

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM **STUDY GUIDE 2014**

Welcome!

We are thrilled to have you and your family join us for this season's Portland Actor's Ensemble's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Our goal is to engage every age with the work on a variety of levels through the live performance and in this study guide to the play.

An Introduction to our Study Guide

The task of creating a study guide for any of Shakespeare's plays is difficult. How does one provide a modest resource for encountering the play without oversimplifying it? The complexity of these plays is part of what makes them so exciting and engaging, so by simplifying them, we risk robbing them of that idiosyncratic texture that can attract a wide variety of readers. At the same time it can be difficult for the modern reader to initially connect with the plays. This study guide, instead of simplifying Shakespeare's complex play, intentionally seeks to provide points of connection, to point out some rough edges and fissures. We hope these pages will consequently inspire, provoke and engage you to look more deeply into the play's richness and complexity. We offer some background information, some discoveries we've made in our research and some decisions we've made in our presentation, but by no means what one might call definitive statements or interpretation.

We've provided a bare-bones synopsis of the play, wording it carefully to minimize any interpretation. In the 'Who's Who,' we've offered brief

descriptions to help a new reader or audience member keep in mind who the main characters are. When one can do that it helps ‘quiet the mind’ to focus on the language and the development of a now familiar story as it unfolds scene by scene. Next there is a scene-by-scene description of action. While we do reference the standard act and scene divisions, it’s worth noting that Shakespeare didn’t actually write his plays in acts and scenes. The plays published during his lifetime in Quarto editions are written as continuous action: characters exit and different characters enter without a break, as it would be performed in a playhouse. The five-act structure was first imposed on Shakespeare’s plays in the Folio edition (published after his death), presumably because it was the fashion at the time of its publication in 1623. The next section provides a bit of background information on some of the references in the text. Rather than a traditional glossary, we chose to focus on words and phrases that appear for the first time in this play.

Drama by its nature is very democratic, interpretive, and collaborative. The best playwrights avoid the kind of authorial voice which tells one what to believe or how ‘rightly’ to interpret text. Shakespeare left this kind of business to puritans and politicians. He presents characters who represent different points of view, interpreted by individual actors who bring their personalities into the mix, heard by individual audience members who will additionally have their own unique responses to what they hear. Shakespeare, as a playwright, does not seek to interpret the world for us, but rather gives us the opportunity to experience – with the characters – significant events: falling in love, losing a friend, being betrayed, facing fears, making choices, killing kings, re-establishing order out of chaos, etc. Shakespeare, as a poet, gives us these experiences in language that transcends the merely immediate situation of his characters. His language resonates with both immediacy and universality and subsequently has had lasting value through the ages.

Because Shakespeare doesn’t provide answers, this study guide does not aim to either. Rather, we hope through this effort to provoke even more questions, and inspire each individual to discover more and more in this extraordinarily rich and complex play.

-Douglas Lay *director*

PREPARING FOR SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE

How can I prepare myself and family?

Give them a sense of the story

The plots of most of Shakespeare's plays are usually laid out simply and sequentially and can be readily detailed beforehand. His plays are not murder mysteries that depend on elaborate twists or surprise revelations to keep the excitement high. It doesn't spoil the experience to know beforehand that Ophelia goes mad and drowns, Romeo and Juliet die, Prince Hal will become King Henry V, or to know that in his comedies the lovers almost always get married in the end. In Shakespeare, it doesn't detract to "give away" the ending. Shakespeare's plays are language and character-driven. The audience or reader becomes engaged by the individual characters, their thoughts, feelings, relationships and journeys. When we know the plot ahead of time – when we know what's going to happen – we are better able to quiet our minds and focus on how and why we got there through the characters' interaction and the piercingly beautiful language.

Introduce yourself to the characters

Before the play starts, it's very helpful if the audience is able to know who the characters are. This allows them to focus on *what* and *why* the characters do what they do: *development* and *interpretation*. Since most of Shakespeare's plays have a rather long list of characters, they will either become a feast of friends, or a jumble of confusing strangers. Having some pre-understanding of the relationships between Helena, Hermia, Demetrius, Lysander, Hippolyta, Theseus and the rest, we are better able to notice the nuances, surprises and changes that comprise the story. For all the characters in any play of Shakespeare's it's helpful to know their social status, their degree of nobility and what social position (political, familial or religious) they hold.

Get excited about the language

This preparation may be the most difficult to do beforehand. Shakespeare's language and style of writing is different from what we're most familiar with: movies, tv, or novels. The language is poetic, so it often involves unusual sentence structures, syntax and words. At the same time, the language is primarily dramatic, which makes it more engaging and alive in

performance. While most people think of Shakespeare's language as 450 years older than the English we speak today, it is much more helpful to think of his language as being 450 years *younger* than what we speak today. Now it can be presented as more vibrant, daring and outrageous. It is a language replete with images. Shakespeare delights and nearly overwhelms our modern ear with a myriad of images that surprise, delight, inspire or even startle us. We lose much of our enjoyment if his language too often confuses us.

Discuss the qualities of live theatrical performance

It's helpful for those who don't normally attend theatre to reflect a bit on the nature of live performances. Because we're so used to other forms of entertainment, it can be surprising to remember that everything happens in real time, with real people playing before us who can hear, see and play with the attending audience. At Portland Actor's Ensemble, we celebrate these aspects of live performances, placing great emphasis on a lively relationship with the audience. Our actors look directly at the audience, speak to them directly – sometimes even ask them for a response. We want – even depend – on our audiences to participate actively in the imaginative and emotional creation of the play. There is constant acknowledgement that this is a play, being performed in the moment and in the presence of people who have come to hear and see it – in other words – the actors will continually shift between the “real” reality of being actors on a stage in front of people watching, and the “imaginative” reality of say, being Theseus in ancient Athens, or in the woods during the night. We also ask our audience to reflect on their role as responders. Rather than focusing on “theatre etiquette,” we invite everyone to participate as an engaged, supportive and responsive audience. When an audience is attentive and actively responsive they share in the creation of the performance and genuinely influence its success. Since the actors are aware of the audience's response, they can be inspired to give more generously, take more risks in their performance. Great audiences create great performances.

WHO'S WHO IN THE PLAY

THE COURT:

THESEUS: Duke of Athens. For Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, the character of Theseus stands alone as the archetype of a hero/king. Drawn from a rich store of myth and legend, this classical Athenian ruler serves to set the scene in a familiar mythical time period. Son of King Aegius, namesake of the Aegean Sea, Theseus was raised far from Athens, and only came to know his royal father and his city as a young man, after a series of incredibly heroic adventures. No sooner had he set foot in Athens, but Theseus selected himself to be sent with other youths as a sacrifice to the Minotaur, the man-bull monster of Crete. With the help of Ariadne, daughter to the king of Crete, Theseus manages to kill the Minotaur, escape the labyrinth and return to Athens. More and more stories and legends attached themselves to Theseus over time. He was so revered, so valued as a hero, law-giver, companion and guest, that the expression, "Nothing – without Theseus!" can still be heard in our time by visitors to Greece.

HIPPOLYTA: The mythical queen of the Amazons, that renowned tribe of ferocious warrior women referred to in Greek and Roman legend. The Amazons were said to be the daughters of Ares, the god of war, and they appear in many tales of heroic quests. Like most legendary figures, Hippolyta has several conflicting incarnations. In perhaps the best-known of these Theseus tricked the Amazon ruler into capture and marriage. He invited her aboard his visiting ship, then sailed immediately away, kidnapping the queen to be his bride. The outraged Amazons retaliated with battle, but the Athenians won and Theseus and Hippolyta were married. As Theseus says 'I won thee with my sword.' She bore him a son, Hippolytus, but was later replaced by Phedre, a sister of one of Theseus' earlier conquests. Hippolyta reappears in the story of Heracles, who was sent to retrieve her girdle as one of his labors. In still other stories Hippolyta is killed at Theseus' side fighting against the Amazons who had come to rescue her.

EGEUS: An Athenian nobleman, father of Hermia. Egeus has his roots in Roman comedy where the issue of forced marriage is a common scenario.

THE LOVERS:

HELENA: A young Athenian woman, in love with Demetrius. His early protestations of love and his subsequent defection to Hermia, Helena's dearest friend, have left Helena hurt, desperate, and mad. *Helena is the English variant of the Greek name of Helen, derived from Helios, the sun. Helena, whose name means light, is referred to as 'fair.'*

HERMIA: Daughter of Egeus, in love with Lysander. Hermia's refusal to marry Demetrius, her other suitor and her father's choice, sparks the opening conflict of the play. *Hermia is a Greek name, derived from Hermes, the thieving wing-footed messenger and herald of the gods. Characteristics associated with the name include truthfulness, implicit faithfulness in love, and a refusal to forgive those who deceive her.*

LYSANDER: A noble Athenian youth, in love with Hermia. Egeus had previously accepted his suit for Hermia's hand before switching his preference to Demetrius. *Shakespeare may have borrowed the name Lysander from an historical prince, Lysander of Sparta, who defeated Athens and overthrew its democracy in 404 BCE. Both the historical Demetrius and Lysander appear in Plutarch's Lives, one of Shakespeare's main sources of classical knowledge.*

DEMETRIUS: A noble Athenian youth, currently courting Hermia, who had formerly courted Helena. Demetrius is Egeus' choice of son-in-law, but his prior avowals of love to Helena have made Hermia extremely unwilling to marry him. *His name is almost certainly borrowed from Demetrius Poliorcetes, king of Macedon c.337–283 BCE.*

THE MECHANICALS:

The working men, or 'rude mechanicals,' who meet to rehearse a play for Theseus' wedding belong to yet another source tradition. They are unmistakably Elizabethan tradesmen working in professions common and familiar to the era. The majority of their names contain a reference to their profession and social status. Their speech and simple natures follow the comic tradition, e.g. *The Second Shepard's Play*. Shakespeare must have taken some pleasure in having them put on a play for Theseus and Hippolyta.

PETER QUINCE the CARPENTER: Director and author of the mechanicals' play, *Pyramus & Thisbe*. Quince's name probably derives from "quines," which are blocks of wood used in building—almost as if he had been called Peter Two-by-four. Quince refers to himself as playing the part of Thisbe's father, but in the performance his only spoken words are the two prologues.

BOTTOM the WEAVER: Nick Bottom, the man whom William Hazlitt called "the most romantic of mechanics," is indeed a character who transcends type. His blunderings and blusterings dominate the 'mechanicals' scenes and his response to his strange adventures have made Bottom one of the best-remembered characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, inspiring several different adaptations. The story of the human transmuted to an animal form is a common story in mythology. Among many other things the word 'bottom' means 'a skein of thread,' appropriate to a weaver. Bottom, though he is eager to play any part, or all the parts at once, plays Pyramus, the male lover.

FLUTE the BELLOWS-MENDER: A beardless youth who is made to play the part of the 'lady that Pyramus must love.' Flute's name may refer to the pleated sides of the bellows that he mends. Bellows were an apparatus for producing a strong current of air, as for sounding a pipe organ or increasing the draft to a fire, and consist of a flexible, valved air chamber that is contracted and expanded by pumping which forces the air through a nozzle. This is a common household fixture in any home with a fireplace, which was in every home until the introduction of stoves in the 1800s.

SNOUT the TINKER: A tinker is a slightly derogatory term for a mender of household utensils. Tinkers often had to travel in pursuit of their trade. Indeed, in Irish usage the word is often used to mean gypsy. Much of the tinker's business is in repairing pots and kettles. In the kettles' spouts, or snouts, lies a possible explanation for the name. He also plays The Wall that divided Pyramus and Thisbe.

SNUG the JOINER: Humble and 'slow of study,' Snug is a craftsman, a maker of wooden furniture. The practice of the crafts in Elizabethan England was regulated by the Guilds, political and artistic unions that controlled all aspects of training, pricing, and competition. The Mystery (or Guild) of the Joiners used legislation to gain a monopoly over all cabinet and furniture making. The Turners guild was responsible for the making of all furniture parts that required turning on a lathe, a sort of mass-production. The pieces were then literally 'joined' (preferably snugly) by the joiner, the creator of the finished piece. Snug plays the Lion.

THE FAIRY COURT, THE NIGHT AND FOREST WORLD:

OBERON & TITANIA: Oberon is probably related to the Alberich of German medieval legends, a Nibelung (dwarf) who steals the magic treasure from the Rhine maidens. The stories and references used by Oberon and Titania tie them to the classical world, as do their forest rituals. Titania, as an idealized natural female, became a popular subject for painters of the Romantic period. Oberon, Titania, and Puck, as well as Ariel from *The Tempest*, are the names of some of the moons of the planet Uranus.

PUCK: Also known as Robin Goodfellow. A 'knavish sprite', servant to Oberon. Puck's appearance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* marked a new turn in his literary career. But Puck is, as Kipling called him at the beginning of the 20th century, 'the oldest Old Thing in England.' He has been known by many names and in many shapes. In Welsh, Puck was Pwca, in Irish Phouka, Pooka, or Puca. Parallel words exist in many ancient languages: puca in Old English, puki in Old Norse, puke in Swedish, puge in Danish, puks in Low German, pukis in Latvia and Lithuania – mostly with the original meaning of a demon, devil, or evil and malignant spirit. "Pouk was a typical medieval term for the devil...and the Phouka was sometimes pictured as a frightening creature with the head of an ass." As a folklore spirit, the devilishness of Puck is not only a Christian devil, but an older thing, the familiar devil, demon, and dangerous goblin. Puck is a shapeshifter, who can take the form of animals, of elements, of humans, of the nature-god Pan. Puck leads travelers (and young women) astray and delights in the creation of mischief. Puck appears in writings and at least one ballad as early as 1588. After the premiere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck began to appear more and more frequently in plays and ballads.

Pease-blossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustard-Seed: Fairies attending on Titania. Named for humble natural things, these fairies are usually depicted as small, eager to serve, with simple powers.

A SCENE-BY-SCENE DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS OF THE PLAY

The Act and scene format is a convention of literature and not theatre, and was imposed on Shakespeare's plays when they were published in the Folio of 1623. Notations like Act II, scene 3 lines 78 – 125 are very awkward nomenclature in dividing up a play to rehearse, and are irrelevant in performance which is continuous.

SCENE 1

The play opens with Theseus, the fabled hero of ancient Greece, talking to Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons, about their impending wedding in 4 days and his impatience for it. He promises to wed her very differently than the violent way he wooed her.

SCENE 2

They are interrupted by the entrance of Egeus, his daughter Hermia, his desired son-in-law Demetrius, and Hermia's own choice for a husband, Lysander. Egeus accuses Lysander of seducing Hermia with cunning and gifts, and invokes the law of Athens which allows him to send his daughter to her death if she refuses to wed the man he has chosen for her, Demetrius. Hermia pleads with Theseus to take her part, but Theseus seems to side with her father. He gives her 4 days to make up her mind but adds an additional option to marriage or death – a vow of single life. Hermia remains steadfast in her choice of Lysander, who accuses Demetrius of wooing another girl, Helena, who remains devoted to him. Theseus takes Egeus and Demetrius away with him to talk leaving Hermia and her lover Lysander alone onstage. Hippolyta says nothing during the whole encounter.

SCENE 3

Hermia and Lysander bemoan their predicament, comparing their troubles to the plight of other similarly crossed lovers from history. Lysander devises a plan to escape from Athens to the woods where his aunt lives, there to be married. Hermia agrees and swears an elaborate vow. Helena is discovered and interrupts them as she attempts to flee.

SCENE 4

Helena complains about her inability to attract her own love, Demetrius. She compares herself unfavorably to Hermia, and it seems to compound her unhappiness. Hermia tries to comfort her by revealing Lysander's plan for the two of them to elope. They then say farewell and leave Helena alone onstage.

SCENE 5

Helena bemoans her unhappy state to the audience, scolds Cupid for his capriciousness, and then decides to tell Demetrius of Hermia's flight with Lysander, thinking that will at least make him grateful to her. She exits cheered by her own escape from Athens to follow Demetrius.

SCENE 6

Peter Quince, Nick Bottom and several other craftsmen of Athens have assembled to be cast in a play to present to Theseus in celebration of his wedding. Quince has chosen the tragic love story of Pyramus and Thisbe, and divides the parts of the play he has written among his actors. Bottom will play the lead and only the lead. The others get their parts and agree to meet in the woods outside of Athens so they may rehearse secretly.

SCENE 7

This scene takes us to those woods where we will remain until the very end of the play. Here we meet Robin Goodfellow (Puck) and a fairy and learn that Titania, Queen of the Fairies, is about to arrive. Puck warns her that Oberon, the fairy King, is also coming and that they are angry with each other concerning a little mortal boy whom Oberon wants, but Titania refuses to surrender. Their scene is interrupted by the entrance of Titania and Oberon.

SCENE 8

The King and Queen of the fairies immediately start arguing, accusing each other of jealousy and betrayal – they have a long history. Titania observes that a consequence of their fighting is the altered seasons which are raising havoc with human life and prosperity. After blaming each other some more Titania leaves again refusing to give up the child. Oberon vows revenge.

SCENE 9

Oberon – after a lengthy speech about their history, Cupid, Queen Elizabeth and other curious matters, plans his revenge and enrolls Puck to help him by retrieving a special flower, wounded by one of Cupid's arrows, which – when the juice of it is applied to the eyes of a sleeper – will cause that person to fall in love with the next live creature that he or she sees. Puck leaves to fetch the flower. Oberon, alone onstage, explains his plan to the audience. Titania will be the victim. He is interrupted by the entrance of Demetrius and Helena.

SCENE 10

Demetrius scolds, threatens and shames Helena for following him. Helena argues that she is powerless to resist him, citing several classical references. Demetrius runs off to find Lysander and Hermia. Helena vows to follow him, even if it means her own death. Oberon, having observed the scene, commiserates with Helena.

SCENE 11

Puck returns with the flower and Oberon explains again his plan for Titania. He then instructs Puck to find an Athenian youth (meaning Demetrius) and anoint his eyes – which will cause him to fall in love with the unrequited Helena. Puck dashes off to do so.

SCENE 12

Titania and some fairies enter. She issues a few instructions and then tells them to sing her to sleep. Oberon then enters and puts the flower's juice in her eyes.

SCENE 13

Now Lysander and Hermia enter, exhausted and lost in the woods. They lie down to sleep – separately. Puck enters, compliments the sleeping Hermia, scolds the sleeping Lysander, and rubs the flower in his eyes, mistakenly thinking this is the Athenian youth Oberon was talking about. He dashes off to report back to Oberon.

SCENE 14

Helena and Demetrius reenter, argue a bit more, and Demetrius runs away. Helena then discovers the sleeping Lysander and wakes him. With his charmed eyes, Lysander falls immediately in love with Helena and starts to woo her. She rebukes him and runs away. Lysander disdains the sleeping Hermia and runs off to be Helena's knight. Hermia awakes from a nightmare after he leaves, is distressed to find herself alone, and runs off to find Lysander.

SCENE 15

The handicraftsmen of Athens enter to rehearse their play, but they have to solve a few problems first. That accomplished, they start the rehearsal. Puck stumbles upon them, and decides to take an active role in their rehearsal. He transforms Bottom by giving him an ass's head which frightens the others back to Athens. Bottom is left alone and starts to sing. His singing awakes Titania, whose eyes are charmed, and she immediately falls in love with him. She summons her fairies to attend on him, and they eventually lead him to her bower. Puck observes it all and dashes off to tell Oberon.

SCENE 16

Oberon enters next and is joined by Puck, who recounts what has happened to both Titania and the Athenian youth (which turns out to have been Lysander, the wrong youth). They are interrupted by Demetrius (the youth Oberon had in mind for the magic flower) and Hermia (whom Oberon hasn't seen before). They argue, and Hermia runs off to find her love, Lysander (of the charmed eyes). Demetrius stays and goes to sleep. Oberon scolds Puck for his mistake, and sends him off to get Helena. He then charms Demetrius's eyes in preparation of her coming. Now both boys have their eyes charmed by the magical flower. Puck reenters and tells Oberon that Helena is coming, which she is, and followed by Lysander.

SCENE 17

Lysander enters wooing Helena who still rebuffs his advances, as she is in love with Demetrius. Demetrius – with charmed eyes – wakes and sees Helena. He immediately starts to woo her in the presence of Lysander. They both begin to compete for Helena's affections. Hermia enters and marvels at Lysander's peculiar behavior in wooing Helena. An argument breaks out between the two girls who insult each other while the boys stay fixated on Helena. Eventually what Puck calls 'the lovers' pageant' ends with the boys running off to fight for Helena's love. Helena exits as well, escaping the fingernails of Hermia. There are lots of insulting remarks hurled around, and after everyone has left, Oberon accuses Puck of mischief or ignorance, both displeasing to him.

SCENE 18

Oberon is furious at Puck. Eventually he calms down and then instructs Puck – with the aid of another flower – to take the charm off Lysander’s eye so he will again be in love with Hermia.

SCENE 19

Puck further darkens the night in the woods, rounds up the 4 lovers and tires them out with chases until they all fall asleep in the same place. He undoes the charm in Lysander’s eye as planned. Now, when they awake, Lysander will again be in love with Hermia, Demetrius with Helena, and the 2 girls will be reconciled to their loves and each other. Puck remarks, “Jack shall have Jill, and naught shall go ill.”

SCENE 20

Titania reenters with the exhausted Bottom in his ass’s head and they both fall asleep. Oberon enters and wakes Titania. They reconcile. Oberon then instructs Puck to restore Bottom to himself. They all go off together in flight from the sun.

SCENE 21

Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus are out hunting in the woods the following morning. When they stumble across the 4 sleeping lovers, Theseus instructs the forester to wake them with his horn. Upon arising, the boys sort out who they are in love with. Theseus overrides Egeus’s demands, and everyone goes back to Athens to prepare for the multiple weddings that will follow.

SCENE 22

Bottom awakes alone in the woods and talks to the audience about his dream. He too heads back to Athens to be reunited with his friends.

SCENE 23

It is immediately after the multiple weddings and Theseus requests some entertainment before bed.

SCENE 24

The ‘players’ enter and what ensues is their retelling of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, which is graciously – sometimes – received by the court. At the end of their play Theseus praises the players and sends all the newly married couples off to bed.

SCENE 25

Puck enters followed by Titania and Oberon who bless the house and the offspring of the 3 couples. Puck has the last word and apologizes to the audience on behalf of all the cast, promising to mend their ways if the audience will pardon them.

SOURCES OF *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

A Midsummer Night's Dream is first mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598, leading many scholars to date the play between 1594 and 1596. It is likely to have been written around the same period *Romeo and Juliet* was created.

The play was first printed in quarto in 1600, following its entry into the Stationer's Register on October 8, 1600. This quarto is almost surely taken directly from a manuscript written by Shakespeare. A second quarto, printed in 1619 (and falsely backdated to 1600), attempted to correct some of the errors in the first printing; unfortunately it introduced several new errors. It is the second quarto which served as the basis for the First Folio in 1623.

A Midsummer Night's Dream has no direct source material. Unlike many of Shakespeare's plays, which lifted plots entirely from earlier plays or historical accounts, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a composite. In its creation Shakespeare drew on a wealth of available material, from philosophical texts to low comedic situations. All of his sources would have been familiar to the well-educated in his audience, and most of them would have been familiar to everyone else through oral tradition as well as other plays of the time. A similar effect might be achieved today by mixing some characters from Grimm's Fairy Tales with a Harry Potter novel, a sit-com, several urban legends, and a Shakespeare play – all combined in the same play world.

The play introduces characters from a variety of theatrical traditions – their separate journeys tied improbably together by arbitrary plot devices and the common theme of love and marriage.

The setting and frame of the play, the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, is a classical story retold by Chaucer in 'The Knights' Tale' of *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387-1394). In that story, which also uses the legend of Theseus as a framework, two very different suitors vie for the love of Hippolyta's sister Emily. In that story, as in *Midsummer*, Theseus, while out hunting, is called upon to act as a judge, having come upon the lovers fighting. Chaucer presumably took his material from many sources, including Plutarch's *Lives*.

Quince and Bottom and the gang of 'rude mechanicals' are stock Elizabethan workingmen, much like other lower characters in most Shakespeare plays, but the adventures of Bottom draw him out of this group into a far different mythological sphere. The story of Bottom's 'translation' and his night in the fairy world has its roots in Greek mythology and the medieval carnival tradition which, in turn, is a permutation of the Roman Saturnalia. Both these traditions are concerned with the animal nature of man which reveals itself in transformations and low acts.

The probable main source for the story of Bottom is Lucius Apeleius' *The Golden Asse* (c. 170 AD), translated by W. Adlington in 1566. (The first person adventure of Apeleius

himself, who was accidentally turned into an ass by a sorceress, and lived in that shape many years.) In one episode, Apeleius, in ass-shape, is desired by a high-born woman. At first he is afraid of hurting her but reminds himself of the story of Pasiphae of Crete who, coupled with a bull, bore a monstrous son, the Minotaur, who was later killed by Theseus.

Titania and Oberon, the fairy king and queen, are drawn in part from the Olympian world (Titania is one of the names of the goddess Diana) and in part from Northern European folklore and Renaissance literature. They or their counterparts appear in *Huon de Bordeaux*, (trans. by Lord Berners, c. 1545) and in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (published in 1596). The stories and references used by Oberon and Titania tie them to the classical world, as do their forest rituals. The nature of their servants (Puck and the fairies) and their place in the story attach them to spirits and legends closer to European tradition.

Puck and the little fairies, or 'elves,' are taken from British folklore. The 'little folk,' or 'fair folk,' were generally seen as dangerous, anarchic, and hurtful – though in the right circumstances they could be helpful.

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe (the play performed by the mechanicals), as well as most of the other mythological allusions in the text, can be found in the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid (Ovidius Naso, 43 BC-17 AD), a well-known Latin text in Shakespeare's day and the source for a recent Broadway play by the same name. The *Metamorphoses* contains numerous stories of transformation where a god or human lover is changed in form, to an animal, vegetable, or mineral.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM & THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

Midsummer's Night

Midsummer's Night, or St. John the Baptist's Eve in the Christian tradition, is the night before the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. This night was said to be particularly sacred to the fairy folk. "The...summer solstice is traditionally a time when charms and spells were performed for the purpose of protecting the livestock and the barns in which they live, as well as the farmhouse." (DuMolin) Although the (few) references to time of year in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* place the action somewhat earlier in the year, the play's spirit places it in the magical uncertainty of the Midsummer's Night.

Court Masques

One popular form of private entertainment was the masque. These pieces were usually short with simple classical or allegorical plots. The emphasis was placed on musical and visual effects. At court performers were the nobility and care was taken to see that the characters played were equal in rank to that of the player. At the end of the piece, the performers would remove their disguise and invite the audience to dance. The English form of the masque includes the earlier traditions of festival mummers and disguise. Shakespeare both parodies and uses the forms of the masque in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the end with the Pyramus and Thisbe play.

Crafts and Trades

Craftsmen, such as those who meet in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to rehearse a play for 'Duke' Theseus, were under the protection and regulation of organizations called Guilds. These Guilds were established to provide quality control, personnel support, political bargaining, and training systems. For more information on individual crafts and trades see the character breakdown on the 'Mechanicals.'

Seeming

The Elizabethans were uneasy both philosophically and politically with the act and notion of 'seeming'. A disguise – or pretending to be someone else – was feared since it could be confused with reality. Acting and plays were especially problematic since this 'seeming' was, of course, their entire purpose and mode. Could a commoner usurp a king by playing one? Would a man ostensibly become a lion by putting on a lion costume? Shakespeare's characters – most notably Hamlet – are deeply concerned with the tension between 'seeming' and 'being'.

Literature and the Arts, Intellectual/Spiritual Life

The Elizabethan period was the height of the Renaissance in England. Theatre, literature, music, sciences and the arts were flourishing and in constant interaction and debate. The variety of themes and sources in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reflect some of the busy multi-leveled excitement of the period.

HISTORICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL REFERENCES IN THE PLAY

A Midsummer Night's Dream is packed with references from classical mythology. The following is an alphabetical listing of the many classical references Shakespeare mentions in his play.

Gods, goddesses, heroes and places

ACHERON is the river of pain, one of the five rivers that flow in the underworld. The others are Phlegethon (the river of fire), Lethe (the river of oblivion), Cocytus (the river of wailing), and Styx (the river of hatred). (source: www.theoi.com)

With drooping fog as black as **Acheron** (III.ii.)

APOLLO is the god of music, of reason, and often of sunlight. Brother to Diana, the moon huntress, he is the patron of healing, sculpture and lyric, the keeper of the oracle at Delphi. Like most gods, Apollo didn't take well to being denied in love. The story referred to in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the story of his encounter with Daphne, a forest nymph. He pursued her until she could run no further, at which point Zeus (Jove) granted her prayer to be hidden, transforming her into a laurel tree. The laurel became the tree sacred to Apollo and the laurel wreath the prize in competitions of art and rhetoric. As Helena pursues Demetrius into the forest, the myth has been turned on its head as the woman chases after the all-unwilling man.

Apollo flies, and **Daphne** holds the chase (II.i.)

AURORA, Roman goddess of the dawn. The Aurora Borealis, or the northern lights, are the false dawn over the arctic sky.

And yonder shines **Aurora's** harbinger (III.ii.)

THE BACCHANALS, followers of the Greek wine-god Bacchus, or the Latin Dionysus, were wild bands of women and satyrs who rioted across the countryside in dangerously ecstatic states. The **Thracian singer** was Orpheus, a mortal with the ability to make music so beautiful it could charm anyone or anything – even the gods. He charmed his way down to the underworld to rescue his bride, Eurydice, who was killed on their wedding day. His music bought her freedom, but Orpheus' lack of trust in the god Hades sent her back to the underworld and left him doomed to wander alone. In this state he encountered a group of Bacchanals who, enraged by his unwillingness to sing for them, tore him to pieces.

'The riot of the tipsy **Bacchanals**,
Tearing the **Thracian singer** in their rage (V.i.)

THE CARTHAGE QUEEN is Dido, a widowed princess who fled her native land of Tyre after the murder of her husband. Dido founded the city of Carthage, later a great power in Roman times. Her story is told in detail in Vergil's *Aeneid*. The '**false Trojan**' is Aeneas, the hero of that epic. Aeneas was a Trojan warrior and the mythical founder of Rome. When Aeneas came to Carthage Queen Dido fell in love with him. Aeneas accepted her love and married her, but later abandoned her and sailed away. When Dido saw his ship leaving her harbor she built a pyre and burned herself to death. She is the archetype of the betrayed woman.

And by that fire which burn'd the **Carthage queen**,
When the **false Trojan** under sail was seen (I.i.)

CENTAURS were monster-like creatures with the body of a horse and the head and torso of a man. Most were wild, rude, quarrelsome, and lecherous, though a few, notably Chiron, were renowned for wisdom. The battle referred to occurred at a noble wedding where the invited centaurs drank heavily and behaved with great depravity attempting to steal the bride. Theseus and others at the wedding fought back and defeated the rioting centaurs.

The battle with the **Centaurs** (V.i.)

CORIN & PHILLIDA are common names in pastoral verse, the archetypal shepherd and shepherdess.

And in the shape of **Corin** sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn and versing love
To amorous **Phillida** (II.i.)

CUPID is the Latin god – Eros for the Greeks – who is usually depicted as a winged boy with a quiver of arrows. He is the son of Venus, the goddess of love, and of Mars, the god of war. Cupid is sometimes depicted as blind because of the mismatched lovers he creates. Cupid's arrows overpoweringly affected anyone they hit, god or mortal, and his selection and aim was anarchic and unsparing. In some traditions he has two kinds of arrows – the golden headed one which caused love, the leaden one, hate. Oberon tells the story of Cupid's attempt to catch the heart of a **fair vestal throned by the west**. This **imperial votaress** is generally assumed to refer to Queen Elizabeth I, who despite extraordinary social and political pressure, never married.

I swear to thee, by **Cupid's** strongest bow
By his best arrow with the golden head (I.i.)

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is wing'd **Cupid** painted blind (I.i.)

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,

Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a **fair vestal throned 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
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the **imperial votaress** passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of **Cupid** fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with **Cupid's** archery,
Sink in apple of his eye. (III.ii.)

Cupid is a knavish lad,
Thus to make poor females mad (III.ii.)

DIAN, or Diana, was the virgin goddess of the hunt, and of the moon. Diana is the daughter of Zeus and the sister of the god Apollo.

Or on **Diana's** altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life. (I.i)

Dian's bud o'er **Cupid's** flower
Hath such force and blessed power (IV.i.)

The **THREE FATES** are daughters of Themis, goddess of Necessity. All things, including gods and mortals, are ultimately in the power of **Clotho**, **Lachesis** and **Atropos**. Life in their hands is depicted as a wheel, upon which Clotho spins (the past), Lachesis measures and guides the thread (choosing in the present), and Atropos cuts the thread of life (the future which is death).
(source:<http://www.messagenet.com/myths/bios/fates.html>)

The foolish **Fates** (I.ii.)

O **Sisters Three**,
Come, come to me (V.i.)

O **Fates**, come, come,
Cut thread and thrum; (V.i.)

The **FURIES** are goddesses of vengeance and punishers of the unfaithful. They tortured

the mind, body, and heart of those who crossed the gods or broke natural law. Also three sisters, Alecto, Tisiphone and Megaera, the furies are renowned for being cruel, but fair.

Approach, ye **Furies** fell! (V.i.)

HECATE is an underworld goddess of witchcraft often depicted in a triple form for the moon including Phoebe and Diana. The three faces of Hecate are the horse, the dog, and the serpent, or else the virgin, the mother, and the crone. Hecate, who appears in another form in Celtic mythology, is probably a remnant of an older series of Titans assimilated into the Olympian pantheon.

And we fairies, that do run
By the triple **Hecate's** team (V.i.)

HELEN, daughter to Zeus and to Leda, a mortal woman, was described as the most beautiful woman of the ancient world. As a child she was abducted by **THESEUS** but rescued and returned to her father's house. She married Menelaus, the king of Sparta, but was abducted – apparently willingly – by Paris, Prince of Troy. Thus began the ten years of the Trojan war. When Troy fell, Helen returned to Sparta with her husband. Helen is still invoked as the incarnation of ultimate beauty. The second quotation is a bit mysterious, as Helen was not known for faith. Some people think that Limander may refer to Alexander, another name for Paris, or even Leander (Hellesport swimmer), but then Helen would need to be Hero for this to make better sense.

Sees **Helen's** beauty in a brow of Egypt (V.i.)

Pyramus: Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace;
And, like **Limander**, am I trusty still.
Thisbe: And I like **Helen**, till the **Fates** me kill. (V.i.)

HERCULES, or **HERACLES** is the original hero of the Age of Heroes. Half-man, halfgod (Zeus was his father), his deeds and his mighty Labours (one of which was to steal the golden belt of Hippolyta) have carved out his place in legend for all time. He took part in every adventure, and when finally vanquished by the remnants of a treacherous poison he had previously used, Hercules' strength would not allow him to die. Instead, he was raised to Olympus to live immortal among the stars. The only hero of mythology who rivals Hercules in his particular sphere is Theseus. **Cadmus** was a Phoenician prince who, according to the myth, killed a dragon and planted its teeth, from which grew an army of men who fought with one another until only five survived. Cadmus then went on to found the city of Thebes with the five surviving soldiers. Cadmus was never in Crete.

I could play **Ercles** rarely (I.ii.)

I was with **Hercules** and **Cadmus** once,
When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear

With hounds of Sparta (IV.i.)

In glory of my kinsman **Hercules** (V.i.)

HIEMS, in Latin, is the word for winter. Like many gods of nature, **HIEM** is both the god of winter and winter itself.

And on old **Hiems'** thin and icy crown (II.i)

LEVIATHAN, a deep-sea creature, sometimes a whale, the largest large thing.

Ere the **leviathan** can swim a league (II.i.)

THE NINE MUSES (thrice, or three times, three equals nine), daughters of Zeus (Jove) and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, are often pictured in myth and painting grouped around Apollo, patron of the arts. Each muse has her special area of expertise, in which she inspires works of genius in mortals. The **MUSES** are: **Kleio** (history), **Euterpe** (flute playing), **Thaleia** (comedy), **Melpomene** (tragedy), **Terpsichore** (dance) **Erato** (love poems), **Polyhymnia** (sacred music), **Ourania** (astrology) and **Kalliope**, (epic poetry) who holds the highest rank of the Muses.

'The thrice three **Muses** mourning for the death
Of Learning, late deceased in beggary.' (V.i.)

NEPTUNE, or Poseidon, god of the sea. Powerful Neptune, the 'earth-shaker,' is the only one of the three original Olympian brothers (Jove, Neptune, and Pluto) mentioned in the play.

Neptune's yellow sands (II.i)
Opening on **Neptune** with fair blessed beams (III.ii.)

PHOEBE, the Moon in the sky (one of the three aspects of the moon, besides Diana and Hecate).

To-morrow night, when **Phoebe** doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass (I.i.)

PHOEBUS, or Helios, is both the sun and the sun god. Each day he rides his fiery horses across the path of the sky, pulling the cart that holds the sun.

And **Phibbus'** car
Shall shine from far (I.ii.)

CEPHALUS & PROCRIS, or Shafalus & Procrus as the play calls them, are a somewhat unfortunate reference for true lovers. They were husband and wife, but

Procris left her husband, believing him to be unfaithful. He went out to look for her, and she in turn went out to spy on him. Hearing her rustling like a wild beast in the bushes, Cephalus threw a javelin and killed her. When he realized his mistake, he sent the same javelin into his heart. (E. Cobham Brewer 1810–1897. Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. 1898.)

Pyramus: Not **Shafalus** to **Procrus** was so true.
Thisbe: As **Shafalus** to **Procrus**, I to you.

VENUS, or Aphrodite. The goddess of love, Venus hears the prayers of lovers in distress. Venus appears in the sky as the evening star, bright and glorious.

When his love he doth espy,
Let her shine as gloriously
As the **Venus** of the sky (III.ii.)

By the simplicity of **Venus'** doves (I.i.)

As yonder **Venus** in her glimmering sphere (III.ii.)

WORDS AND PHRASES COINED BY SHAKESPEARE

New Words that Appear for the first Time in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Beach (transitive verb) - to run or drive ashore; to ground as if on a beach.

Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the **beached** margent of the sea

Bedroom (noun) - a room furnished with a bed and intended primarily for sleeping; from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, merely means a place to sleep on the ground.

Then by your side no **bed-room** me deny;
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

Eyeballs (noun) - the more or less globular capsule of the vertebrate eye formed by the sclera and cornea together with their contained structures.

Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye;
Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
To take from thence all error with his might,
And make his **eyeballs** roll with wonted sight.

Mimic (noun) - an ancient dramatic entertainment representing scenes from life usually in a ridiculous manner; one that ridicules by imitation.

An ass's nole I fixed on his head:
Anon his Thisbe must be answered,
And forth my **mimic** comes.

Moonbeams (noun) - a ray or beam of light from the moon.

To have my love to bed and to arise;
And pluck the wings from Painted butterflies
To fan the **moonbeams** from his sleeping eyes:
Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.

Rival (adjective) – having the same pretensions or claims; competing or standing in rivalry (First used as an adjective in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – it had been well known as a noun).

I know you two are **rival** enemies:
How comes this gentle concord in the world,

That hatred is so far from jealousy,
To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity?

Swagger (verb) - to conduct oneself in an arrogant or superciliously pompous manner; especially: to walk with an air of overbearing self-confidence.

What hempen home-spuns have we **swaggering** here,
So near the cradle of the fairy queen?
What, a play toward! I'll be an auditor;
An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

Trippingly (adverb) - in a nimble or lively manner.

Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from brier;
And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it **trippingly**.

Fancy-free (adjective) - free from amorous attachment or engagement; free to imagine or fancy.

But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation, **fancy-free**.

Flowery (adjective) - of, relating to, or resembling flowers; marked by or given to rhetorical elegance.

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

USEFUL WEBSITES

Play Texts

<http://etext.virginia.edu/shakespeare/folio>

<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/index.html>

Both sites offer the Folio text.

www.it.usyd.edu.au/~matty/Shakespeare/

They claim to be the “Web’s oldest Shakespeare site.” This is our favorite site because when you copy and paste the text into Microsoft Word, the text is formatted into tables, rather than with nasty tabs.

<http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/>

Businesslike and scholarly texts of the plays, supported by MIT.

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/lambtales/LTMND.HTM>

Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare

1807 Story of the play. More narrative than many modern plot summaries.

<http://eserver.org/books/apuleius/default.html>

The Golden Asse, by Lucius Apuleius

Elizabethan/Renaissance

<http://renaissance.dm.net/compendium/home.html>

LIFE IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND: *A Compendium of Common Knowledge 1558-1603*. This site offers a concise, yet superficial view of basic daily existence in Elizabethan England. Good for a basic introduction to the period and quick fact searches.

http://eudocs.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page

EURODOCS: Primary Historical Documents from Western Europe

Contains facsimiles of documents from the period concerning wedding ceremonies, 16th & 17th century papers and writings authored by Queen Elizabeth.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1577harrison-england.html>

MODERN HISTORY SOURCEBOOK: *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England 1577* Holinshed’s Chronicles are a primary source account of daily living in

England during the Renaissance. It includes a discussion of topics such as laws, policies, inventions and public health.

<http://renaissance.dm.net/sites.html>

RENAISSANCE RESOURCES Designed for scholars and Renaissance Faire aficionados, this page has links to nearly anything and everything, from portraits of Elizabeth I to the rules of rapier and dagger fighting to Elizabethan gardening and the Great Chain of Being. If the site is missing anything at all, you can bet it links to a page where that something can be found.

<http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/shakespeare/spear.html>

Guide to Shakespeare's playhouses and playing

www.sca.org

OFFICIAL WEBSITE OF The society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). An international organization dedicated to researching and re-creating pre-17th-century European history.

Some of the material is highly esoteric, but the SCA is a wonderful resource for finding helpful people in your area.

<http://www.drizzle.com/~celyn/mrwp/mrwp.html>

THE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE WEDDING PAGE

Information on wedding customs from the Vikings on.

Classical

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>

The best resource for the study of classical texts. Perseus, run by the Classics Department at Tufts University, offers classical texts in several languages, translations, linked commentary, ancient art, and more.

<http://www.messagenet.com/myths/>

A simple, more or less scholarly, and accessible site for information on basic Greek gods and myths.

Lesson Plans and Study Guides

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=618>

Links and lesson plans for teaching Shakespeare's plays to primary and secondary school students.

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/learning/Learning.aspx>

Play guides for all of Shakespeare's works, from The Royal Shakespeare Company in England, for both teachers and students.

<http://www.gradesaver.com/classicnotes/titles/midsummernight/>

An act-by-act summary and analyses of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as an e-text of the play

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

A thorough guide and links to all and anything Shakespeare

<http://www.shakespeare.com/>

Collection of lesson plans and study guides for Shakespeare's works

Miscellaneous

http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html

A linked list of paintings up to 1846 inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

www.william-shakespeare.org.uk/shakespeare-insults-dictionary.htm

PERSONALIZED SHAKESPEAREAN INSULTS.

Need we say more? - thou tottering shard-borne pumpkin!

<http://www.geocities.com/beyondearth2001/uranus.htm>

Details and pictures of the moons of URANUS, many of which are named for Shakespeare characters, including Titania, Oberon, and Puck.

www.portlandactors.org

Portland Actor's Ensemble's wonderful website. Here can be found our mission statement, up-to-date information on productions and programs, calendar of shows and photos from previous performance seasons.

<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/classics/chaironeia/>

<http://www.e-classics.com/plutarch.htm>

Either of these websites include anything and everything you might want to know about Plutarch, including the text of Plutarch's *Lives*.

