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FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

AN UPDATED EDITION

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT
AND PAUL WERSTINE

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From the Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library

It is hard to imagine a world without Shakespeare. Since their composition more than four hundred years ago, Shakespeare's plays and poems have traveled the globe, inviting those who see and read his works to make them their own.

Readers of the New Folger Editions are part of this ongoing process of "taking up Shakespeare," finding our own thoughts and feelings in language that strikes us as old or unusual and, for that very reason, new. We still struggle to keep up with a writer who could think a mile a minute, whose words paint pictures that shift like clouds. These expertly edited texts, presented here with accompanying explanatory notes and up-to-date critical essays, are distinctive because of what they do: they allow readers not simply to keep up, but to engage deeply with a writer whose works invite us to think, and think again.

These New Folger Editions of Shakespeare's plays are also special because of where they come from. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., where the Editions are produced, is the single greatest documentary source of Shakespeare's works. An unparalleled collection of early modern books, manuscripts, and artwork connected to Shakespeare, the Folger's holdings have been consulted extensively in the preparation of these texts. The Editions also reflect the expertise gained through the regular performance of Shakespeare's works in the Folger's Elizabethan Theater.

I want to express my deep thanks to editors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine for creating these indispensable editions of Shakespeare's works, which incorporate the best of textual scholarship with a richness of commentary that is both inspired and engaging. Readers who want to know more about Shakespeare and his plays can follow the paths these distinguished scholars have tread by visiting the Folger itself, where a range of physical and digital resources (available online) exist to supplement the material in these texts. I commend to you these words, and hope that they inspire.

Michael Witmore
Director, Folger Shakespeare Library

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Editors' Preface

In recent years, ways of dealing with Shakespeare's texts and with the interpretation of his plays have been undergoing significant change. This edition, while retaining many of the features that have always made the Folger Shakespeare so attractive to the general reader, at the same time reflects these current ways of thinking about Shakespeare. For example, modern readers, actors, and teachers have become interested in the differences between, on the one hand, the early forms in which Shakespeare's plays were first published and, on the other hand, the forms in which editors through the centuries have presented them. In response to this interest, we have based our edition on what we consider the best early printed version of a particular play (explaining our rationale in a section called "An Introduction to This Text") and have marked our changes in the text—unobtrusively, we hope, but in such a way that the curious reader can be aware that a change has been made and can consult the "Textual Notes" to discover what appeared in the early printed version.

Current ways of looking at the plays are reflected in our brief introductions, in many of the commentary notes, in the annotated lists of "Further Reading," and especially in each play's "Modern Perspective," an essay written by an outstanding scholar who brings to the reader his or her fresh assessment of the play in the light of today's interests and concerns.

As in the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare, which the New Folger Library Shakespeare replaces, we include explanatory notes designed to help make Shakespeare's language clearer to a modern

reader, and we place the notes on the page facing the text that they explain. We also follow the earlier edition in including illustrations—of objects, of clothing, of mythological figures—from books and manuscripts in the Folger Library collection. We provide fresh accounts of the life of Shakespeare, of the publishing of his plays, and of the theaters in which his plays were performed, as well as an introduction to the text itself. We also include a section called "Reading Shakespeare's Language," in which we try to help readers learn to "break the code" of Elizabethan poetic language.

For each section of each volume, we are indebted to a host of generous experts and fellow scholars. The "Reading Shakespeare's Language" sections, for example, could not have been written had not Arthur King, of Brigham Young University, and Randal Robinson, author of *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language*, led the way in untangling Shakespearean language puzzles and generously shared their insights and methodologies with us. "Shakespeare's Life" profited by the careful reading given it by S. Schoenbaum; "Shakespeare's Theater" was read and strengthened by Andrew Gurr, John Astington, and William Ingram. "The Publication of Shakespeare's Plays" is indebted to the comments of Peter W. M. Blayney. We, as editors, take sole responsibility for any errors in our editions.

We are grateful to the authors of the "Modern Perspectives"; to Leeds Barroll and David Bevington for their generous encouragement; to the Huntington and Newberry Libraries for fellowship support; to King's University College for the grants it has provided to Paul Werstine; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided him with Research Time Stipends; to R. J. Shroyer of Western University for essential computer support; and to the

Folger Institute's Center for Shakespeare Studies for its fortuitous sponsorship of a workshop on "Shakespeare's Texts for Students and Teachers" (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by Richard Knowles of the University of Wisconsin), a workshop from which we learned an enormous amount about what is wanted by college and high-school teachers of Shakespeare today.

In preparing this preface for the publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1993, we wrote: "Our biggest debt is to the Folger Shakespeare Library—to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Library, who made possible our edition; to Jean Miller, the Library's Art Curator, who combed the library holdings for illustrations, and to Julie Ainsworth, Head of the Photography Department, who carefully photographed them; to Peggy O'Brien, Director of Education, who gave us expert advice about the needs being expressed by Shakespeare teachers and students (and to Martha Christian and other 'master teachers' who used our texts in manuscript in their classrooms); to the staff of the Academic Programs Division, especially Paul Menzer (who drafted 'Further Reading' material), Mary Tonkinson, Lena Cowen Orlin, Molly Haws, and Jessica Hymowitz; and, finally, to the staff of the Library Reading Room, whose patience and support have been invaluable."

As we revise the play for publication in 2016, we add to the above our gratitude to Michael Witmore, Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, who brings to our work a gratifying enthusiasm and vision; to Gail Kern Paster, Director of the Library from 2002 until July 2011, whose interest and support have been unfailing and whose scholarly expertise continues to be an invaluable resource; to Jonathan Evans and Alysha Bullock, our production editors at Simon & Schuster,

whose expertise, attention to detail, and wisdom are essential to this project; to the Folger's Photography Department; to Deborah Curren-Aquino for continuing superb editorial assistance and for her exceptionally fine Further Reading annotations; to Alice Falk for her expert copyediting; to Michael Poston for unfailing computer support; to Anna Levine; and to Rebecca Niles (whose help is crucial). Among the editions we consulted, we found the commentary notes in Peter Holland's 1994 Oxford World's Classics edition especially useful. Finally, we once again express our thanks to Stephen Llano for twenty-five years of support as our invaluable production editor, to the late Jean Miller for the wonderful images she unearthed, and to the ever-supportive staff of the Library Reading Room.

Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine
2016

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare confronts us with mysterious images of romantic desire. There are Theseus and Hippolyta, about to be married; both are strange and wonderful figures from classical mythology. Theseus is a great warrior, a kinsman of Hercules; she is an Amazon, a warrior-woman, defeated in battle by Theseus. His longing for the wedding day opens the play, and the play closes with their exit to their marriage bed.

Within Theseus's world of Athens, two young men and two young women sort themselves out into marriageable couples, but only after one triangle, with Hermia at the apex and Helena excluded, is temporarily replaced by another, this time with Helena at the apex and Hermia excluded. At each point the fickle young men think they are behaving rationally and responsibly as infatuation (sometimes caused by a magic flower, sometimes not) leads them into fierce claims and counterclaims, and the audience is shown the power of desire to take over one's vision and one's actions. By presenting the young lovers as almost interchangeable, Shakespeare displays and probes the mystery of how lovers find differences—compelling, life-shaping differences—where there seem to be only likenesses.

In the woods outside of Athens, where the lovers suffer their strange love experiences, we find yet other images of desire, these involving the king and queen of Fairyland and an Athenian weaver transformed into an ass-headed monster. King Oberon and Queen Titania are engaged in a near-epic battle over custody of an orphan boy; the king uses magic to make the queen

fall in love with the monster. The monster—a simple weaver named Bottom who came into the woods with his companions to rehearse a play for Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding—is himself the victim of magic. He has been turned into a monster by Oberon's helper, a hobgoblin or "puck" named Robin Goodfellow. The love-experience of Titania and Bottom is a playing out of the familiar "beauty and the beast" story, and, like the stories of the young lovers, it makes us wonder at the power of infatuation to transform the image of the beloved in the lover's eyes.

Finally, there is the tragic love story of "Pyramus and Thisbe," ineptly written and staged by Bottom and his workingmen companions. In this story romantic love leads to a double suicide—provoking only mirth in the onstage audience but reminding us once again of the extraordinary power of desire.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, Shakespeare stages the workings of love in ways that have fascinated generations of playgoers and readers. After you have read the play, we invite you to read "A Modern Perspective" on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* written by Professor Catherine Belsey, formerly of Cardiff University, printed at the back of this book.

Reading Shakespeare's Language: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

For many people today, reading Shakespeare's language can be a problem—but it is a problem that can be solved. Those who have studied Latin (or even French or German or Spanish), and those who are used to reading poetry, will have little difficulty understanding the language of Shakespeare's poetic drama. Others, however, need to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures and of recognizing and understanding poetic compressions, omissions, and wordplay. And even those skilled in reading unusual sentence structures may have occasional trouble with Shakespeare's words. More than four hundred years of "static"—caused by changes in language and life—intervene between his speaking and our hearing. Most of his immense vocabulary is still in use, but a few of his words are no longer used, and many of his words now have meanings quite different from those they had in the sixteenth century. In the theater, most of these difficulties are solved for us by actors who study the language and articulate it for us so that the essential meaning is heard—or, when combined with stage action, is at least *felt*. When reading on one's own, one must do what each actor does: go over the lines (often with a dictionary close at hand) until the puzzles are solved and the lines yield up their poetry and the characters speak in words and phrases that are, suddenly, rewarding and wonderfully memorable.

Shakespeare's Words

As you begin to read the opening scenes of a play by Shakespeare, you may notice occasional unfamiliar words. Some are unfamiliar simply because we no longer use them. In the opening scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, you will find the words *mewed* (i.e., caged), *an* (i.e., if), *beteem* (i.e., grant, give), *momentany* (i.e., momentary), and *collied* (i.e., coal-black). Words of this kind are explained in notes to the text and will become familiar the more of Shakespeare's plays you read.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as in all of Shakespeare's writing, more problematic are the words that we still use but that now have different meanings. In the opening scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, the word *conceit* has the meaning of "a fancy trinket," the word *solemnity* is used where we would say "festive ceremony," *blood* where we would say "passions, feelings," *fantasy* where we would say "imagination," and *well possessed* where we would say "wealthy." Such words will be explained in the notes to the text, but they, too, will become familiar as you continue to read Shakespeare's language.

Some words are strange not because of the "static" introduced by changes in language over the past centuries but because these are words that Shakespeare uses to build a dramatic world that has its own space, time, history, and background mythology. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a particularly interesting example of this practice in that, in this play, Shakespeare creates three such worlds, each of which thinly veils other, very different worlds. In the play's first scene he builds a world that purports to be the city of Athens, home to the legendary characters Theseus and Hippolyta.

That world exists in references to "Athenian youth," to "the law of Athens," and to "Athens' gates." But the language used in this Athens creates not a recognizable Greek city (in contrast to the opening scenes of, say, *Julius Caesar*, where the language creates a Rome of the classical past) but rather a placeless, almost timeless world of romantic love, of ritual, of mythology. This romance world is created through references to May Day "observances," to "Diana's altar," to "Venus' doves," to "winged Cupid," to "Cupid's strongest bow," and to "his best arrow with the golden head."

In the play's second scene, Shakespeare builds a world of supposedly Athenian workingmen (a world created primarily through the names of the men's occupations—joiner, bellows-mender, tinker), but here again language displaces this world and creates a world of theater, with its "scrolls," "scrips," "parts," "cues," and "bills of properties." References to mythological figures appear here, as they do in the world of Theseus's Athens, but now transformed through the language of the uneducated workers into comic references to "Phibbus' car" (i.e., the chariot of the sun god, Phoebus) and to "Ercles" (i.e., Hercules).

Finally, in the play's third scene, Shakespeare creates the world of Fairyland, ruled over by Oberon, king of the fairies, and Titania, his queen. This world is made through references to "changelings," to fairy "ringlets" (i.e., circle dances), to "orbs" (i.e., the dancing ground of fairies), and to such magic flowers as "love-in-idleness." But more interesting are the other worlds created through the language of the fairies—first, the world of English country villagers affected by the doings of fairies, especially by that "lob of sprites," Robin Goodfellow, a world that is never shown onstage but that is created through references to the "villagery," the "quern," the "gossip's bowl," the old "aunt"

with her "withered dewlap," the "quaint mazes in the wanton green," the "murrain flock," and "nine-men's-morris"; second, the world of Titania's past, with its mortal "vot'ress" who sat with her in the "spicèd Indian air" on "Neptune's yellow sands," watching "embarkèd traders on the flood"; and, third, the world of Oberon's past, with its "mermaid on a dolphin's back," its "bolt of Cupid," its "vestal thronèd by the West." This pattern of displacement, this creation of worlds that thinly veil quite different worlds, may well help to explain this play's magic, otherworldly quality.

Shakespeare's Sentences

In an English sentence, meaning is quite dependent on the place given each word. "The dog bit the boy" and "The boy bit the dog" mean very different things, even though the individual words are the same. Because English places such importance on the positions of words in sentences, on the way words are arranged, unusual arrangements can puzzle a reader. Shakespeare frequently shifts his sentences away from "normal" English arrangements—often in order to create the rhythm he seeks, sometimes in order to use a line's poetic rhythm to emphasize a particular word, sometimes to give a character his or her own speech patterns or to allow the character to speak in a special way. When we attend a good performance of the play, the actors will have worked out the sentence structures and will articulate the sentences so that the meaning is clear. In reading the play, we need to do as the actor does: that is, when puzzled by a character's speech, we check to see if words are being presented in an unusual sequence.

Look first for the placement of subject and verb. Shakespeare often places the verb before the sub-

ject (e.g., instead of "He goes," we find "Goes he"). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we find such a construction when Egeus says "Full of vexation come I" (1.1.23), instead of "Full of vexation I come"; Lysander uses a similar kind of construction when, at 1.1.163, he says "There, gentle Hermia, *may I* marry thee," as does Hermia at 1.1.209–10, when she says "Before the time I did Lysander see / *Seemed Athens* as a paradise to me." Helena's "But herein *mean I* to enrich my pain" (1.1.256) is another example of inverted subject and verb. Such inversions rarely cause much confusion. More problematic is Shakespeare's frequent placing of the object before the subject and verb (e.g., instead of "I hit him," we might find "Him I hit"). Egeus's "And what is mine my love shall render him" (1.1.98) is an example of such an inversion (the normal order would be "And my love shall render him what is mine"), as is Helena's "Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity" (1.1.238–39), where "things base and vile" is the object of the verb "transpose."

Inversions are not the only unusual sentence structures in Shakespeare's language. Often in his sentences words that would normally appear together are separated from each other. (Again, this is often done to create a particular rhythm or to stress a particular word.) Take, for example, Theseus's "But earthlier happy is the rose distilled / Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn, / Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness" (1.1.78–80); here the phrase "withering on the virgin thorn" separates the pronoun ("which") from its verb ("grows"). Or take Lysander's lines that begin at 1.1.103: "My fortunes every way as fairly ranked / (If not with vantage) as Demetrius'," where the normal construction "as fairly ranked as Demetrius' " is interrupted by the insertion of the parenthetical "If not with vantage." In

order to create for yourself sentences that seem more like the English of everyday speech, you may wish to rearrange the words, putting together the word clusters ("that which grows," "as fairly ranked as Demetrius' "). You will usually find that the sentence will gain in clarity but will lose its rhythm or shift its emphasis.

Locating and rearranging words that "belong together" is especially necessary in passages with long delaying or expanding interruptions. In some plays (*Hamlet*, for instance), long interrupted sentences are used to catch the audience up in the narrative or are used as a characterizing device. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the interruptions are more often decorative lyrical passages. Hermia uses such an interrupted construction when she says to Lysander at 1.1.172–81

> *I swear to thee* by Cupid's strongest bow,
> By his best arrow with the golden head,
> By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
> By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
> And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen
> When the false Trojan under sail was seen,
> By all the vows that ever men have broke
> (In number more than ever women spoke),
> In that same place thou hast appointed me,
> *Tomorrow* truly *will I meet with thee.*

Occasionally, rather than separating basic sentence elements, Shakespeare simply holds them back, delaying them until subordinate material has been given. Lysander uses this kind of delaying structure when he says, at 1.1.134–36, "For aught that I could ever read, / Could ever hear by tale or history, / The course of true love never did run smooth" (where the basic sentence elements "The course of true love never did run smooth" are held back until two lines of explanatory

material are introduced); Lysander's speech to Helena at 1.1.214–18 uses this same construction—

> Tomorrow night when Phoebe doth behold
> Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
> Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass
> (A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal),
> *Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal . . .*

delaying the basic sentence elements "we have devised to steal through Athens' gates" and then doubly inverting them.

Finally, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as in other of Shakespeare's plays, sentences are sometimes complicated not because of unusual structures or interruptions but because Shakespeare omits words and parts of words that English sentences normally require. (In conversation, we, too, often omit words. We say "Heard from him yet?" and our hearer supplies the missing "Have you.") Frequent reading of Shakespeare—and of other poets—trains us to supply such missing words. In plays written ten years or so after *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare uses omissions both of verbs and of nouns to great dramatic effect. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* omissions are few and seem to result from the poet's wish to create regular iambic pentameter lines. At 1.1.76, for instance, Theseus says "Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood" instead of "Thrice-blessèd *are* they." This omission creates a rhythmically regular line. At 1.1.166 ("Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night"), the omission of the word *from* in the phrase "forth from" again creates a regular rhythm.

Shakespearean Wordplay

Shakespeare plays with language so often and so variously that entire books are written on the topic. His wordplay in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is particularly interesting in the way it varies his usual use of puns and figurative language. A pun is a play on words that sound the same but that have different meanings. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, puns are found only occasionally, but, as with much of the language of this play, where they are used, they are used complexly. When, for example, Helena says

> For, ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
> He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
> And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
> So he dissolved, and show'rs of oaths did melt . . . ,
> (1.1.248–51)

the first use of the word *hail* means "to shower down, to pour," but, since it sounds exactly like the verb *hale*, it also carries the sense of "pull down," as if the oaths were being tugged down from the sky. The second use of the word *hail*, in the following line, is as a noun, and Demetrius's oaths are given the characteristics of hail: they feel heat, dissolve, and melt. This shift from *hail/hale* as a verb to *hail* as a noun is an interestingly complex pun.

More often, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we find instead a variation on Shakespeare's usual puns. In a complex variant on the pun, he has characters *confuse* words with other words that sound (more or less) the same but have very different meanings. (Such verbal confusions are now called "malapropisms.") Bottom is particularly inclined to this kind of speech. When he says, for example, "But I will *aggravate* my voice so that

I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove" (1.2.78–80) he seems to be confusing *aggravate* with *moderate* or *mitigate* (soften, tone down). (In a different kind of confusion, his reference to the "sucking dove" mixes up the sucking [i.e., unweaned] lamb and the sitting [i.e., hatching] dove.) When he says "there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously" (1.2.103–4), he is confusing *obscenely* with some other word (probably *seemly*) and confusing *courageously* either with a word that sounds a bit like it (perhaps *correctly*) or perhaps with the word *bravely*, which had the meaning both of "courageously" and of "splendidly, in a fine fashion."

Not only are puns and related wordplay used unusually and complexly in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but figurative language is also shifted away from Shakespeare's usual patterns. Instead of finding straightforward metaphors (i.e., plays on words in which one object or idea is expressed as if it were something else, something with which it is said to share common features), one is more likely to find extended similes, buried similes, and elaborate personifications. In a simile, one thing is said to be *like* or *as* another, as when Theseus charges that the moon "lingers my desires / Like to a stepdame or a dowager / Long withering out a young man's revenue" (1.1.4–6). Here the moon is compared to a stepmother or a widow with rights in her husband's property, and Theseus's desires are compared to the young man who has to wait to claim his inheritance. Many of the similes in this play begin as simple similes and then extend themselves into elaborate comparisons that take on some of the qualities of what we sometimes call "epic similes." In Lysander's words to Hermia at 1.1.136–51, for example, he first compares the briefness of love to a series of things thought of as transient: sounds, shadows, dreams. Then, with the comparison of love to "lightning in the collied [coal-

black] night," the simile takes on a life of its own, as the lightning "unfolds both heaven and earth" and then is devoured by the darkness:

> The course of true love never did run smooth. . . .
> [Since,] if there were a sympathy in choice,
> War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
> Making it momentany as a sound,
> Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
> Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
> That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and Earth,
> And, ere a man hath power to say "Behold!"
> The jaws of darkness do devour it up.
> So quick bright things come to confusion.

(Note the powerful puns in the final line of this speech, where "So quick bright things" means, simultaneously, "So quickly do bright things" and "Thus quick [living, intense] bright things," and where *confusion* means both "destruction, ruin" and "disorder.")

One finds a much simpler example of an extended simile in Helena's charge to Hermia (1.1.186–88),

> Your eyes are lodestars and your tongue's sweet air
> More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear
> When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear . . . ,

where the third line elaborates the figure of the lark, to which Hermia's tongue has been compared.

Another kind of extended simile in this play is reminiscent of emblem books, where an idea is shown in the form of a picture under which is printed a name for the picture and an elaborate explanation. One finds the verbal equivalent of such an emblem in Helena's speech about Love (1.1.240–47). (Here the "picture" we are supposedly looking at is that of the boy Cupid,

wearing a blindfold and bearing wings; Helena's words provide the standard "explanation" of the picture and its title, "Love"):

> Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind;
> And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
> Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste.
> Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste.
> And therefore is Love said to be a child
> Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
> As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
> So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.

The entire speech could be transcribed as an extended simile: "Love is like a boy who is winged and blind, because love is blind, without judgment, hasty, etc."

Often in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the simile, rather than being extended, is "buried" within the language. (Some readers might prefer to see these buried similes as metaphors.) For example, when Theseus says to Hermia

> Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood
> To undergo such maiden pilgrimage,
> But earthlier happy is the rose distilled
> Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
> Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness . . . ,
> (1.1.76–80)

under the surface of the language is a comparison of the unmarried woman to an unplucked rose and of the married woman to the rose that is plucked and its fragrance distilled into perfume. When Lysander says to Hermia (1.1.130–31): "How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale? / How chance the roses there do fade so fast?" the buried simile likens red cheeks to roses. Her-

mia continues that simile when she responds "Belike [probably] for want [lack] of rain, which I could well / Beteem [give] them from the tempest of my eyes" (1.1.132–33), expanding the buried simile to include a comparison of weeping eyes to pouring rain. Hermia's "Keep word, Lysander. We must starve our sight / From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight" (1.1.227–28) includes a buried simile: the sight of the beloved is like food to the lover.

Finally, figurative language in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* often includes personification (i.e., abstract qualities are given human characteristics). To take a single example: when Theseus says to his master of the revels "Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth. / Turn melancholy forth to funerals; / The pale companion is not for our pomp" (1.1.14–16), he personifies both mirth and melancholy, expanding the personification of melancholy by describing it as pale and using the condescending term *companion* (which here means "fellow").

Implied Stage Action

Finally, in reading Shakespeare's plays we must always remember that what we are reading is a performance script. The dialogue is written to be spoken by actors who, at the same time, are moving, gesturing, picking up objects, weeping, shaking their fists. Some stage action is described in what are called "stage directions"; some is suggested within the dialogue itself. We must learn to be alert to such signals as we stage the play in our imaginations. When, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at 2.1.60, Robin Goodfellow says to the Fairy "room [i.e., stand aside], fairy. Here comes Oberon," and the Fairy responds "And here my mis-

tress. Would that he were gone!" it is almost certain that Robin and the Fairy would move aside for the entrance of the king and queen of Fairyland. Similarly, three lines later, when Titania orders her fairies to "skip hence," it is almost certain that they would obey her orders. Her later orders to them at line 149, "Fairies, away," show that, when they earlier "skip hence," they do not leave the stage. At many places in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, signals to the reader are not quite so clear. When Demetrius says to Helena at line 242 "Let me go," it is clear that she has earlier taken hold of him, but it is not at all certain when she did so. Nor is it certain when she turns him loose (or, perhaps, when he pulls away from her) nor even when he exits. (In our text, we have shown him leaving the stage two lines before Helena's exit, but we could have placed his exit several lines earlier, or left him onstage until Helena's exit.) In these uncertain situations, the director and the actors and you, as reader, must decide what makes for the most interesting, most likely, action.

Many scenes in this play give scope for imaginative "staging": Just how do Oberon and Robin "anoint" the eyes of their sleeping victims? How does Robin stage the mock combat between Lysander and Demetrius? What stage action accompanies the speeches of Titania to (and about) the transformed Bottom: "Out of this wood do not desire to go" (3.1.154); "Tie up my lover's tongue. Bring him silently" (3.1.208); "So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle / Gently entwist; the female ivy so / Enrings the barky fingers of the elm" (4.1.43–45)?

Learning to read the language of stage action repays one many times over when one reaches scenes such as the final scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where much of the pleasure of the scene turns on our ability to visualize the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe"

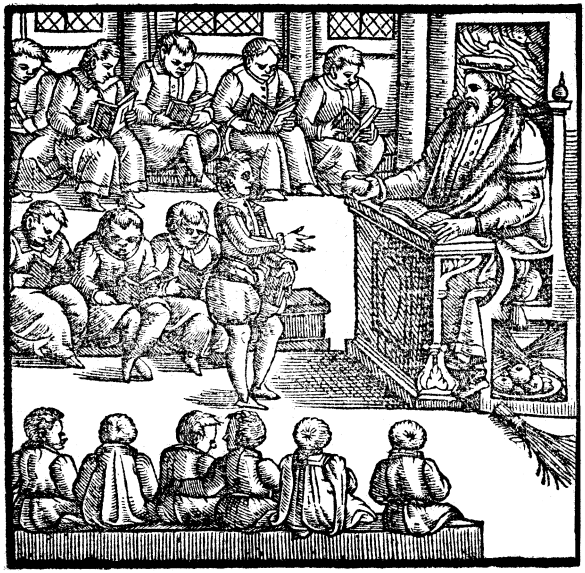
before a scoffing court (as Wall provides a "chink" through which the lovers whisper, as "Moon" defends his bush and his lantern, as Thisbe imbrues her breast with a "trusty sword").

It is immensely rewarding to work carefully with Shakespeare's language—with the words, the sentences, the wordplay, and the implied stage action—as readers for the past four centuries have discovered. It may be more pleasurable to attend a good performance of a play—though not everyone has thought so. But the joy of being able to stage one of Shakespeare's plays in one's imagination, to return to passages that continue to yield further meanings (or further questions) the more one reads them—these are pleasures that, for many, rival (or at least augment) those of the performed text, and certainly make it worth considerable effort to "break the code" of Elizabethan poetic drama and let free the remarkable language that makes up a Shakespeare text.

Shakespeare's Life

Surviving documents that give us glimpses into the life of William Shakespeare show us a playwright, poet, and actor who grew up in the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon, spent his professional life in London, and returned to Stratford a wealthy landowner. He was born in April 1564, died in April 1616, and is buried inside the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

We wish we could know more about the life of the world's greatest dramatist. His plays and poems are testaments to his wide reading—especially to his knowledge of Virgil, Ovid, Plutarch, Holinshed's *Chronicles,* and the Bible—and to his mastery of the English language, but we can only speculate about his education. We know that the King's New School in Stratford-upon-Avon was considered excellent. The school was one of the English "grammar schools" established to educate young men, primarily in Latin grammar and literature. As in other schools of the time, students began their studies at the age of four or five in the attached "petty school," and there learned to read and write in English, studying primarily the catechism from the Book of Common Prayer. After two years in the petty school, students entered the lower form (grade) of the grammar school, where they began the serious study of Latin grammar and Latin texts that would occupy most of the remainder of their school days. (Several Latin texts that Shakespeare used repeatedly in writing his plays and poems were texts that schoolboys memorized and recited.) Latin comedies were introduced early in the lower form; in the upper form, which the boys entered at age ten or eleven, students wrote their own Latin orations and declamations, studied Latin



Title page of a 1573 Latin and Greek catechism for children.
From Alexander Nowell, *Catechismus paruus pueris primum Latine . . .* (1573).