Within, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd.

Although playhouses in the past could sometimes be rowdy, participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance today. Shouting out (or even whispering) can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After this A Noise Within performance, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

**blocking:** The instructions a director gives actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

**character:** The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

**conflict:** The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

**dramatic irony:** A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

**genre:** Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

**motivation:** The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

**props:** Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

**proscenium stage:** There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

**set:** The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

**setting:** The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

**stage areas:** The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as they face the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as they face the audience.

**theme:** The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

**thrust stage:** A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. A Noise Within features a thrust stage.

## ABOUT A NOISE WITHIN

**A NOISE WITHIN** produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 27-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at A Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.

### Study Guides

A Noise Within creates study guides in alignment with core reading, listening, speaking, and performing arts standards to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org). The information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with the California VAPA standards, The Common Core, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of A Noise Within's artistic interpretation of the work, statements from directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

### Study Guide Credits

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