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# A Midsummer- Night's Dream

*The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare*

VOLUME 23

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON



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THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

BY

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH  
AND JOHN DOVER WILSON

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

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# A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM



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## A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

### I

Signor Croce says of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* that 'the little drama seems born of a smile'—and, we may add, 'of a Sunday'—if the old proverb be true that 'a Sunday's child is full of grace.' It is sister, in a fashion, to *Love's Labour's Lost*; but a wiser, more beautiful sister, and with far fewer briars around the palace, for editor or reader. To the approaching lover she seems at first to present a stout hedge for entanglement. To misquote Dogberry, she has two Quartos and everything handsome about her. But in her, as in *Silvia*,

beauty lives with kindness.

There is small trouble over the text of this play, and nothing—unless we choose to make it more—to worry us about 'origins.'

### II

The story of the text—with which, according to our custom, we deal in a separate chapter—runs simply enough for our purpose in this Introduction. There are two known Quartos, both bearing the date 1600 on their title-pages. The one, usually known as Q<sub>1</sub>, was entered to the publisher, Thomas Fisher, in the Register of the Stationers' Company in that year.

The second, which bears the name of James Roberts on its title-page, was not entered in the Register. For long there was never a doubt that this Second Quarto belonged to the date it advertised: until the researches of Greg and Pollard—working on minutiae, including water-marks—conclusively established that the date 1600

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is fraudulent and that the book belongs to 1619, having been designed in that year to make one of a set of collected plays<sup>1</sup>. For all this it was from the Second Quarto that Jaggard set up the play in the 1623 Folio.

## III

For the date of its composition and first performance, all we can say for certain (for it really amounts to all we know) is that the invaluable Meres mentions it in his list of 1598, or two years earlier than Fisher's Quarto. Speculation has of course run riot over internal evidence—for example over Titania's description (in 2. 1. 82–114) of her bicker with Oberon and its results in perverting the weather with lamentable effect on the crops.

And never, since the middle summer's spring,  
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,  
By pavéd fountain, or by rushy brook,  
Or in the beachéd margent of the sea,  
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,  
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.  
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea  
Contagious fogs: which falling in the land,  
Hath every pelting river made so proud,  
That they have overborne their continents.  
The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,  
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn  
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard:  
The fold stands empty in the drownéd field,  
The crows are fatted with the murrion flock,  
The nine men's morris is filled up with mud,  
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green  
For lack of tread are undistinguishable...etc.

'The confusion of seasons here described,' wrote Steevens in 1773, 'is no more than a poetical account of the weather which happened in England about the

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Pollard, *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos*, 1909, etc.

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time when this play was published. For this information I am indebted to chance, which furnished me with a few leaves of an old meteorological history.' This assertion concerning the weather in or about 1600 Steevens repeated in 1778 and again in 1785; but eight years later, in 1793 having assured himself that *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* must go back at least so far as 1598 (Meres' date) he calmly shifted back his 'old meteorological history' some eight years earlier with the airy statement that his 'few leaves' referred to the weather 'about the time the play was written.' Such are the licences allowed itself by scholarly conjecture!<sup>1</sup>

Other guesses to be reasonably extracted from internal study of our play are (1) that Oberon's words in the same Scene—

That very time I saw—but thou couldst not—  
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,  
Cupid all armed: a certain aim he took  
At a fair Vestal, thronéd 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  
Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon:  
And the imperial Vot'ress passéd on,  
In maiden meditation, fancy-free...

—may, or may not, glance at some defeated foreign political attempt upon the hand of our Virgin Queen. More certain (2) is our conviction, which grows as we read, that, at whatever date written, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* was composed to celebrate a marriage—possibly for private performance at some great house, possibly even at Court, but most certainly for a wedding somewhere. If only we could fasten on the date of some noble marriage in or before 1598 and link up *A Midsummer-*

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it now seems generally accepted and (to us) highly probable that the bad weather Titania speaks of belonged to the year 1594 (v. Note on the Copy, pp. 95–6).

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## ⌘ A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

*Night's Dream* to it, we have the date of one performance clinched. In 1598, indeed, Shakespeare's Earl of Southampton espoused his darling Mistress Vernon, to whom he had long been betrothed. If we had any certainty linking the play to that espousal, all would indeed be well and clear. Certainty is denied us here as elsewhere; but that there are at least possibilities in the Southampton wedding a reference to our Note on the Copy will show. In any event, the play must have been intended for *some* courtly marriage. It has all the *stigmata*. Like *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Tempest* it contains an interlude: and that interlude—Bully Bottom's *Pyramus and Thisbe*—is designed, rehearsed, enacted, for a wedding. Can anyone read the opening scene, or the closing speech of Theseus, and doubt that the occasion was a wedding? Be it remembered, moreover, how the fairies dominate the play; and how constantly and intimately fairies were associated with weddings by our Elizabethan ancestors, their genial favours invoked, their possible malign caprices prayed against. Let us take a stanza from Spenser's *Epithalamion*:

Let no deluding dreames, nor dreadfull sights  
 Make sudden sad affrights;  
 Ne let house-fyres, nor lightnings helpelesse harmes,  
 Ne let the Pouke, nor other evill sprights,  
 Ne let mischivous witches with theyr charmes,  
 Ne let hob Goblins, names whose sence we see not,  
 Fray us with things that be not:  
 Let not the shriech Oule nor the Storke be heard,  
 Nor the night Raven that still deadly yels;  
 Nor damnéd ghosts, cald up with mighty spels,  
 Nor griesly vultures, make us once affeard:  
 Ne let th'unpleasant Quayre of Frogs still croking  
 Make us to wish theyr choking.  
 Let none of these theyr drery accents sing;  
 Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr eccho ring.

Let this be set alongside the fairies' last pattering ditty  
 in our play:

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Now the wasted brands do glow,  
 Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,  
 Puts the wretch that lies in woe  
 In remembrance of a shroud.  
 Now it is the time of night,  
 That the graves, all gaping wide,  
 Every one lets forth his sprite,  
 In the church-way paths to glide.  
 And we fairies, that do run  
 By the triple Hecate's team,  
 From the presence of the sun,  
 Following darkness like a dream,  
 Now are frolic: not a mouse  
 Shall disturb this hallowed house....  
 I am sent with broom before,  
 To sweep the dust behind the door.

\* \* \*

To the best bride-bed will we:  
 Which by us shall blesséd be:

\* \* \*

And each several chamber bless,  
 Through this palace, with sweet peace.

Can anyone set these two passages side by side and doubt *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* to be intended for a merry *κάθαρσις*, a pretty purgation, of those same goblin terrors which Spenser would exorcise from the bridal chamber? For our part we make little doubt that Shakespeare had Spenser's very words in mind as he wrote.

## IV

In dealing with Shakespeare we should respect the preoccupations of other students, and the allurements they find in him, however wide of our own interest or taste. Johnson's manly words on this point cannot be too constantly borne in mind by any actual or prospective Shakespearian scholar.—

I can say with great sincerity of all my predecessors, what I hope will hereafter be said of me, that not one has left

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## xii A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

*Shakespeare* without improvement, nor is there one to whom I have not been indebted for assistance and information... They have all been treated by me with candour, which they have not been careful of observing to one another. It is not easy to discover from what cause the acrimony of a scholiast can naturally proceed. The subjects to be discussed by him are of very little importance; they involve neither property nor liberty; nor favour the interest of sect or party. The various readings of copies, and different interpretations of a passage seem to be questions that might exercise the wit without engaging the passions.

Let us observe Johnson's spirit in dealing with the subject that comes next to our hand—the alleged 'sources' of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. Concerning Shakespeare's 'sources' we must, of course, discriminate. When, for example, he borrows from North's *Plutarch* he keeps as a rule extremely close to the prose story, even to the prose text—converting it into noble poetry by the most dexterous, most economical touches. Nay, so deeply absorbed is he in his original that now and again (but oftenest perhaps in *Julius Caesar*) he omits something which *he* remembers from Plutarch—just forgets, or has forgotten, to put it in—and leaves some stray speech or allusion dangling in the air, to puzzle us until we turn to Plutarch and discover its relevance. With Holinshed he takes far wider liberties: yet we can usually go to Holinshed, seek out the original passage and know where we are. Or again in *As You Like It* we know on what he is building: it is Lodge's novel *Rosalynde*, *Euphues' Golden Legacie*, and we can see just what he makes of it. But it is quite 'other guess-work' when we come to the *Dream* or *The Tempest* (both of which plays take us into fairy-land). So far as anyone has been able to discover—and considering the amount of pains spent by curious minds in tracking Shakespeare to his 'sources' we take that qualification to be no mean one—in these plays he was building on no other man's plot. No author, to be sure, can build *in*

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*vacuo*, fetching his bricks from nowhere, and Mr Frank Sidgwick has brought together in a small volume<sup>1</sup>, and discussed, the sources or (as he puts it alternatively and better) the analogues, which may have been running in Shakespeare's mind as he wrote this fantasy of the *Dream*. The story, as he points out, is woven of three threads, which we can disentangle with ease into (1) the main, sentimental, plot of the court of Theseus and the four lovers, (2) the grotesque, buffooning plot of Bottom and his fellows, with the interlude of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and (3) the fairy plot. For the first, Shakespeare may have used floating hints from Chaucer's *Knights Tale* of Palamon and Arcite, afterwards the set theme of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: and from North's Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*. For the second, Ovid includes the legend of Pyramus and Thisbe in the 4th Book of his *Metamorphoses*, and we know that Shakespeare knew his Ovid—if not, as many contend, in the original, at any rate in Arthur Golding's translation (1575). For the third, Mr Sidgwick can, of course, quote his fairy songs in abundance: songs about Robin Goodfellow—

From Oberon in fairy land,  
The king of ghosts and shadows there,  
Mad Robin I, at his command  
Am sent to view the night-sports here...

By wells and rills, in meadows green,  
We nightly dance our heyde-guys;  
And to our fairy King and Queen  
We chant our moonlight minstrelsies.  
When larks 'gin sing,  
Away we fling:  
And babes new-born steal as we go,  
And elf in bed  
We leave instead  
And wend us laughing, *ho, ho, ho!*

<sup>1</sup> *The Sources and Analogues of 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream.'* Compiled by Frank Sidgwick. London, 1908.

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## xiv A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

—and so, through Bishop Corbett's

Farewell rewards and Fairies!

—to Thomas Campion's

Hark, all you ladies that do sleep!  
 The fairy queen, Proserpina,  
 Bids you awake and pity them that weep.  
 You may do in the dark  
 What the day doth forbid.  
 Fear not the dogs that bark,  
 Night will have all hid....

In myrtle arbours on the downs  
 The fairy queen, Proserpina,  
 This night by moonshine leading merry rounds,  
 Holds a watch with sweet Love,  
 Down the dale, up the hill,  
 No plaints or groans may move  
 Their holy vigil...<sup>1</sup>

But may we suggest that while these and other strains may have been singing in Shakespeare's head while he wrote, it is even more likely that he brought all this fairy-stuff up to London in his own head, packed with nursery legends of his native Warwickshire? When will criticism learn to allow for the enormous drafts made by creative artists such as Shakespeare and Dickens upon their childhood? They do not, as Wordsworth did, write it all out in a story and call it *The Prelude*: but surely they use it none the less.

## V

If this be true, may it not be just as true and as scientific a way of getting at the meaning of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* if we try (in all modesty) to get at the

<sup>1</sup> Campion's song did not see print, so far as we know, until published in his (first) *Booke of Ayres, Set forth to be song to the Lute, Orpherion and Base Viol*, by Philip Rosseter, *Lutenist*, 1601.



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workings of Shakespeare's mind and reason them out more or less in the following fashion<sup>1</sup>?—

Here (say we) we have a young playwright commissioned to write a wedding-play—a play to be presented in some great private house before a distinguished company. He has patrons to conciliate, favour to win, his own ambitions to set in a fair road of success. He is naturally anxious to shine; here is his opportunity; and, moreover, though his fellow-playwrights already pay him the compliment of being a little jealous, he still has his spurs to win. 'Upstart crow am I? You wait a bit, my supercilious University wits, and see what a countryman can make, up from Warwickshire.'

He turns over his repertory of notions, and takes stock. 'I must not repeat the experiment of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Lyly's model has had its day; the bloom is off it, even for travesty; and that was a witty topical play with malice in it. One must not introduce topical hits or malice in celebrating a bridal....I have shown that I can do great things with the trick of mistaken identity, but I cannot possibly push the fun of it farther than I did in *The Comedy of Errors*; and the fun there, which I stole from Plautus, was clever but a trifle hard, inhuman...not at all the thing for a wedding....A wedding, if any occasion on earth, should be human: what is more, a wedding above any occasion on earth calls for poetry—and I *can* write poetry—witness my *Venus and Adonis*....Still, mistaken identity is a trick I know, a trick at which I am known to shine....If I could only make it poetical!...A pair of lovers, now?... For mistaken identity, *that* means *two* pairs of lovers,

<sup>1</sup> The mere speculations that follow are taken, with permission, from *Shakespeare's Workmanship* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1918), a series of lectures given at Cambridge. They profess to be no better than a tentative step—easily discredited—in a somewhat new method of interpretation. 'The worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.'

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## xvi A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

mischanging oaths somehow.... Yet I must on no account make it farcical. It was all very well, in *Errors*, to make wives mistake their husbands. That has been funny ever since the world began; and as ancient as cuckoldry, or almost. But this is a wedding-play, and the sweethearting must be fresh. Lover and Beloved are not so easily mistaken, deluded, as wife and husband—or ought not to be—in poetry.

'I like, too'—we fancy the young dramatist continuing—'this situation of the scorned lady following her love.... I did not quite succeed with it in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: but it is a good situation, nevertheless. Can I use it again<sup>1</sup>?...

'Lovers mistaking one another...scorned lady following the scorner, wandering...through a wood, say... Yes, and by night: this has to be written for a bridal evc....

'A night for lovers—a warm night—a summer's night—a midsummer's night—dewy thickets—the moon.... The moon? Why, of course, the moon! Pitch darkness is for tragedy, moonlight for love, for illusion. Lovers can be pardonably mistaken—under the moon.... What else—on a summer's night, in woodland, under the moon?

'Eh?...Oh, by Heaven! Fairies! Fairies, of course! Yes, and real Warwickshire fairies! Fairies full of mischief—and for a wedding, too! How does that verse of Spenser go?—

Ne let the Pouke...

Fairies, artificers and ministers of all illusion...the fairy ointment, philtres, pranks...fairies that

take the shining metals  
And beat them into shreds;  
And mould them into petals  
To make the flowers' heads,

<sup>1</sup> And he did: not only in this play, but in *All's Well That Ends Well*. It has a beautiful reflex in *Cymbeline*.

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and, crown of their hammering, the little western flower

Before, milk-white; now purple with love's wound—  
And maidens call it, Love-in-idleness.

These, and wandering lovers, a mistress scorned—Why, we scarcely need the moon after all!’

Then—for Shakespeare's fancy never started to work but it forthwith teemed—one can watch it opening out new alleys of fun, weaving its delicate filigrees upon and around the central invention. ‘How, for a tangle, to get one of the fairies caught in the web they spin? Why not even the Fairy Queen herself?... Yes; but the mortal she falls in love with? Shall he be one of the lovers?... Well, to say the truth, I have not given any particular character to those lovers. The absolute jest would be to introduce opposite extremes upon the middle illusion of the stage lovers, to make the Queen of Fairies herself dote on a gross clown—say through some overreaching cleverness of Puck's.... All very well, but I haven't any clowns!

‘The answer to *that* is, If I haven't I ought to have.... Stay again! I have been forgetting the Interlude all this while. An Interlude is expected in a wedding-play. ... Now suppose we make a set of clowns perform the Interlude—an improvement upon the eccentrics in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and get them chased by the fairies while they are rehearsing? Gross flesh and gossamer—that's an idea! If I cannot use it now I certainly will some day<sup>1</sup>.... But I *can* use it now! What is that story in Ovid about Midas and the ass's ears? Or am I confusing it with a story I read the other day, in a book about witches, of a man transformed into an ass?’<sup>2</sup>

*Ohe! jam satis!* Nobody suggests, of course, that Shakespeare hammered out *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* just in that way. Yet is it likely to be a nearer

<sup>1</sup> He did: in 5. 5. of the *Wives*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 168.

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## xviii A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

guess at his operation than any that can be reached by the traditional conception of a shadowy Prospero plucking out this or that volume from his library in search for his next plot? Admittedly Shakespeare was by habit careless whence he took his themes; and admittedly the plot of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is fairly ingenious. But why on earth people who, for the rest, idolise the man—why on earth they must choose to doubt him in one respect so lacking in ingenuity that he *could* never have written a drama without filching the idea of it from some inferior, British or foreign, baffles understanding. A man so opulent of imagination and of words and music and emotion and all other gifts of great poetry to be so confidently assumed a needy beggar of invention!

## VI

The play, at any rate, contains three plots: and these three plots are so prettily interwoven as to provide us not only with an early confutation of Ben Jonson's dictum, reported by Drummond of Hawthornden, that Shakespeare 'wanted art,' but with a help to discover the stage of his career at which he found himself as an artist. We cannot, needless to say, fix that moment for a genius so mighty in operation as Shakespeare's—

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

There must have been, after all, a tide in Shakespeare that gathered and swelled and carried him up from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to *Twelfth Night*, from *The Comedy of Errors* to *The Tempest*, as from *Titus Andronicus* to *Hamlet*, from *Richard the Third* or *Romeo and Juliet* to *Antony and Cleopatra*. And we can say of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* that here is a thing Shakespeare could not do when he was writing *The*

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*Two Gentlemen of Verona*. He has mastered the trick of it. As Mr Max Beerbohm once said in effect, writing on a performance of this play, 'Here we have the Master, confident in his art, at ease with it as a man in his dressing-gown, kicking up a loose slipper and catching it on his toe.' *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* shows a really careless grace—the best grace of the Graces.

Critics have complained that he gets his effect at the expense of stagifying his quartet of lovers—Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, Helena—depriving them of separate character. But the complaint is not over-intelligent. In the first place, he does get his effect—which is something. Secondly the play is a Dream, and in a dream reality and fantasy are allowed to exchange places: nay, it is a part of the illusion that they should. To shift 'Theseus' words to these Athenian lovers 'the best in *this* kind are but shadows'—in a magic wood where Oberon reigns and has a real quarrel with his queen—'and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.' Love, mortal love—'fancy,' as the Elizabethans called it—is a craze, a passion bred nor in the heart nor in the head. 'Let us all ring fancy's knell'—in this magic wood where the fairies are wise, and the mortals all, in one way or another, demented—'Lord, what fools these mortals be!'

## VII

We feel, at any rate, reading this play as it has come to us, that Shakespeare at last is pulling out the stops for his full music—not only his native wood-notes wild

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine:  
There sleeps Titania, some time of the night,  
Lulled in these flowers...

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## xx A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

or The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,  
 And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs,  
 And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,  
 To have my love to bed and to arise...

[imitated, of course, by Herrick, in his *Night-piece: to Julia*:

Her eyes the glow-worm lend thee,  
 The shooting stars attend thee;  
 And the elves also,  
 Whose little eyes glow  
 Like the sparks of fire, befriend thee...]

or Never so weary, never so in woe,  
 Bedabbled with the dew and torn with briars,

but the deeper-toned phrases such as

Following darkness like a dream,

or And as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation and a name.

That is just what this, the spirit, fairy-tale does—

Cras amet qui nunquam amavit—

before out of the humid midsummer wood, which it has drenched with poetry, it nestles like Ariel on the bat's back and escapes us, 'following darkness like a dream.' But the lark will be up 'from his moist cabinet.' and Autolycus will wake under the hedge to watch it.

The lark, that tirra-lirra chants  
 With heigh! with heigh! the thrush and the jay—  
 Are summer songs for me and my aunts,  
 While we lie tumbling in the hay.

## VIII

One of the editors once discussed with a friend how, if given their will, they would have *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* presented. They agreed at length on this:

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## INTRODUCTION

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The set scene should represent a large Elizabethan hall, panelled, having a lofty oak-timbered roof and an enormous staircase. The cavity under the staircase, occupying in breadth two-thirds of the stage, should be fronted with folding or sliding doors, which, being opened, should reveal the wood, recessed, moonlit, with its trees upon a flat arras or tapestry. On this secondary remoter stage the lovers should wander through their adventures, the fairies now conspiring in the quiet hall under the lantern, anon withdrawing into the woodland to befool the mortals straying there. Then, for the last scene and the interlude of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the hall should be filled with lights and company. That over, the bridal couples go up the great staircase. Last of all—and after a long pause, when the house is quiet, the lantern all but extinguished, the hall looking vast and eerie, lit only by a last flicker from the hearth—the fairies, announced by Puck, should come tripping back, swarming forth from cupboards and down curtains, somersaulting downstairs, sliding down the baluster rails; all hushed as they fall to work with their brooms—hushed, save for one little voice and a thin, small chorus scarcely more audible than the last dropping embers:

Through the house give glimmering light,  
 By the dead and drowsy fire,  
 Every elf and fairy sprite  
 Hop as light as bird from briar....  
 Hand in hand, with fairy grace,  
 Will we sing and bless this place....

Trip away:  
 Make no stay:  
 Meet me all by break of day

—and this is, we conceive, not far from picturing the play as it was actually presented in 1598<sup>1</sup>.

Q.

<sup>1</sup> v. pp. 98, 151.

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## TO THE READER

The following is a brief description of the punctuation and other typographical devices employed in the text, which have been more fully explained in the *Note on Punctuation* and the *Textual Introduction* to be found in *The Tempest* volume:

An obelisk (†) implies corruption or emendation, and suggests a reference to the Notes.

A single bracket at the beginning of a speech signifies an 'aside.'

Four dots represent a *full-stop* in the original, except when it occurs at the end of a speech, and they mark a long pause. Original *colons* or *semicolons*, which denote a somewhat shorter pause, are retained, or represented as three dots when they appear to possess special dramatic significance. Similarly, significant *commas* have been given as dashes.

Round brackets are taken from the original, and mark a significant change of voice; when the original brackets seem to imply little more than the drop in tone accompanying parenthesis, they are conveyed by commas or dashes.

In plays for which both Folio and Quarto texts exist, passages taken from the text not selected as the basis for the present edition will be enclosed within square brackets. Lines which Shakespeare apparently intended to cancel, have been marked off by frame-brackets.

Single inverted commas (‘’) are editorial; double ones (“”) derive from the original, where they are used to draw attention to maxims, quotations, etc.

The reference number for the first line is given at the head of each page. Numerals in square brackets are placed at the beginning of the traditional acts and scenes.

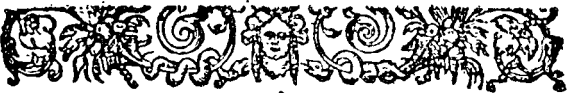


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A  
Midsummer nights  
dreame.

As it hath beene fundry times pub-  
lickely acted, by the Right honoura-  
ble, the Lord Chamberlaine his  
servants.

*Written by William Shakespeare.*



¶ Imprinted at London, for *Thomas Fisher*, and are to  
be soulede at his shoppe, at the Signe of the White Hart,  
in *Fleetestreete*. 1600.

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Scene : Athens, and a wood hard by

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

THESEUS, *Duke of Athens*

HIPPOLYTA, *Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus*

EGEUS, *an old man, father to Hermia*

LYSANDER } *young gentlemen, in love with*  
 DEMETRIUS } *Hermia*

PHILOSTRATE, *master of the revels to Theseus*

HERMIA (*short and dark*), *daughter to Egeus, in love with Lysander*

HELENA (*tall and fair*), *in love with Demetrius*

PETER QUINCE, *a carpenter*

NICK BOTTOM, *a weaver*

FRANCIS FLUTE, *a bellows-mender*

TOM SNOUT, *a tinker*

ROBIN STARVELING, *a tailor*

SNUG, *a joiner*

OBERON, *King of the Fairies*

TITANIA, *Queen of the Fairies*

ROBIN GOODFELLOW, THE PUCK

PEASEBLOSSOM }  
 COBWEB } *fairies*  
 MOTH }  
 MUSTARDSEED }

*Other fairies attending their King and Queen*

*Attendants on Theseus and Hippolyta*