**Midsummer Night's Dream**

**Character List**

**Theseus** the Duke of Athens.

**Hippolyta** the Queen of the Amazons and betrothed to Theseus.

**Philostrate** the Master of the Revels to Theseus.

**Egeus** the father of Hermia.

**Hermia** the daughter of Egeus and in love with Lysander.

**Lysander** the man loved by Hermia.

**Demetrius** a suitor to Hermia.

**Helena** a close friend of Hermia and in love with Demetrius.

**Oberon** King of the Fairies.

**Titania** the wife of Oberon and the Queen of the Fairies.

**Robin Goodfellow, a puck** a mischievous fairy who causes much confusion in the play.

**Peaseblossom** a fairy.

**Cobweb** a fairy.

**Mote** a fairy.

**Mustardseed** a fairy.

**Peter Quince** a carpenter and one of the artisans.

**Nick Bottom** a weaver who is transformed into an ass by Puck.

**Francis Flute** a bellows-mender and one of the artisans.

**Tom Snout** a tinker and one of the artisans.

**Snug** a joiner.

**Robin Starveling** a tailor.

**Other lords and fairies**

**Summary**

**Summary and Analysis of Act 1**

**Act One, Scene One**

 [Theseus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3526), the Duke of Athens, is preparing the city for a large festival to mark his imminent marriage to [Hippolyta](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3527). [Egeus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3529), a nobleman, enters the stage accompanied by his daughter [Hermia](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3530), the man she loves named [Lysander](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3531), and the man Egeus wants her to marry named [Demetrius](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3532). He begs Theseus for the ancient Athenian right to either make his daughter marry Demetrius or have the power to kill her.

 Theseus offers Hermia only two options: she must marry Demetrius or join a nunnery. He then departs with the other men, leaving Hermia and Lysander behind on stage. Lysander quickly convinces Hermia to sneak into the woods the next night so that they may get married at his aunt's house outside of Athens. She agrees to the plan.

 [Helena](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3533) arrives and laments the fact that Demetrius only has eyes for Hermia, even though she loves him far more than Hermia ever could. Lysander tells her to not worry since he and Hermia are sneaking away that night. Helena, in a final soliloquy, indicates that she will tell Demetrius about Hermia's plans because that might make him start to love her again.

**Act One, Scene Two**

 The assembled artisans gather and [Peter Quince](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3541) hands out several parts to a play they want to perform for the Duke's wedding. The play is based on Pyramus and Thisbe, and is meant to be a comedy and a tragedy at the same time. One of the actors, [Nick Bottom](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3542), is afraid that if the make the lion in the play too real, it might frighten the ladies and get them all hung. They finally all agree to meet in the woods outside of the city the next night to rehearse their parts.

**Analysis of Act One**

 Two themes present in many of Shakespeare's plays, the struggle of men to dominate women and the conflict between father and daughter, form a large part of the dramatic content of A [Midsummer Night's Dream](http://www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-dream/). In the first act both forms of tension appear, when Theseus remarks that he has won Hippolyta by defeating her, "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword" (1.1.16), and via the conflict between Egeus and Hermia. Adding to this war of the sexes are Lysander and Demetrius, both wooing Hermia away from her father.

 It is therefore necessary to realize that A Midsummer Night's Dream is really a play about finding oneself in order to be free of these authoritative and sexual conflicts. The forest therefore quickly emerges as the location where all of these struggles must be resolved. Hermia will try to seek her freedom from Egeus in the woods, in the process fighting a battle against arranged marriages and for passionate love. The buffoons, in the form of the artisans, add an undercurrent of comedy which at first masks the very real events unfolding on the stage. Yet later they will provide a terrifying (albeit funny) vision of what could have happened in A Midsummer Night's Dream, in the form of their Pyramus and Thisbe play.

 Recalling [Romeo and Juliet](http://www.gradesaver.com/romeo-and-juliet/), Theseus offers Hermia the choice of the nunnery or death. As always in Shakespeare (note Juliet), this is not a viable option for a young woman who is beautiful. Hermia therefore decides to run away rather than face the certainty of death.

 A remarkable aspect of A Midsummer Night's Dream is that it contains a play within a play. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe serves to not only show the tragedy that might have occurred if the fairies had not intervened, but also to comment on the nature of reality versus theater. Nick Bottom, afraid the lion will frighten the ladies, get them to write a prologue in which the lion is explicitly revealed as only being an actor. Adding to this, Pyramus must further provide a commentary in which he informs the audience that he is not really committing suicide, but is only acting.

 This play within a play is therefore used by Shakespeare to make a subtle point about theater, namely the fact that it is only acting. Elizabethan times were not so far removed from the medieval past that actors lived with impunity, regardless of their roles. The threat of censorship was very real, a fact that Shakespeare makes laughable in Pyramus and Thisbe. A further purpose of pointing out the distinction between theater and reality could have been to try and convince the public that it does not matter what is put on stage, since the audience clearly knows that it is only a facade. However, Shakespeare throws all of this into doubt with his suggestion in the epilogue that the play has only been a "dream."

**Summary and Analysis of Act 2**

**Act Two, Scene One**

 Robin Goodfellow, also called Puck, meets with a fairy who serves Queen [Titania](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3535). She tells him that Titania is coming to the woods outside of Athens that night. Puck informs the fairy that it would be better if Titania and his master, [Oberon](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3534), did not meet since they only quarrel when they do so.

 Seconds later both Oberon and Titania arrive onstage, both accompanied by their respective fairy followers. Immediately they begin an argument, with both of them accusing each other of infidelity and jealousy. Titania has stolen a young boy whom she keeps with her and spends her time caring for. Oberon, jealous of the attention the boy is receiving, demands that Titania give the boy to him, a request she refuses.

 After Titania departs, Oberon vows to get revenge on her for causing him embarrassment. He sends his puck to fetch some pansies, the juice of which is supposed to make a person love the first thing he or she sees upon waking up. Oberon's plan is to put the juice onto Titania's eyes while she sleeps, so that she will fall in love with the first animal she sees after waking up. Puck leaves him and Oberon hides himself.

 [Demetrius](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3532) and [Helena](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3533) arrive in the woods right next to where Oberon is hidden. Demetrius tells Helena to go away, and that he does not love her even though she has told him about [Hermia](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3530) and [Lysander](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3531) trying to run away. She threatens to chase him down if he should try to leave her in the woods.

Oberon, having overheard the entire conversation, decides to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena. He tells Robin Goodfellow to take some of the juice and go anoint the eyes of the Athenian man in the woods, but doing so only when it is certain that the woman by his side will be the first person he sees. The puck agrees, and goes off to carry out his errand.

**Act Two, Scene Two**

 Titania calls for a quick dance in the woods with her fairies, after which they sing her to sleep. Oberon takes the opportunity to sneak up and drop the pansy juice onto her closed eyelids. Soon thereafter Lysander and Hermia, tired of walking and having lost their way, decide to go to sleep as well. They lie down, but Hermia demands that Lysander sleep a short distance away in order to keep up her sense of modesty since she is not married to him yet.

 The puck enters, having vainly searched the woods for an Athenian. He spies Lysander lying apart from Hermia and deduces that this must be the hard-hearted Athenian which Oberon spoke about. Robin Goodfellow quickly drops some of the juice onto Lysander's eyes.

 Demetrius, followed closely by Helena, runs into the clearing where Lysander is lying asleep. She begs him to stop running away from her, but he refuses and leaves her there alone. Helena finally sees Lysander on the ground and shakes him awake, unwittingly becoming the first woman he sees when he opens his eyes. Lysander immediately falls in love with Helena, and tells her that he deeply loves her. She thinks it is a cruel joke and tells him to stop abusing her.

 Helena leaver, and Lysander decides to forget about Hermia and follow Helena instead. Hermia wakes up because she is scared about a dream she has had in which a serpent eats her heart. She calls for Lysander, but he is no longer near her. She then leaves her bed to go search for him.

**Analysis of Act Two**

 The aspect of the woods as a place for the characters to reach adulthood is made even more explicit in this scene. In the dialogue between Helena and Demetrius, the woods are a place to be feared, and also are a place to lose virginity. As Demetrius warns, "You do impeach your modesty too much, / To leave the city and commit yourself / Into the hands of one that loves you not; / To trust the opportunity of night / And the ill counsel of a desert place, / With the rich worth of your virginity" (2.1.214-219). Thus the forest can be allegorically read as a sort of trial for the characters, a phase they must pass through in order to reach maturity.

 Hermia's serpent serves as a sign of the monsters which are in the woods. This plays into the fact that the woods are not only a place which the characters must escape from, but are also a place of imagination. Hermia's fear of her dream, in which the monster and the danger are only imagined, is meant to show the audience that the danger in a play is only imagined by the audience; neither the play nor Hermia's dream are real.

**Summary and Analysis of Act 3**

**Act Three, Scene One**

 The rustics and artisans arrive in the woods and discuss their play, Pyramus and Thisbe. Bottom is afraid that if Pyramus commits suicide with his sword, it might seem too real and cause the ladies to be afraid. As a result, they agree to write a prologue which tells the audience that Pyramus is really only Bottom the Weaver and that he does not really kill himself.

 Next, Snout becomes afraid that [Snug](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3545)'s role as the lion will cause a similar fear. Thus, they undertake to write another prologue to tell the audience that it is not a lion, but only Snug the joiner. The men further decide that Snug should speak to the audience directly and that half his head should be visible through the costume.

 Finally they start to rehearse the play, with the puck eavesdropping in the background. Each of the actors makes several word mistakes, giving the phrases completely different meanings. The puck leaves when Bottom goes offstage, and reappears with Bottom, who now wears a donkey’s head which the puck put on him. Bottom is blissfully unaware that he is transformed into an ass, and humorously asks the others why they run away from him.

 At this point [Titania](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3535) wakes up and sees Bottom, with his donkey’s head, and falls in love with him. She begs him to keep singing and making jokes for her, and entreats him to remain in the forest with her. She then calls four fairies in to take care of Bottom and lead him to her garden.

**Act Three, Scene Two**

 Robin Goodfellow, the puck, returns to [Oberon](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3534) and tells him what has happened to Titania. Oberon is overjoyed that Titania is being humiliated in this way. He then asks about the Athenian he wanted to fall in love with [Helena](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3533). At this point [Demetrius](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3532) and [Hermia](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3530) enter the stage.

 Hermia is convinced that Demetrius has killed [Lysander](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3531) in his sleep, and in her fury she curses Demetrius for his actions. She finally storms away, leaving Demetrius to fall asleep in front of Oberon. Oberon, furious that Robin has ruined his plan to make Demetrius love Helena, sends Robin off to get her. The puck soon returns with both Helene and Lysander.

 Helena believes that Lysander is only mocking her with his words of love, and tells him that his phrases have no substance. Inadvertently she wakes up Demetrius, on whose eyes Oberon has applied his pansy juice. Demetrius sees her and also falls in love with Helena, saying, "O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!" (3.2.138).

 In the midst of this quarrel over which man loves Helena more, Hermia arrives. She is shocked by Lysander's words and does not believe that he could possibly love Helena. Helena assumes that Hermia is part of the mockery, and chastises her for violating the close friendship which they have enjoyed since childhood.

 Demetrius and Lysander begin to quarrel over Helena even more intensely, at which point Hermia breaks in and tries to stop Lysander. He spurns her, calling her a serpent and a dwarf, and finally leaves with Demetrius to fight over which man should get Helena.

 Oberon and Robin step forward, having watched the entire spectacle. Oberon is furious about the mess that Robin has created and orders him to separate Demetrius and Lysander. He then tells the puck to make the men fall asleep, and to rub the juice on Lysander's eyes and make him see Hermia when he awakes. Robin mimics the mens' voices, causing them to follow shadows and sounds and effectively separating them.

**Act Three, Scene Three**

 Robin leads both men until they fall asleep on the ground. He then finds the two women and brings them close to their "lovers" before letting them fall asleep as well. His last act is to sprinkle the juice into Lysander's eyes so that he will fall in love with Hermia

when he awakes and sees her.

**Analysis of Act Three**

 What is interesting in this scene is the interchangeability of the characters. Lysander and Demetrius, Helena and Hermia, each of them switches roles and becomes the other person. One of the primary ways that Shakespeare indicates maturity is to make his characters distinct. Thus, at this stage of the play the lovers are clearly not yet mature enough in their love to escape from the forest. Puck makes this clear by the way he leads them around in circles until they all collapse in exhaustion. It is this interchangeability that must be resolved before the lovers can fully exit from the forest.

 The nature of this interchangeability is further evidenced by the characters themselves. Helena says to Hermia:

 "We, Hermia, like two artificial gods Have with our needles created both one flower, Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion, Both warbling of one song, both in one key, As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds Had been incorporate. So we grew together, Like to a double cherry" (3.2.204-210).

 "Like to a double cherry." This line sums up the reason why they are lost in the forest: it is necessary for them to become distinct from one another. After all, Lysander and Demetrius have been able to shift their love to Helena without noticing any difference whatsoever. Therefore, the forest is not only a place of maturation, but also of finding one's identity.

 Perhaps the most famous line from A [Midsummer Night's Dream](http://www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-dream/) is when Puck remarks, "Lord what fools these mortals be!" (3.2.115). His exclamation, directed at the ridiculous antics of Lysander, is also a direct jibe towards the audience. The nature of human love is challenged in this line, which implies that people will make fools of themselves because of love.

 Shakespeare's challenge of what is real versus what is only dreamed emerges in full force in this scene. Oberon decides that he will resolve the conflicts once and for all, saying, "And when they wake, all this derision / Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision" (3.2.372-3). Thus the lovers are expected to wake up, each loving the correct person, and each having found his or her own identity.

**Summary and Analysis of Act 4**

**Act Four, Scene One**

 [Titania](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3535) and Bottom, still with a donkey’s head, enter the stage followed by Titania's fairies. Bottom asks the fairies to scratch his head, and is hungry for some hay. Titania, completely in love with him, orders the fairies to find him food. Together they soon fall asleep.

 [Oberon](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3534) enters and looks at his sleeping Queen. He tells the puck that Titania gave him her young boy earlier in the woods, and so it is time for him to remove the spell from her eyes. He orders Robin to change Bottom back to normal, but first he wakes up Titania. She at first thinks she dreamed about being in love with a donkey, but then sees Bottom still asleep by her side. Oberon helps her off the ground and tells her that tomorrow they will dance at the weddings of [Theseus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3526) and the other two couples.

 Theseus, [Hippolyta](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3527) and [Egeus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3529) arrive where the lovers are sleeping. They are in the woods to celebrate the May morning with hunting hounds in preparation of the day's ceremonies. Theseus sees the lovers and has them woken by sounding the hunting horns.

 The lovers tell Theseus what they remember from the night before, and [Lysander](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3531) declares his love for [Hermia](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3530) while [Demetrius](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3532) speaks of his love for [Helena](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3533). Theseus decides to override Egeus' will and have all three of them get married in Athens that day. They eventually all depart for Athens.

 Bottom wakes up and realizes that he has been abandoned in the woods by his friends. He recalls what happened to him only as a dream, a dream about which he says, "I will get [Peter Quince](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3541) to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream' (4.1.208). Bottom then returns to Athens.

**Act Four, Scene Two**

 The artisans are lamenting the fact that the Duke Theseus is already married, as well as the other noblemen, which means they missed their chance to perform Pyramus and Thisbe at the wedding. Bottom finally arrives and tells the men to hurry to the festivities since there is still enough time to perform the play.

**Analysis of Act Four**

 The transition of reality into only a dream emerges a second time in Act Four. Oberon tells Titania that Bottom will "think no more of this night's accidents / But as the fierce vexation of a dream" (4.1.65-6). Indeed, this is exactly what happens: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was" (4.1.205-207).

 It is the way that Bottom deals with his nightmare of a dream that is important and interesting. Not only is he not afraid of it, but he wants to turn it into a ballad. Turning a fearful nightmare into a fun song is crucial to understanding what Shakespeare has done with A [Midsummer Night's Dream](http://www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-dream/). This play is the [Romeo and Juliet](http://www.gradesaver.com/romeo-and-juliet/) theme woven into a play, taking the sad tragedy and converting it into comedy. Thus Shakespeare is making a further comment about the nature of plays and acting, showing them to be a medium by which our worst fears can be dissipated into hilarity.

 The nature of doubling emerges once again in this act, but for the last time. Hermia remarks that, "Methinks I see these things with parted eye, / When everything seems double" (4.1.186-7). This comment occurs right after Theseus has overridden Egeus' desires and agreed to let Hermia and Lysander get married. Hermia is correct about the fact that this is a doubling of marriages. In spite of escaping from the confusion of the forest, there is still a lingering uncertainty about whether Lysander and Demetrius have been able to distinguish between Helena and Hermia. The effect of having a double wedding merely makes the newfound differences more vague, making Hermia wonder if things still are in fact double.

**Summary and Analysis of Act 5**

**Act Five, Scene One**

 In the palace where [Theseus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3526) and [Hippolyta](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3527) reside, the guests are waiting for some form of after dinner entertainment. Theseus has [Egeus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3529) read him a list of possible performances, and Theseus finally settles on 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth' as the play he wants to see performed. Egeus tries to dissuade him, telling him that the actors are workingmen will no talent, but Theseus is adamant that he watch them perform.

 Quince delivers the prologue, a masterpiece of writing fraught with sentence fragments which serve to reverse the meaning of the actual phrases:

 “If we offend, it is with our good will. That you should think: we

 come not to offend But with good will. To show our simple skill, That is

 the true beginning of our end. Consider then we come but in despite.

 We do not come as minding to content you, Our true intent is. All for

 your delight We are not here. That you should here repent you The actors

 are at hand, and by their show You shall know all that you are like to know.”

 (5.1.108-117)

 The play is then performed, with numerous linguistic errors and incorrect references making it into a complete farce. Hippolyta condemns the play as being "silly" while Theseus defends it as being nothing more than imaginative. During the performance, Theseus, [Lysander](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3531), [Demetrius](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3532) and Hippolyta add commentary which criticizes the action, and makes fun of the antics of the laymen.

 At the end of the play both Bottom and Flute get up from where they are lying, supposedly dead, and offer to perform an epilogue or a bergamask (a type of dance). Theseus quickly intervenes and tells them they need no epilogue, but rather should only perform the dance, which they do.

**Act Five, Scene Two**

 Puck enters with a broom and sweeps the stage. In a monologue he informs the audience that not even a mouse will disturb the lovers, and it can be inferred that he is protecting their bedchambers. [Oberon](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3534) and [Titania](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3535) arrive in order to bless the union of Theseus and Hippolyta. They perform a fairy dance and depart, leaving Puck alone on stage.

**Epilogue**

 Puck's epilogue begs forgiveness of the audience and says: If we shadows have offended, Think but this, and all is mended: That you have but slumbered here, While these visions did appear; (Epilogue, 1-4) indicating that if someone did not like the play, then he or she should imagine that it was all a dream.

**Analysis of Act Five**

 This final act at first seems completely unnecessary to the overall plot of the play. After all, in Act Four we not only have the lovers getting married, but there has been a happy resolution to the conflict. Thus, the immediate question which arises is why Shakespeare felt it necessary to include this act.

 The answer lies in the fact that Shakespeare is trying to drive home a point about theater; he wants to make it very clear that the ending to this play could just as easily have been tragedy, not comedy. The Pyramus and Thisbe play makes this very clear because it parallels the actual action of the lovers so closely. Pyramus and Thisbe decide to run away, a lion (one of the monsters in the forest) emerges and seizes Thisbe's cloak, and when Pyramus sees the bloodied cloak he rashly commits suicide. This ending could easily have been the ending to A [Midsummer Night's Dream](http://www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-dream/).

 The final act also serves to challenge the audience's notions about reality and imagination. Seeing the pathetic acting of the artisans, Theseus remarks that, "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact" (5.1.7-8). By this he means that it is imagination which makes people crazy, but it is also the imagination which inspires people. Without imagination it would be much more difficult to enjoy a play, as evidenced by the farce of Pyramus and Thisbe, about which Hippolyta comments, "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard." Theseus helps her overcome this problem by saying, "The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them" (5.1.207,208). Thus, the imagination can solve all the problems.

 Perhaps the most telling line of the last act is when Theseus asks, "How shall we find the concord of this discord?" (5.1.60). That is exactly what has happened in the play itself, namely there has been a resolution to the discord of the lovers in the initial scenes, which by the end has turned into concord.

**About Midsummer Night's Dream**

 A [Midsummer Night's Dream](http://www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-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](http://www.gradesaver.com/romeo-and-juliet/) was created. Indeed, many similarities exist between the two plays, so much that A Midsummer Night's Dream at times seems likely to degenerate into the same tragic ending that befalls Romeo and Juliet.

 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 was printed in 1619 (and falsely backdated to 1600) and attempted to correct some of the errors in the first printing, but also introduced several new errors. It is the second quarto which served as the basis for the First Folio in 1623.

 There is a myth that A Midsummer Night's Dream was first performed for a private audience after an actual wedding had taken place. The play's three wedding and play-within-a-play Pyramus and Thisbe certainly would seem to fit the scene, with all the newlyweds retiring to their respective chambers at the end. However, no evidence of this imagined performance exists. Rather, A Midsummer Night's Dream was definitely performed on the London stage by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and the title page of the first Quarto indicates it was written by [William Shakespeare](http://www.gradesaver.com/author/shakespeare/).

 The title draws on the summer solstice, Midsummer Eve, occurring June 23 and marked by holiday partying and tales of fairies and temporary insanity. Shakespeare cleverly weaves together not only fairies and lovers, but also social hierarchies with the aristocratic [Theseus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3526) and the "rude mechanicals," or the artisans and working men. This allows the play to become infinitely more lyrical, since it is able to draw on the more brutal language of the lower classes as well as the poetry of the noblemen.

 One of the more interesting changes which Shakespeare introduces is the concept of small, kind fairies. Robin Goodfellow, the spirit known as Puck, is thought to have once been feared by villagers. History indicates the prior to Elizabethan times, fairies were considered evil spirits who stole children and sacrificed them to the devil. Shakespeare, along with other writers, redefined fairies during this time period, turning them into gentle, albeit mischievous, spirits.

 The final act of the play, completely unnecessary in relation to the rest of the plot, brings to light a traditional fear of the Elizabethan theater, namely that of censorship. Throughout the play the lower artisans, who wish to perform Pyramus and Thisbe, try to corrupt the plot and assure the audience that the play is not real and that they need not fear the actions taking place. This culminates in the actual ending, in which Puck suggests that if we do not like the play, then we should merely consider it to have been a dream. One of the most remarkable features of A Midsummer Night's Dream is that at the end members of the audience are unsure whether what they have seen is real, or whether they have woken up after having shared the same dream. This is of course precisely what Shakespeare wants to make clear, namely that the theater is nothing more than a shared dream. Hence the constant interruption of that dream in the Pyramus and Thisbe production, which serves to highlight the artificial aspect of the theater. Bottom and his company offer us not only Pyramus and Thisbe as a product of our imagination, but the entire play as well.

 Puck's suggestion hides a more serious aspect of the comic fun of the play. There is deep underlying sexual tension between the male and female characters, witnessed by [Oberon](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3534)'s attempts to humiliate [Titania](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3535) and Theseus' conquest of [Hippolyta](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3527). This tension is rapidly dissipated by the sure solution which the play assumes, making it seem less real. However, the darker side of the play should not be ignored, nor the rapid mobility with which the actors transfer their amorous desires from one person to the other.

**Short Summary**

 A [Midsummer Night's Dream](http://www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-dream/) takes place in Athens. [Theseus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3526), the Duke of Athens, is planning his marriage with [Hippolyta](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3527), and as a result he is a planning a large festival. [Egeus](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3529) enters, followed by his daughter [Hermia](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3530), her beloved [Lysander](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3531), and her suitor [Demetrius](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3532). Egeus tells Theseus that Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius, wanting instead to marry Lysander. He asks for the right to punish Hermia with death if she refuses to obey.

 Theseus agrees that Hermia's duty is to obey her father, and threatens her with either entering a nunnery or marrying the man her father chooses. Lysander protests, but is overruled by the law. He and Hermia than decide to flee by night into the woods surrounding Athens, where they can escape the law and get married. They tell their plan to [Helena](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3533), a girl who is madly in love with Demetrius. Hoping to gain favor with Demetrius, Helena decides to tell him about the plan.

 Some local artisans and workmen have decided to perform a play for Theseus as a way to celebrate his wedding. They choose Pyramus and Thisbe for their play, and meet to assign the roles. [Nick Bottom](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3542) gets the role of Pyramus, and Flute takes the part of Thisbe. They agree to meet the next night in the woods to rehearse the play.

 [Robin Goodfellow, a puck](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3536), meets a fairy who serves Queen [Titania](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3535). He tells the fairy that his King [Oberon](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=3534) is in the woods, and that Titania should avoid Oberon because they will quarrel again. However, Titania and Oberon soon arrive and begin arguing about a young boy Titania has stolen and is caring for. Oberon demands that she give him the boy, but she refuses.

 Oberon decides to play a trick on Titania and put some pansy juice on her eyes. The magical juice will make her fall in love with first person she sees upon waking up. Soon after Puck is sent away to fetch the juice, Oberon overhears Demetrius and Helena in the woods.

 Demetrius deserts Helena in the forest, leaving her alone. Oberon decides that he will change this situation, and commands Robin to put the juice onto Demetrius's eyes when he is sleeping. He then finds Titania and drops the juice onto her eyelids. Robin goes to find Demetrius, but instead comes across Lysander and accidentally uses the juice on him.

 By accident Helena comes across Lysander and wakes him up. He immediately falls in love with her and starts to chase her through the woods. Together they arrive where Oberon is watching, and he realizes the mistake. Oberon then puts the pansy juice onto Demetrius's eyelids, who upon waking up also falls in love with Helena. She thinks that the two men are trying to torment her for being in love with Demetrius, and becomes furious at their protestations of love.

 The workmen arrive in the woods and start to practice their play. They constantly ruin the lines of the play and mispronounce the words. Out of fear of censorship, they decide to make the play less realistic. Therefore the lion is supposed to announce that he is not a lion, but only a common man. Bottom also feels obliged to tell the audience that he is not really going to die, but will only pretend to do so. Puck, watching this silly scene, catches Bottom alone and puts an asses head on him. When Bottom returns to his troupe, they run away out of fear. Bottom then comes across Titania, and succeeds in waking her up. She falls in love with him due to the juice on her eyes, and takes him with her.

 Lysander and Demetrius prepare to fight one another for Helena. Puck intervenes and leads them through the woods in circles until they collapse onto the ground in exhaustion. He then brings the two women to same area and puts them to sleep as well.

 Oberon finds Titania and releases her from the spell. He then tells the audience that Bottom will think is all a dream when he wakes up. He further releases Lysander from the spell. Theseus arrives with a hunting party and finds the lovers stretched out on the ground. He orders the hunting horns blown in order to wake them up.

 The lovers explain why they are in the woods, at which point Egeus demands that he be allowed to exercise the law on Hermia. However, Demetrius intervenes and tells them that he no longer loves Hermia, but rather only loves Helena. Theseus decides to overbear Egeus and let the lovers get married that day with him. Together they return to Athens.

 Bottom wakes up and thinks that he has dreamed the entire episode. He swiftly returns to Athens where he meets his friends. Together they head over to Theseus's palace. Theseus looks over the list of possible entertainment for that evening and settles on the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. Bottom and the rest of his company perform the play, after which everyone retires to bed.

Puck arrives and starts to sweep the house clean. Oberon and Titania briefly bless the couples and their future children. After they leave Puck asks the audience to forgive the actors is they were offended. He then tells the audience that if anyone disliked the play, they should imagine that it was only a dream.