



Plays and Pinot: A Midsummer Night's Dream

Synopsis

Theseus, duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia's head if she flouts her father's will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father's wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

About the Playwright

William Shakespeare (also spelled Shakspeare) was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon and died April 23 1616. He was an English poet, dramatist, and actor often called the English national poet and considered by many to be the greatest dramatist of all time. Shakespeare occupies a position unique in world literature. Other poets, such as Homer and Dante, and novelists, such as Leo Tolstoy and Charles Dickens, have transcended national barriers, but no writer's living reputation can compare to that of Shakespeare, whose plays, written in the late 16th and early 17th centuries for a small repertory theatre, are now performed and read more often and in more countries than ever before. The prophecy of his great contemporary, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson, that Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time," has been fulfilled. It may be audacious even to attempt a definition of his greatness, but it is not so difficult to describe the gifts that enabled him to create imaginative visions of pathos and mirth that, whether read or witnessed in the theatre, fill the mind and linger there. He is a writer of great intellectual rapidity, perceptiveness, and poetic power. Other writers have had these qualities, but with Shakespeare the keenness of mind was applied not to abstruse or remote subjects but to human beings and their complete range of emotions and conflicts. Other writers have applied their keenness of mind in this way, but Shakespeare is astonishingly clever with words and images, so that his mental energy, when applied to intelligible human situations, finds full and memorable expression, convincing and imaginatively stimulating. As if this were not enough, the art form into which his creative energies went was not remote and bookish but involved the vivid stage impersonation of human beings, commanding sympathy and inviting vicarious participation. Thus, Shakespeare's merits can survive translation into other languages and into cultures remote from that of Elizabethan England.



Characters

Theseus, Duke of Athens

Theseus, the Duke of Athens, has recently won a war against the Amazons, and to reward himself for his victory is going to marry their queen Hippolyta, whether she likes it or not.

Egeus

Egeus is a courtier at Theseus's court.

Lysander

Lysander is a young man of Athens, of good family and fortune.

Demetrius

Demetrius is not the most admirable of young men. Having wooed Helena and won her heart, he shifts his attentions to Hermia, who will have none of him, but whose father favors him.

Philostrate

Philostrate is Theseus's Master of the Revels. The Duke sends him to encourage everybody in Athens to celebrate his wedding and have a festive time during the four days leading up to the ceremony.

Quince

Peter Quince is a carpenter with literary pretensions who organizes some fellow workers into preparing a play he has written to present to Theseus and Hippolyta on their wedding day (in which he presents the Prologue).

Bottom

Bottom the weaver is a take-charge sort of fellow, and a great stage ham who wishes to play all the parts he can in Quince's play.

Flute

Flute is a bellows-mender, a young man whose facial hair is only just beginning to grow. His voice may be unbroken.

Snout

Snout is a tinker cast as Pyramus's father and the Wall in Quince's play.

Snug

Snug the joiner is not the most quick-witted of fellows, and is therefore cast as the lion to avoid his having to learn lines.

Starveling

Starveling the tailor portrays Moonshine in Quince's play.

Hippolyta

Hippolyta is Queen of the Amazons. Having been defeated in battle by Theseus, she is now betrothed to him.

Hermia

Hermia is Egeus's daughter. In love with Lysander, she refuses to marry Demetrius despite the threat of death for her refusal.

**Helena**

Helena is a young lady of Athens. She was wooed by Demetrius and remains obsessively, even masochistically in love with him.

Oberon

Oberon is King of Fairies. Proud, angry, and vengeful, he quarrels with Titania for the sake of a changeling boy, and on being refused decides to humiliate her into obedience.

Titania

Titania is Queen of Fairies. Her quarrel with Oberon disturbs nature, but in memory of her votaress she still refuses to give up the boy who is at the quarrel's root.

Puck

Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, is an amoral prankster of a spirit. Oberon's jester, he delights in practical jokes, transforming Bottom for a lark and making him the object of Titania's love.

Peaseblossom

Peaseblossom is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

Cobweb

Cobweb is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

Moth

Moth is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

References: *Britannica.com*