and *Much Ado*, i. 3. 27—

"I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace".

If this is the meaning of 'canker-blossom' here, Hermia's point will be that Helena has juggled herself into Lysander's affections, and is as poor a substitute for her rival, as the canker-blossom is for the garden rose.

288. **you counterfeit, you puppet**, 'you doll that dost ape humanity'.

292. Scan

"And with | her per' | sonage, her | tall' per' | sönage",

and note the same word pronounced as a dissyllable and a trisyllable in the same line. Cf. Essay on Metre, § 8 (ii) *b*.

296. **thou painted maypole.** Stubbes, in his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), describes the Maypole as "some tyme painted with variable colours". The dark Hermia is jeering at her rival's pink-and-white cheeks.

329. **hindering knot-grass.** The knot-grass is *Polygonum aviculare*, a low-growing herb of the Buckwheat family. It is probably called 'hindering', because it was supposed to stunt the growth of children. Cf. Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, "Should they put him into a straight pair of gaskins, 'twere worse than knot-grass, he would never grow after it"; and *The Coxcomb*, "We want a boy extremely for this function, kept under, for a year, with milk and knot-grass". But the 'knot-grass' also 'hinders' the plough, and is called in the north the Deil's-lingels; just as another plant is, for the same reason, known as Rest-harrow. Milton must have intended by

"the savoury herb
Of knot-grass dew-besprent",

on which the flocks feed in *Comus*, some kind of pasture grass. But then Milton knew nothing of natural history.

338. The duel between Lysander and Demetrius for Hermia may be suggested by that between Palemon and Arcite for Emilia in the *Knightes Tale*.

344. This line is accidentally omitted in F1, which gives no *Exit* for Helena or Hermia.

344–400. This episode begins the unravelling of the lover story. The humorous confusion is to continue a little longer, and then Lysander is to be restored to his love for Hermia, while Demetrius is to retain his for Helena. Oberon also prepares for the similar unravelling of the fairy story.

347. **king of shadows.** On this description of Oberon, see Appendix A, § 13 (*h*).

349. Cf. ii. 1. 263.

351. **'nointed.** For the omission of the initial syllable, see Essay on Metre, § 8 (iv).

355. On the power of the fairies to overcast the night, see Appendix A, § 13 (*d*). The scene irresistibly reminds one of the battle between Tweedledum and Tweedledee in *Through the Looking-glass*, and the characters of those heroes are about as much differentiated as those of Lysander and Demetrius.

365. **With leaden legs and batty wings**, a description which suggests both the heaviness and the darkness of sleep.

366. **this herb**, the antidote referred to in ii. 1. 184. It is afterwards called 'Dian's bud': cf. iv. 1. 70, note.

367. **virtuous** here combines the two senses of 'efficacious' and 'beneficent'. See Glossary.

373. Here, as in Theseus, Shakespeare keeps in mind the difference between the vagaries of love in its early stages, and the assurance of confirmed love.

379. **night's swift dragons.** Cf. *Cymbeline*, ii. 2. 48, "Swift, swift, you dragons of the night"; and Milton, *Il Penseroso*, 59, "While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke".

380. **Aurora's harbinger**, Venus Phosphor, the morning-star. Cf. Milton, *May Morning*, 1, "Now the bright morning-star, day's harbinger".

381–387. Cf. *Hamlet*, i. 1. 149—

"I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine";

and Milton, *Ode on the Nativity*, 232—

"The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail;
Each fettered ghost slips to his several grave;
And the yellow-skirted fays
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze".

383. **crossways and floods.** Suicides, whose bodies were either never recovered from the water, or else buried in crossways without religious rites, were looked upon as especially doomed to wander.

384. **their wormy beds.** Cf. Milton, *On the Death of a Fair Infant*—

"Thy beauties lie in wormy bed",

and Charles Lamb, *Hester*—

"Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed
And her together".

388. spirits of another sort, *i.e.* not mere ghosts. On the nocturnal habits of the fairies, see Appendix A, § 13 (*h*).

389. I take this line to mean that Oberon has dallied with the Morning; but some critics explain it as meaning that he has 'made sport' or 'hunted' with 'the Morning's love', that is, Tithonus, the husband, or Cephalus, the lover, according to Greek myth, of Aurora.

391. the eastern gate. Cf. Milton, *L'Allegro*, 59—

> "Right against the eastern gate,
> Where the great sun begins his state".

392. Cf. Sonnet 33, "gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy".

401–463. Puck leads Demetrius and Lysander in turn astray by counterfeiting to each the voice of the other. At last the two men and the two maids come separately to the same spot, and, overwearied, lie down to sleep. Puck then applies the antidote to Lysander's eye, that on awaking he may return to his first love, and leave Helena for Demetrius.

415. The Ff. have here the stage-direction, *Shifting places.* Perhaps it belongs really to line 413, and signifies that Lysander comes in as Demetrius goes out. Demetrius accuses Lysander in line 423 of 'shifting every place'.

418. The Ff. have the stage-direction, *Lye down.*

421. Ho, ho, ho! Robin Goodfellow inherited this laugh from the devil of the mysteries and moralities, who traditionally entered with it. In the prose *Life of Robin Goodfellow* the account of each of Robin's tricks ends with: "And Robin went away laughing *ho, ho, hoh*".

451. To your eye. So Rowe, for the *your eye* of the Qq. Ff.

461. Cf. *Love's Labour's Lost*, v. 2. 884—

> "Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
> Jack hath not Jill".

The proverb, "All shall be well, and Jack shall have Jill", is found in Heywood's *Epigrams upon Proverbs* (1562), in Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, and elsewhere.

463. Another old proverb: cf. Ray's *English Proverbs*, "All is well, and the man hath his mare again". F 1 closes with the stage-direction, *They sleep all the Act; that is*, through Act iv. up to iv. 1. 135.

Act IV.—Scene I.

The whole of this short Act is concerned with the resolution or disentanglement of the three stories which came to a crisis in the last. Lines 1–42 of the first scene again put before us the contrast between Titania and Bottom, thus connecting the motive of this

scene with that of Act iii. sc. 1. In lines 43–99, the charm is taken off Titania's sight and she is reconciled to Oberon. In lines 100–196, a similar reconciliation comes about between the human lovers; while in lines 197–213, Bottom is restored to his normal aspect without any loss of self-satisfaction.

1–42. The contrast between Bottom's coarse tastes, and the dainty delights which Titania proffers to him, is humorously touched. The point is emphasized by making Titania speak in blank verse, and Bottom in prose. Cf. Essay on Metre, § 19.

2. amiable. Literally 'lovable'; here used rather of physical than mental qualities: cf. Glossary.

3. musk-roses. Cf. ii. 1. 252, note.

12, 13. the honey-bag. Marshall quotes from Kirkby and Spence's *Entomology*, "The honey is conveyed through the œsophagus into the first stomach, which we call the honey-bag, and which, from being very small, is swelled when full of it to a considerable size".

19. leave your courtesy, 'do not wait for elaborate compliment', 'put on your hat'. Mustard-seed is bowing and scraping before Bottom. Cf. the scene between Hamlet and Osric in *Hamlet*, v. 2. 82, *sqq.* Bottom is adapting himself to the manners of courts.

21, 22. Cavalery Cobweb. It was Pease-blossom who was to scratch (line 7), and Cobweb was sent after a honey-bag (line 10); but the alliteration of *Cavalery Cobweb*, parallel to that of 'Monsieur Mustardseed', makes it probable that the slip was Shakespeare's.

27. the tongs and the bones. The 'tongs' appear to have been a rustic instrument, like a triangle, played with a key; the 'bones' are unfortunately familiar. The Ff. here have the stage-direction *Musicke Tongs, Rurall Musicke.*

30. a bottle of hay; not, as is generally said, a 'truss' of hay, but a smaller quantity, doubtless the same measure as a 'pottle' of strawberries. Halliwell quotes a statement from a court-book of 1551, that the halfpenny bottle of hay weighed 2½ pounds, and the penny bottle 5 pounds. The term survives in the proverbial phrase 'to look for a needle in a bottle of hay'.

31. good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow. This passage seems to have suggested the bit in *Through the Looking-glass*, where the White King observes, "There's nothing like hay"; and on being pressed, explains, "I did n't say there was nothing better than hay, I said there was nothing like it".

32, 33. These lines as arranged in the Qq. Ff. do not scan. Pope treated them as prose, but Titania does not speak prose elsewhere in the scene. The arrangement in the text is Hanmer's, who, however, read *fetch thee thence* for the sake of the metre. But probably *hoard* should be scanned as a dissyllable: cf. Essay on Metre, § 8 (viii).

36. exposition. Bottom seems to mean 'disposition'.

38. **all ways**; *i.e.* in all directions. This is Theobald's conjecture for the *alwaies* of the Qq. Ff.

39–41. **So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle**
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.

The punctuation here adopted implies that the woodbine and the honeysuckle are two different plants, which twine together; but the Qq. Ff. have—

So doth the woodbine, the sweet honeysuckle,
Gently entwist;

If this is right, only one plant is spoken of, and 'entwist' must either govern 'the elm', or must be taken in the neuter sense of 'twists itself together'. Now in *Much Ado about Nothing*, iii. 1. 7—

"the pleached bower,
Where honeysuckles, ripen'd by the sun,
Forbid the sun to enter",

is clearly the same as 'the woodbine coverture' of line 30 of the same scene. In our own play, the heavy scent of the honeysuckle gives the natural interpretation of '*luscious* woodbine' in ii. 1. 251; while in the most authoritative botanical books of the 16th century, the *Herbals* of Turner (1568), Lyte (1578), and Gerard (1597), the two names are always treated as synonymous. But then Shakespeare was not a botanist; the local names of plants vary considerably, and it is easy to show that many other climbers besides the honeysuckle were actually known as woodbine. Thus Taylor, the water-poet, distinguishes

"The woodbine, primrose, and the cowslip fine,
The honisuckle and the daffadil".

And the parallelism of the present passage makes it clear to my mind that two plants are meant, just as the ivy and the elm are two, and Titania and Bottom are two. A point is lost if Bottom is not compared to the 'sweet honeysuckle'. What plant, then, is here intended by the woodbine? Possibly the *Convolvulus sepium*, the great white bindweed or withywind. This is apparently the meaning of the name in Linacre's *Herball*, and we may compare Jonson's picture of a garden species of Convolvulus in *The Vision of Delight* (1617)—

"Behold!
How the blue bindweed doth itself infold
With honeysuckle".

And possibly the *Clematis Vitalba*, or traveller's-joy, which is called *wooden-binde* in an 11th-century Anglo-Saxon vocabulary (cf. Ellacombe, *Plant-lore of Shakespeare*). An ingeniously improbable

solution of the difficulty is given by Warburton's conjectural reading—

"*So doth the woodbine, the sweet honeysuckle,*
Gently entwist the maple; ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm".

40. **female ivy.** Shakespeare transfers to the ivy the classical notion of the vine as the wife of the husband elm which supports it. Cf. *Comedy of Errors*, ii. 2. 176—

"Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,
Whose weakness married to thy stronger state,
Makes me with thy strength to communicate".

46. **favours**, 'love-tokens'. So Q 1: Q 2 F 1 have *savours*.

51. Cf. ii. 1. 14, 15.

66. **a dream.** Cf. Introduction, p. 23.

70. **Dian's bud**, the herb already spoken of in ii. 1. 184 and iii. 2. 366. The flower intended may be the *Agnus castus*, of which the old herbals say that it "wyll keep man and woman chaste". Cf. *The Flower and the Leaf*, lines 473–476—

"That is Diane, goddess of chastite,
And for because that she a maiden is,
In her hond the braunch she beareth this,
That *agnus castus* men call properly".

Or it may be, and perhaps this is more likely, the rose, the proper flower of Elizabeth, who loved to be called Cynthia or Diana.

o'er. So Thirlby for the *or* of the Qq. Ff.

Cupid's flower, the love-in-idleness or pansy, already used on Titania in ii. 2. 27. The connection with Cupid is explained in ii. 1. 155, *sqq*.

79. **these five**, the four Athenian lovers and Bottom. The *five* of the text is Thirlby's emendation for the *fine* of the Qq. Ff.

83. **rock the ground.** On the power of the fairies to do this, see Appendix A, § 13 (*d*).

86. The plot is all but unravelled, and we begin to look forward to the final winding-up.

87. **prosperity.** So Q 1: Q 2 Ff. have *posterity*.

93. **nightës.** Here, as in ii. 1. 7, the metre seems to require the old inflected genitive form. Cf. Essay on Metre, § 8 (i) *b*.

100. Theseus and his train enter, and bring us a step nearer to the conclusion.

forester. The Elizabethan forester was rather a huntsman than a woodcutter.

101. **our observation**, *i.e.* of the 'rite of May'. Cf. line 109.

104. An Alexandrine line. Cf. Essay on Metre, § 15.

109. Cadmus, the mythical founder of Thebes, not elsewhere mentioned by Shakespeare.

110. **the bear.** Theobald quite needlessly conjectured *the boar*.

111. Shakespeare might have learnt from Ovid in what esteem the Spartan breed of hound was held in classical Greece.

116–124. Theseus, the practical man, the man of his hands, takes more delight in the sport of hunting, than in intellectual pursuits. He is a noted huntsman already in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. The description of the hounds is an example of Shakespeare's own skill in woodcraft. Cf. the description of the points of a horse in *Venus and Adonis*, lines 295–300.

121. **Each under each,** that is, some higher, some lower in note, like a chime of bells. The Elizabethan huntsman made much of the musical cry of his pack. Cf. Markham's *Country Contentments*: "If you would have your kennell for sweetnesse of cry, then you must compound it of some large dogges, that have deepe solemne mouthes, and are swift in spending, which must, as it were, beare the base in the consort, then a double number of roaring, and loud ringing mouthes, which must beare the counter-tenour, then some hollow, plaine, sweete mouthes, which must beare the meane or middle part; and soe with these three parts of musicke you shall make your cry perfect". Even Addison's "very parfit gentil knight" returned a present of a hound by a servant "with a great many expressions of civility, but desired him to tell his Master that the dog he had sent was indeed a most excellent *Bass*, but that at present he only wanted a *Counter-Tenor*".

137. For the idea that wood-birds begin to couple on St. Valentine's Day, cf. Donne, *Epithalamion on the Lady Elizabeth*, 5–8—

> "Thou marriest every year
> The lyric lark, and the grave whispering dove,
> The sparrow that neglects his life for love,
> The household bird with the red stomacher".

157–173. Demetrius' fancy for Hermia is no less a freak of love, a bit of love's lawlessness, than that of Lysander for Helena, although we do not see it brought about by visible enchantment.

163. I doubt if this line can be scanned without emendation. Abbott (§ 486) makes a trisyllable of *Melted*, thus—

> "Me-el' | ted as | the snow', | seems' to | me now'".

Cf. Essay on Metre, § 14.

170. **a sickness.** So Qq. Ff.; most editors accept Farmer's conjecture of *in sickness*. The grammatical apposition is somewhat loose, between 'a sickness' and the substantive idea contained in 'did I loathe this food'.

179. **for,** used in the sense of 'for that', 'since', or 'because', to introduce a subordinate sentence; cf. Abbott, § 151.

181. **three and three,** three men and three maids.

183. Cf. i. 1. 122, note.

186. **parted eye,** that is, with the two eyes not in focus, and so seeing the object separately.

189. **Mine own, and not mine own,** like a jewel picked up in the road, which the rightful owner may claim at any moment. Warburton's emendation, *like a gemell*, *i.e.* 'twin', is ingenious, but improbable.

189, 190. **Are you sure that we are awake?** So the Qq.: the Ff. omit this sentence, which certainly makes both lines difficult to scan: cf. Essay on Metre, § 15.

197–213. Bottom awakes and regards all that has happened since his transformation as a dream. But that he has been an ass he has no notion, only that he has been adored by a most fair lady. Hence the irony of his situation. He would say in lines 203–205, 'Methought I was a gallant lover, and methought I had a garland on my head'; the audience know that it should be, 'Methought I was—an ass, and methought I had—an ass's nole on'.

200. **God's my life.** As in so many oaths, there is some ellipse here: perhaps the full phrase is, 'God's blessing on my life'. Sometimes it is still further corrupted, as in *As You Like It*, iii. 5. 43, "'Od's my little life".

202. **an ass.** Cf. iii. 1. 105, note.

205. **a patched fool.** The traditional garb of the professional jester or court fool was a patched, parti-coloured, or motley coat.

206–209. **eye...heard,...ear...seen,** &c. An absurd inversion, belonging to the same type of humour as Bottom's characteristic misuse of words. There is a clear reference to *1 Corinthians*, ii. 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him".

210, 211. **Bottom's dream...because it hath no bottom.** Mr. Fleay suggests that there is here a hit at Robert Greene, who called one of his poems *A Maiden's Dream*, for the apparent reason that there was no maiden in it.

213. **at her death,** that is, 'at Thisbe's death', as an epilogue. Theobald's *after death*, that is, after his death as Pyramus on the stage, is ingenious, and commends itself to many editors. But has not Bottom confused the incidents of his dream with those of the play, and identified Titania with Thisbe?

Scene 2.

Bottom is restored to his fellows, and so the fairy story, the lover story, and the rustic story are all alike happily resolved. This scene leads on to the Fifth Act, which is all concerned with the play

within the play, and serves as an epilogue to the main action. The stage-direction is, in the Qq., *Enter Quince, Flute, Thisby, and the rabble*; in the Ff., *Enter Quince, Flute, Thisbie, Snout, and Starveling*. But of course Thisby *is* Flute. The second speech is given to Flute in the Qq. and Starveling in the Ff. The speeches given to Flute in the text are given to Thisby in both Qq. and Ff.

7. Bottom has succeeded in persuading the rest of the company to take him at his own valuation.

9, 10. **any handicraft man in Athens**, which is much the same in the speaker's mind as, 'any man in the world'.

14. **a thing of naught.** Cf. *Hamlet*, iv. 2. 30—

> *Ham.* "The king is a thing—
> *Guild.* A thing, my lord!
> *Ham.* Of nothing".

18, 19. **sixpence a day.** It is suggested by Steevens that there is here another satirical hit at Thomas Preston (cf. i. 2. 9–11, note), who received from Elizabeth a pension of £20 a year, or about a shilling a day, for his performance before her in the play of *Dido* at King's College, Cambridge, in 1564.

24. **courageous.** I suppose Quince means 'encouraging'.

27. **no true Athenian.** Cf. *Acts*, xvii. 21, "For all the Athenians, and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing". Bottom's anxiety at once to tell his tale and to keep up the mystery of it, is very humorous.

34. **our play is preferred.** If preferred here means 'chosen for performance', as the context and Bottom's excitement seem to indicate, there is a slight inconsistency, for the play is not definitely chosen until v. 1. 81. Perhaps it means 'proffered', as in the phrase 'to prefer a request'.

39. **No more words.** No one has had much chance of any words but Bottom himself.

Act V.

This Act is a kind of epilogue to the whole play. The principal actions are finished, but the presentment by the rustics of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe gives an opportunity for a burlesque treatment of the central theme. Here, too, young love, and the disobedience to parents which it provokes, are the cause of the calamity. Thus the Act bears the same relation to the rest of the play as the antimasque, the dance of clowns or satyrs, bears to the masque proper. It also serves Shakespeare to introduce certain criticisms on

poetry and the drama, as they appear to Theseus, and to that side of Shakespeare which Theseus represents.

The closing lines (lines 378–424) are of the nature of an epithalamion, or wedding-song, and doubtless have a particular reference to the occasion on which the play was first performed. See Introduction, p. 13.

2–22. Theseus is the practical man, more impressed with the unrealities of imagination than with its realities, and therefore, in this case at least, judging with an undue scepticism of the supernatural. Contrast the attitude of the unpractical, speculative Hamlet (*Hamlet*, i. 5. 166)—

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy".

And, in a sense, Shakespeare himself thinks with Theseus, for the fairy action is to him a dream, not true, though symbolical of truth.

4. In the mind of Theseus, his own deep but sane affection for Hippolyta is a thing apart from such passions and absurdities of youthful lovers as this play treats of.

seething brains. Cf. *Winter's Tale*, iii. 3. 64, "Would any but boiled brains of two-and-twenty hunt this weather?" and *Macbeth*, ii. 1. 38—

> "A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain".

9. **sees more devils.** Chalmers found in this passage an allusion to Lodge's *Wit's Miserie and the World's Madnesse: discovering the incarnate devils of this age* (1596). But this is the emptiest of empty critical theories.

11. **Helen's beauty.** Helen of Troy became the type of beauty to the Elizabethans, from the time of her glorification in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

a brow of Egypt, the dark features of an Egyptian, or gipsy. Darkness was a blemish in the age which adored the blonde Elizabeth.

12, 13. Cf. Drayton's description of Marlowe in the *Epistle to Reynolds*—

> "that fine madness still he did retain,
> Which rightly should possess a poet's brain".

19, 20. 'The mere idea of a joy is enough incentive to a strong imagination to conjure up and believe in the actual presence of something which causes that joy.'

21, 22. These lines are rather bald after what they follow. If the scene has been rewritten (cf. Introduction, p. 14), perhaps we have here a survival from the earlier version.

26. *i.e.* holds together so *constantly*, or *consistently*, as almost to compel belief.

34. **after-supper**, not a separate meal from supper, but the last course of it, the rere-supper or dessert.

37. **a torturing hour.** Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ii. 90—

> "The vassals of his anger, when the scourge
> Inexorably, and the torturing hour,
> Calls us to penance".

38. Philostrate fills the position of Master of the Revels at Theseus' court. In the Ff. Egeus takes the place of Philostrate in this scene. Perhaps the part of Philostrate was omitted to save an actor.

39. **abridgement**, something to cut the hours short, a pastime. Hamlet uses the word in a rather different sense, when he says of the players in ii. 2. 439, "Look, where my abridgment comes". He means that they are, as he calls them in ii. 2. 548, "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time".

42. **ripe.** So Q 1; F 1 has *rife*.

43. According to the Ff. Lysander reads the brief, and Theseus comments on it; and probably this represents the later stage-practice. The Qq. make Theseus both read and comment.

44. Hercules was attacked by the Centaurs and vanquished them, when he was pursuing the Erymanthian boar. Theseus himself was present, according to Plutarch, at the still more famous battle between the Centaurs and the Lapithæ, and doubtless it is to this that he now refers. Cf. Appendix D.

48. The story of Orpheus and his death at the hands of the Thracian Bacchanals is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bk. xi. Cf. Milton, *Lycidas*, 58–62—

> "What could the muse herself that Orpheus bore,
> The muse herself, for her enchanting son,
> When by the rout that made the hideous roar
> His gory visage down the stream was sent,
> Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore".

51. **Thebes.** The conquest of Thebes by Theseus is told of in Chaucer's *Knightes Tale*. See also the passage quoted from Plutarch in Appendix D.

52. **The thrice three Muses.** On the probable allusion here, see Introduction, p. 9.

56–60. On the Oxymoron in these lines, see i. 2. 9–11, note.

59. **wondrous strange snow.** Scan *wondrous* as a trisyllable, *wonderous* (Essay on Metre, § 8 (iii) *b*). Innumerable emendations have been suggested, in order to replace *strange snow* by an antithesis corresponding to *hot ice*, &c. Among them are *scorching snow* (Hanmer), *strange black snow* (Upton), *seething snow* (Collier), *orange snow* (Bailey), *sooty snow* (Herr), *swart snow* (Kinnear), *and wondrous strange jet snow* (Perring). But 'strange' means 'contrary to nature', and therefore 'wondrous strange' sufficiently indicates the point of Theseus' criticism.

80. **stretch'd**, *i.e.* 'strained'.

82, 83. Cf. Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, v. 3. of a masque—

> "Nothing which duty, and desire to please,
> Bears written in the forehead, comes amiss".

85. Hippolyta protests against seeing the play merely to mock it. Theseus suggests another view. 'We shall take what they mistake, find our amusement in their blunders; but at the same time we shall appreciate the spirit in which the play is proffered.' In Theseus, as in Henry V., Shakespeare finds that sympathy with the mass of his subjects which makes him fit to be their king.

91, 92. **noble respect Takes it in might, not merit.** 'If you regard it as a noble mind should, you will judge it as it might have been, as it was intended, not as it actually deserves.'

93, 94. **great clerks.** This seems to be an allusion to the elaborate addresses made during the progresses of Elizabeth at the gates of every town she entered, and in particular whenever she visited Oxford or Cambridge. At Warwick, which Elizabeth visited in 1572, when the Recorder had welcomed her, she replied, "Come hither, little Recorder. It was told me you would be afraid to look upon me, or to speak boldly; but you were not so afraid of me, as I was of you; and I now thank you for putting me in mind of my duty, and that should be in me" (Nicholls, *Progresses of Elizabeth*, i. 315). Cf. also *Pericles*, v. prol. 5, "Deep clerks she dumbs".

96. **periods**, full stops, as in the Prologue that follows.

106. **the Prologue.** This served a double purpose in Elizabethan drama. Sometimes it took the form of an apology for the shortcomings of the performance; sometimes it indicated the course of the plot. Here, as in the choruses which serve as prologues to the several Acts of *Henry V.*, both uses are combined.

108. On the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, see Introduction, p. 17 and Appendix E. The play may be taken as a burlesque of such an interlude as a pedantic schoolmaster might write for a rustic performance, and perhaps more generally of the type of tragedy in vogue before Marlowe. The rhyme, occasionally defective, the incorrect classical allusions, the wealth of ejaculation, the palpable devices to fill up the metre, the abuse of alliteration, and the inevitable bathos, are all characteristic of the primitive kind of drama of which Richard Edwardes' *Damon and Pythias* is an example. Similar burlesques may be found in the *Masque of the Worthies* in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and in the declamation and performance of the strolling players in *Hamlet*, Act ii. sc. 2, and Act iii. sc. 2. Cf. also the account of *Narcissus* in Appendix F.

107. *Flourish of trumpets.* This signified that the play was about to begin. Cf. Decker, *The Gull's Horn-book* (1609), "Present

not yourself on the stage (especially at a new play) until the quaking prologue hath (by rubbing) got colour in his cheeks, and is ready to give the trumpets their cue that he 's upon point to enter".

The mispunctuation of the prologue is ingeniously contrived to pervert the sense. Rightly punctuated it would read thus—

> "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."

A similar use of mispunctuation is found in Nicholas Udall's play of *Roister-Doister* (1566).

118. stand upon points. This has the twofold sense of (1) mind his stops, and (2) trouble about niceties.

123. a recorder, a flute with a hole bored in the side and covered with gold-beater's skin, so as to approach the effect of the human voice. See Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, p. 246.

not in government, not produced with musical skill. Cf. *Hamlet*, iii. 2. 372, "Govern these ventages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music".

125. The Ff. here add the stage-direction, *Tawyer with a trumpet* (*i.e.* with a trumpeter) *before them*. This is by itself almost enough to show that F 1 was printed from a theatre-manuscript of the play. Tawyer or Tawier was no doubt the actor who played the part of Quince. Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps found the entry of his burial in the sexton's note-book at St. Saviour's, Southwark as "William Tawier, Mr. Heminges man". Heminges was a leading member of the Chamberlain's Company.

129. certain. The obsolete accent on the last syllable is satirized.

146. Alliteration artfully used is one of the great beauties of English poetry; Shakespeare avails himself of it freely, but he satirizes the extraordinary abuse of it by the third-rate Elizabethan versifiers. This was partly due to the influence of Lyly's alliterative prose, partly to that of the earlier English poetry, such as *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, where rhyme has not yet taken the place of alliteration. The Scottish poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is also extraordinarily alliterative. With Shakespeare's criticism, cf. Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*, 15—

> "You that do dictionaries' method bring
> Into your rimes running in rattling rows".

And Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), "Ye have another method of composing your metre nothing commendable, specially if it be too much used, and it is when one maker takes too much delight to fill his verse with words beginning all with a letter, as an English rimer that says, 'The deadly drops of dark disdain Do daily drench my due deserts'". Holofernes, too, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, iv. 1. 57, "will something affect the letter, for it argues facility".

162, 163. Note the shocking rhyme, *sinister*, *whisper*. 'Sinister' of course means 'left'; see Glossary.

182. Bottom cannot refrain from leaving his part, in order to set Theseus right: and he is dense enough to miss Theseus' point.

195, 196. Limander...Helen. Bottom mispronounces Leander, and Quince, in writing the play, has apparently confused Helen with Hero. Marlowe's adaptation of *Hero and Leander* from the pseudo-Musæus appeared in 1593. But possibly Alexander (*i.e.* Paris) and Helen are the pair of lovers intended.

197. Shafalus...Procrus. A mispronunciation of *Cephalus* and *Procris*. Cephalus was a faithful lover, who shot his mistress by accident. There is a picture by Piero di Cosimo of *The Death of Procris* in the National Gallery. A poem on the subject was entered in the Stationers' Registers by Henry Chute in 1593.

201. Ninny's tomb. Another absurd mistake for *Ninus' tomb*.

205. the mural down. This is Pope's conjecture; the Qq. read *the moon used*, and the Ff. *the moral down*. But 'mural' is not a word found elsewhere in Shakespeare, and perhaps we should be content with Collier's *the wall down*.

209. The practical man's estimate of poetry; true, but only half the truth.

215. The lion's part is after all more than roaring (i. 2. 60). But this was necessitated by Bottom's proposal in iii. 1. 33.

220. A lion-fell, 'a lion's skin'. This is Singer's emendation for the *A lion fell* of the Qq. Ff. Rowe proposed *No lion fell*.

236. There appears to be a vile pun between *lanthorn* and *horned moon*.

238. greatest...of all the rest. A confusion of two constructions, as in the famous Miltonic lines, in *Paradise Lost*, i. 323, 324—

> "Adam the goodliest man of men since born
> His sons; the fairest of her daughters Eve".

Either "greater than all the rest" or "greatest of all" would be more exact ways of conveying the intended notion. Cf. Abbott, § 409.

242. in snuff, a common phrase for 'in a passion'.

248–250. The man in the moon was popularly represented with a bundle of thorns and a dog. He was variously explained as being either Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice, or Cain sacrific-

ing thorns as the produce of his land, or the man in *Numbers*, xv. 32, who was stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day. The Cain theory may be found in Dante, *Inferno*, canto xx.

259. **moused.** The lion shakes the mantle, as a cat shakes a mouse.

264. **gleams.** This is Staunton's emendation for the *beams* of Qq. F 1, the *streams* of the other Ff. The alliteration makes it a probable one.

266–277. Short rhyming lines are characteristic of such primitive tragedies as Edwardes' *Damon and Pythias*.

278, 279. A humorous way of saying 'This passion, by itself, does not move'. Steevens quotes an old proverb, 'He that loseth his wife and sixpence hath lost a tester': *i.e.* 'A wife is no loss'.

294. **Tongue** seems meaningless. I am inclined to accept the emendation *Sun*.

297. **No die, but an ace.** A pun on the sense of 'die' as an ivory cube used at hazard, on which the lowest point or 'one' is called an 'ace'. There is a further pun in line 300 on 'ace' and 'ass'.

300. **prove an ass.** The humour of the jest lies in the memory which the audience have of Bottom's midnight adventure.

308, 309. **he for...God bless us.** This is omitted in the Ff., probably on account of a statute of James I., passed in 1605, forbidding the use of the name of God in stage-plays.

311. **means.** Theobald's emendation of *moans* is quite unnecessary. See Glossary.

318. **lily lips.** Theobald read *lily brows*, thinking to get a rhyme to *nose*; but several lines in the burlesque are unrhymed, and the alteration spoils the point. With this passage cf. Peele, *Old Wives Tale* (1595)—

"Her coral lips, her crimson chin—
Thou art a flouting knave. Her coral lips, her crimson chin!"

See also the passages quoted from *Narcissus* in Appendix F.

323. **green as leeks.** In *Romeo and Juliet*, iii. 5. 222, the Nurse accounts Paris' 'green' eye a beauty.

324. **Sisters three**, the three Fates. With this passage compare *Damon and Pythias*—

"Ye furies, all at once
On me your torments try:—
Gripe me, you greedy griefs,
And present pangs of death;
You sisters three, with cruel hands
With speed come stop my breath".

332. An allusion in Edward Sharpham's *The Fleire* (1607) preserves the fact that the old stage-custom was for Thisbe to stab herself, in her confusion, with the scabbard instead of the sword.

338. The irrepressible Bottom again puts his word in.

338, 339. **the wall is down that parted their fathers**; just as in *Romeo and Juliet*, probably written or revised about the time this play was written, the death of the lovers heals the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues.

340. **a Bergomask dance.** The dwellers in the Italian district of Bergamo, like the Boeotians in classical Greece, were looked upon as particularly rustic. Therefore a Bergomask dance is a dance of clowns.

357–376. The exquisite poetry of this passage comes in striking contrast to the rude mirth of the burlesque that has preceded it.

358. **behowls.** So Theobald, for the *beholds* of the Qq. Ff. Cf. *As You Like It*, v. 2. 118, "'Tis like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon".

370. **the triple Hecate.** The *tergemina Hecate* or *diva triformis* of classical myth, who was Diana on earth, Phœbe in the sky, and Hecate in the nether world.

371. Cf. Appendix A, § 13 (*h*).

375. On Puck as a house-spirit, see Appendix A, §§ 16, 17.

376. **behind the door.** A somewhat untidy Elizabethan practice, unless the meaning is 'outside the door', or possibly 'from behind the door'.

386. It would appear that a song has been lost here, or perhaps two, one here, and one at line 403; but the Ff. print lines 408–429, given in the Qq. to Oberon, as *The Song*.

387–398. Cf. Milton, *Vacation Exercise*, 59–64—

"Good luck befriend thee, son; for, at thy birth,
The fairy ladies danced upon the hearth;
Thy drowsy nurse hath sworn she did them spy
Come tripping to the room where thou didst lie;
And sweetly singing round about thy bed,
Strew all their blessings on thy sleeping head".

405, 406. These lines are accidentally transposed in the Qq. Ff.

409. Shakespeare insists, by way of close, on the dream-like symbolical character of his play.

419. **the serpent's tongue**, *i.e.* hissing, the reward of a bad play. Steevens quotes Markham, *English Arcadia* (1607), "After the custom of distressed tragedians, whose first act is entertained with a snaky salutation". Cf. also *Love's Labour's Lost*, v. 1. 144, "An excellent device! so, if any of the audience hiss, you may cry, 'Well done, Hercules! now thou crushest the snake'".

423. **your hands**, *i.e.* your applause. Cf. *Tempest*, Epil. 10, "With the help of your good hands", and *All's Well*, v. 3. 340, "Your gentle hands lend us and take our hearts". The plays of the Latin comedy regularly ended with *Plaudite*.