

Comics in Shakespearean plays

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CHAPTER-ONE

The Nature of the Comic

Comedy is commonly taken to mean that species of dramatic composition which ends happily. Dante names his epic *Divine Comedy*, because it closes on a happy and joyous note, though it begins adversely and, to be more precise, terribly. But the happy ending cannot be regarded as the '*differentia*' of comedy. There are countless dramas that end in a fairly happy manner; still they are not comedies. Thus the problem-plays of Shakespeare such as *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *All's Well that Ends Well* all of which have happy ending cannot be called comedies.

Before considering the qualities in the work of any particular author, it may be genuinely profitable to inquire into the very nature of what is known as the comic generally. It is truly very difficult to evince the true source of the risible. According to Aristotelian point of view, the comic or the risible lies in degradation. Aristotle believed that men are in comedy made worse than they are, and become consequently object of laughter.



Ben Jonson, too, noted that 'what either in the words or sense of an author or in the language or actions of men is awry depraved does strangely stir mean affectations and provoke for the most part to laughter.' Bergson candidly believed that the comic to result from the unsociability on the part of the object laughter and the sense of automatism in the situation, in the words or in the character. But the most fertile source of the comic is incongruity whether physical, mental or verbal.

Physical deformity or incongruity is the least productive of laughter. The element of pity in us forbids us to jeer at the physical deformity of a man. Thus we do not laugh at a blind man or a lame person walking on crutches. But the deformity caused by the affectedly ridiculous dress, for example, excites our laughter. We laugh at the ridiculous dress of Malvolio or of the "Gallicized fops" of the restoration period. Again, in certain in certain circumstances physical deformity, too, becomes the source of laughter. Thus when we see, a frail, lean and thin woman looking almost like a straight line from the shoulders all way down walk with a very fat and flabby husband, we burst into laughter. "Falstaff sail forward in his bulk with his little page following him, the contrast arousing our mirth because of the incongruity of the pair."(Nicoll)

But it is the mental deformity that provides the greatest source of comic laughter. This deformity may or may not be vice, but must be a folly. The

utter stupidity of Dogberry and the Verges or the temperamental cynicism of Jaques evokes boisterous laughter. M.Bergson is of the opinion that laughter comes from the sense of mental deformity. He says that the comic characters are in the hands of their deformity, that they are not men, "but merely machines in the control of their humours." Mental deformity or mental automatism may also appear in repetition of certain set phrases or the very manner a character speaks. Thus Mrs. Malaprop with her nice "derangement of epitaphs" turns out to be a dependable element of the risible.

Most people believe that the comic is traceable to a feeling of superiority; we laugh when we find a man committing blunders we ourselves would easily avoid. Indeed, we very often find clever men setting a trap for a victim; the victim walks into the trap and this appeals to the sense of superiority in the conspirators, which is discharged through laughter. But the fact remains that the person arousing the comic sensation is a butt of ridicule, and the most prominent thing in the mind of a comedian is the sensation of joy or glory that he is above falling into the error which is the occasion of laughter. Now this is a popular theory of laughter among the philosophers and men of letters.

Again a sense of superiority is not all by itself comical. Fielding suggests that the essence of comic inferiority lies in affectation. Now, affectation, indeed, is not very often ludicrous, but not all affectation is so. What is more damaging to the theory is that affectation often arouses moral indignation and thus ceases to be comical. Meredith suggests that the Comic Spirit, which is the source of Common Sense, preys chiefly on Folly, which is the daughter of Unreason and Sentimentalism. If we consider only Meredith's most popular novel *Diana of the Crossways*, we find that a character like Lady Wathin is comical for chiefly she is impervious to sentimentalism. Again Bergson points out that laughter is social gesture and that indifference is its natural environment, its appeal being to intelligence, pure and simple. Society is suspicious of inelasticity, because the principal characteristics of living things are continual change of aspects, irreversibility of order, and individuality.

What is then the true essence of comedy? Freud and Bergson have both noted that there is a good deal of similarity between dreams and the comic. What is more suggestive than dream-experience, the most terrible or the most beautiful, appears to be comical when we look back at it in the morning. But what is more striking characteristic of a dream experience? Things appear so real during the dream, as if, it is endowed with all the vividness of waking experience. If we put these two characteristics together, we perhaps get the secret of comedy. Every man tries to understand and assimilate the world outside, to live in his experiences of

the world and make the live in him. That part of the external world, which he considers real—whether friendly or hostile—he re-creates in lyrics, dramatic and narrative poetry and prose. But there is branch of reality that he considers essentially unreal, but he is essentially unreal, but he is amused to find that it, too, has the vigour and suppleness of life. And that is the world of comedy.

CHAPTER-TWO

The Comic in Shakespearean Comedies

All the comedies of Shakespeare do not fall to the one and the same period of Shakespeare's dramatic career, nor are they identical in character and spirit. Thus *The Merry Wives of Windsor* differs, in many respects, from *As You Like It* that in its turn differs from *Measure for Measure*. Still there are some characteristics that mark all more or less. The comedies of Shakespeare are generally set in natural and romantic surroundings, far away from the maddening crowd, the fever and the fret of the city life. In them, Shakespeare transports us into the cloudland of romance and beauty, lit by the light that hardly shines on land or sea. And atmosphere of peace and tranquility so uncommon in human life on earth hang over the comic world of Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in a dreamy and romantic wood near Athens, *Much Ado About Nothing* in the orchards and their surroundings, *As You Like It* in the forest of Arden, *Twelfth Night* in the seacoast of Illyria. As Nicoll says, "The settings are all imaginative—an unhistorical France, Ephesus, Thebes, Arden, Illyria and Venice—each one conceived in the glow of strange and beautiful fancy." While going through the sunny comedies of Shakespeare, we breathe the same romantic air as envelops the world of Keats' poetry or of Scott's novels.

There is hardly any Shakespearean play with only one story and none in which the plot does not include more than one thrilling incident or situation. Another noticeable feature is that, except in those plays which are avowedly satirical, there is everywhere an exuberance of romantic sentiment which stirs the heart of the noble heroine no less than that of the disreputable courtesan. In order to enrich the stories with romantic situation and sentiment, the playwrights draw on fairy lore and mistaken identity and various other intricate devices 'by which credulous people are gulled or super subtle engineers are hoist with their own petards.'

Shakespearian comedy shows no lack of these features of Elizabethan comedy. Indeed, as Dowden remarks, 'The essentials of Shakespearean comedy at its best are, after all, simple and obvious enough—a delightful story, conducted, in some romantic region, by gracious and gallant persons, thwarted or aided by the mirthful god, Circumstance, and arriving at a fortunate issue'. Not to speak of early plays like *Love's Labour's Lost* or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, even in the so-called mature comedies, Portia wins her case, saves Antonio and befools Bassanio by putting on the disguise of a lawyer; Rosalind courts Orlando in male attire, and the plot of *Twelfth Night* thrives upon the mistaken identity of a brother and a sister. Indeed, so great must have been the contemporary craze for disguise that Shakespeare did not abandon this mechanical device even in his latest comedies. In *The Winter's Tale* Florizel masks himself as a shepherd to court Perdita, and when his real identity is discovered he offers to marry her, but he is himself deceived by his father and Camillo

who meet him in the mean attire of shepherds. The situation becomes highly entertaining when we remember that Perdita herself is princess in the guise of a shepherdess. In *Cymbeline*, another play of Shakespeare's final period, princes are disguised as rustics, and the heroine surely passes for a shepherd, without any of her relations being able to see through the mask. Even in such 'dark comedies' as *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* in which we have travelled very far, indeed, from the 'fresh wild-wood paths of Arden and from the glowing gardens of Illyria, the emphasis on disguise and the confusions it leads to is as strong as ever.'

Again, there are other sources on which he freely tends to create a romantic atmosphere in which his imagination may have full play. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* represent incidents and situations more fantastic than those satirized by Peele in *The Old Wives' Tale*, and even though most of the other comedies are free from any touch of the supernatural, Helena's skill in healing and Portia's forensic success are little short of the miraculous. The way in which Hermione and Perdita are preserved is so extraordinary that Shakespeare feels it necessary to offer an apology through the figure of Time who appears as a chorus in the interval between the third and the fourth acts of *The Winter's Tale*. But even he cannot adequately explain how it was possible for Paulina to keep the existence of Hermione concealed from the repentant King and the other people around her. In other respects, too, Shakespeare exhibits the

variety and the largeness that are the most prominent features of Elizabethan comedy. The *dramatis personae* includes men and women of all sorts and conditions-kings and dukes as well as tinkers and bellows-menders, pure London-bred rogues no less than foreign fantastics, noble and gracious ladies as much as courtesans and bawds, a superhuman Spirit beside a half-human monster. Here, indeed, one might exclaim, is God's plenty! In the construction of his plots and in the treatment of his sources, he is always ready to add new complications, to enrich his story with an additional intrigue, if it can be introduced without spoiling the dramatic impression. Plautus gives us only one pair of twins, but Shakespeare adds to the number and quality of diverting situations arising from mistaken identity by giving us two. We look in vain for Benedick and Beatrice no less than for Dogberry and Verges in the story of Bondello which supplied him with materials for *Much Ado About Nothing*. In handling the diverse materials, Shakespeare made incisions here and there, but he was always eager to enrich his story rather than to simplify it. *The Taming of the Shrew* though a mediocre play, is a striking example of how Shakespeare elaborated his plots by filling them in with episodes derived from different sources.

What is the distinctiveness of Shakespearian comedy? Does it consist only in presenting intrigue within intrigue and in introducing a larger variety of characters? If that were so, Shakespeare would be only of his age and not for all time, and Fletcher would be his rival, if not his



superior. But every reader and playgoer must have felt that although he employs all the devices his forerunners and contemporaries make use of, the impression one derives from his dramas is fundamentally different from that which is produced by theirs. H. B. Charlton puts forward the thesis that in Shakespearian comedy there is the picture of a progressive attempt at the conquest of happiness. According to him, Shakespeare 'has sought intuitively to embody in his comic heroes more and more of this capacity for conquering the world.' For Shakespeare's comic idea was, 'in effect, an explicit recognition that man depends, not merely for his success in life, but for his survival through life, on his possession of so much cool reason that he may secure for himself immunity from the mortal diseases which, arising from his emotional and imaginative faculties, may render him unable to distinguish between bushes and bears'. On this view, comedy fulfils its natural function by 'glorifying those settled institutions of man's social existence which owe their persistence to mankind's experience that such as these make for his welfare in the substantial problem of living life in the world as the world is.' Charlton applies the theory outlined above to all the comedies of Shakespeare. Falstaff he interprets as a character who but half succeeded in the quest for happiness, who 'had conquered a world, only to reveal that such a world was not worth the conquest.' This, he suggests, is the secret of Falstaff's incompleteness which explains his rejection of him. Charlton experiences the greatest difficulty in applying his theory to the 'dark comedies' in which Shakespeare seems to express a gloomy, cynical view of life. But

he looks upon them as marking a stage in the development of Shakespeare's comic idea. Indeed, they occupy a place between the tentative, half-hearted expression of the idea in Falstaff and its complete embodiment in *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

The real excellence of a Shakespearian comedy lays not so much in the philosophy that may be gleaned from it or in the romantic atmosphere he diffuses over it as in characterization, in the unity and diversity, logic and inconsistency, vividness and incomprehensibility, which mark his study of human personality. There are surprises, contrasts, incongruities, disguises and confusions, but all these are used as means to the exploration of character, never as ends in themselves. Even in such early comedies as *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Comedy of Errors* in which Shakespeare is not able to plumb the depths of character and in which he seems to be grappling with intransigent material, this distinctiveness of his later and greater work is not altogether absent. The main story of *Love's Labour's Lost* is empty of substance, because the King and his lords begin to break their vows almost as soon as they have taken them. Critics point out that it is impossible that the King should not have provided for, or at least foreseen, the contingency he has to face immediately on taking his vow. The mistakes he and his followers make about the identity of their lady-loves are highly entertaining and may be looked upon as the principal source of comic laughter.

In the later and maturer comedies, the emphasis on character is more pronounced. Julia, Rosalind, Viola, Portia and Imogen put on male attire which deceives even their nearest kinsmen, but it is not the deception which is important for the comedy, but the greater scope this disguise allows for the revelation of character, for Julia's devotion, Imogen's courage and Portia's or Rosalind's intellectual brilliance. In Viola, the male disguise is the occasion of a conflict of emotions for which there would be no scope in a more realistic play. How Shakespeare employs disguise as only a means to an end is seen best in 1 Henry IV where Falstaff is robbed by his comrades who disguise themselves and pass off unrecognized. With any other dramatist of the period, the comic episode would be complete as soon as Falstaff was exposed, but in this play the revelation of the truth does not damp Falstaff as it would have damped the stock liar or braggart of comedy. Falstaff is indifferent to facts and goes on building his castle of lies, until we realize that the metamorphosis of two men in buckram is not distortion of truth but a creation of the imagination. It is in this way that a mechanical trick is lifted to the domain of high comedy in which character rather than plot is the source of laughter.

The title Measure for Measure is itself an indication of its content, the comic interest depending chiefly on the gulling of the self-righteous pretender Angelo. Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not his old self but a dotting lecher who is easily befooled by two sprightly women whose inventiveness is the principal source of laughter in this play. In



All's Well that Ends Well the plot is made up of a fusion of two episodes each of which rests on a trick.

These three plays seem, therefore, to be exceptions to the general principle underlying Shakespearian comedy, but a closer examination reveals that even in these plays character is not overshadowed by plot. *Measure for Measure* seems, indeed, to be a game of hide-and-seek between the ubiquitous Duke and the other characters, but the protagonist is not the Duke or Angelo or Lucio but Isabella who has to face a conflict between sisterly love and her notions of womanly honour. How far Shakespeare succeeds in portraying the character of the heroine may be a matter of dispute, but there seems to be no room for doubt about his intention. Indeed, it is this emphasis on character that distinguishes *Measure for Measure* from a play of Middleton's .like *The Old Law* or *A Trick to Catch the Old One* or *The Family of Love*, plays which rest on disguise and trickery and in which the characters cannot become important because of the dramatist's preoccupation with intrigue.

But in *Measure for Measure*, the disguise and the trick serve only to bring out in the most appropriate manner the comic significance in Isabella's character. The agonizing conflict in Isabella's heart between sisterly devotion and a woman's honour is suitable for portraiture in a tragic drama. We would have been prepared for a tragic conclusion if we had not been fortified by a knowledge of the trick which the Friar-Duke has up his

sleeves. The same deftness in characterization is found also in *All's Well that Ends Well*, in which the dramatist is concerned not so much with the way Helena gulls Bertram as with exploring her character, in which are intermingled devotion to her lover, insight into his snobbery and lustfulness, strength of will, unflinching self-confidence and unperturbed resourcefulness.

CHAPTER-THREE

A Glance on A Mid-summer Night's Dream

In the previous two chapters, I have attempted, in general, to put forward the very essence of what is known as 'the comic' and its plausible presence in Shakespearean comedies citing a number of his plays. In this chapter, I shall try, in short, to evince the abundance of comic elements in *A Mid-summer Night's Dream* one of the most loving plays of Shakespeare. It is generally believed that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written in 1595 or 1596. This view is supported by both internal and external evidence. Part of the evidence to support this view lies in the topicality of Titania's speech in which she describes foul weather and the dislocation of the season. Such extraordinarily bad weather was experienced in England in 1594 from March onward, continuing almost to the end of the year, and followed by bad, wet summers in 1595 and 1596. During this period the prices of corn rose to very high levels, though this price-rise was due as much to the malpractices of the corn-dealers as to a comparatively low harvest. The topicality of Titania's speech lies in its

general reference to the unseasonable rain and cold, with consequent misery and wretchedness. Then there is the style in which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is written. The style of this play links it with *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Whatever chronological fact are there *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's best-loved plays. Its atmosphere of magic and enchantment, its interesting plot, its depiction of various kinds of love, its rich comedy which becomes uproarious at times, its songs and dances, make it perhaps the most fascinating of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Reading it or seeing it on the stage would certainly be a memorable experience for all theatre-loving people. Though it is not entirely free from marks of immaturity, Shakespeare displays here a command over characterization and a power of creating romantic atmosphere which are far above anything one would expect from the author of *Love's Labour's Lost* or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The play records an advance in yet another direction. In the early comedies, Shakespeare shows a fondness for assembling divergent episodes and welding them into a unified whole. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he shows greater boldness in this respect, too, and combines stories of fairy kings and queens, human lovers and Athenian mechanics. It is difficult to conceive of themes less congruous than those of Bottom and Peter Quince on the one hand and of Oberon and Titania on the other; yet Shakespeare's craftsmanship is so wonderful that the fairies come down to earth as easily as Bottom is transported to elf-

land, and what is equally surprising is that these incompatible personages have their parts to play in a drama which starts with the affairs of Theseus, Lysander, Demetrius, Helena and Hermia. The wild mixture of space, time and culture may be realized if one looks over the list of dramatis personae amongst whom Theseus and Hippolyta are taken from mythical Greece, Oberon and Titania from medieval Teutonic mythology, Bottom and his friends from Shakespeare's London. Critics have been puzzled in their attempts to pick the central tread in this entangled web.

Some think that the main story is that of the fairies, to which the affairs of the mortals are only an appendage. But we must remember that it is the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta round which the other episodes revolve. Oberon has come from 'the farthest steep of India' only to supervise the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta and to give their bed joy and prosperity. Titania has had her affair with Theseus whom she led through the glittering night from Perigouna and also made him break his faith with fair Aegles, with Ariadne and Antiopa, and she, too, will stay in Athens, perchance, till after Theseus' wedding day. The Athenian mechanics have gathered only to contribute their share to the entertainments that celebrate the marriage of the Duke and Hippolyta. It is this marriage which thus seems to form the centre of the plot, and the other incidents, however arresting, have no more than episodic value. But we must remember, too, that it is character and not incident which makes drama living. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all the other characters pale

into insignificance when compared with Bully Bottom, who is one of Shakespeare's greatest creations. Indeed, if this comedy ranks as one of the best of Shakespeare's, it is largely because of Bottom, whom Priestly justly describes as 'neither a curve nor a shadow nor a formula, but a gigantic individual creation, the first of the really great comic figures.'

There is an abundance of comedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The comedy sometimes becomes boisterous and even farcical. But there is at the same time a considerable serious element in the play. The opening scene, for instance, is wholly serious. In fact, the opening scene even has tragic overtones. The two lovers, Lysander and Hermia, find themselves faced with a great difficulty; and Helena is feeling deeply disappointed by Demetrius's changed attitude towards her. However, with Scene ii of Act. I. the mood of the play undergoes a cataclysmic change. In this scene a group of Athenian artisans meet to discuss their plan of performing the love-episode of Pyramus and Thisbe for the entertainment of the Duke on the night of his wedding. Bottom the weaver proves to be the chief source of comedy in this scene. When he is offered the role of Pyramus the lover, who kills himself bravely for the sake of his love, Bottom says that this role demands some tears in the true performing of it, and that even the audience would be moved to tears by his performance of this role.

He says that he can move storms in the breasts of the audience, and that he can arouse the feeling of grief most effectively. In spite of that, however,

he would have preferred the role of a tyrant to that of a tragic lover. In the role of a tyrant he would have been able to make ranting speeches; and he then gives to his friends a demonstration of his capacity to make a speech of that kind. Having given them a specimen of a ranting speech, he says that this kind of bombastic language can produce a “lofty” effect on the audience. When Quince talks about the role of Thisbe which is being offered to Flute, Bottom says that he should be allowed to play the role of Thisbe also. He does not realize that the same actor cannot play the roles both of a lover and of a beloved. A little later, when the role of the lion is offered to Snug, Bottom says that he can play the role of a lion also very effectively. He goes on to say that he can roar in such a way that the Duke will say: “Let him roar again; let him roar again!” When Quince points out that his roaring might frighten the ladies in the audience, Bottom says that he can modulate his roaring in such a way that it will appear to be the singing of a nightingale. However, Bottom has to remain content with the role of Pyramus which has been assigned to him. Bottom in this scene amuses us also by his malapropisms. He uses the word “aggravate” for the word “mitigate”; and he uses the word “obscenely” where he should have used the word “obscurely.” Flute’s and Snug’s reactions to the roles which are assigned to them also amuse us, because they talk like simpletons.

A comic situation new arise when Puck, who is invisible to mortal eyes, places an ass-head on the shoulders of Bottom so that, when Bottom comes back to speak his part in the rehearsal, his friends feel scared on

seeing the transformation in him. Quince, feeling horrified, declares that some monster has come to haunt them. Quince and the others thereupon take to their heels, and Bottom is left alone. Puck then decides to chase the actors who have run away, and to create more confusion among them. He will sometimes assume the shape of a horse, sometimes the shape of a hound, sometimes the shape of a headless bear in order to frighten the actors who are fleeing in terror. It is noteworthy that, while the artisans are feeling terrified, we feel amused by their predicament. Bottom, of course, does not know what he has been transformed into an ass, and therefore he cannot understand why his friends have run from him. He thinks that perhaps his friends want to frighten him by leaving him alone; but he is not going to feel frightened, he says. He then begins to sing a song to show that he is totally unafraid.

Bottom's transformation into an ass is certainly a farcical situation; but is very amusing nevertheless. An even more farcical situation now follows; and it is even more amusing. Titania, to whose eyes her husband had applied the juice of Cupid's flower, wakes up on hearing Bottom's song, and falls in love with him because he is the first creature whom she sees on opening her eyes. She now asks Bottom to sing his song again because her ear is much enamoured of his voice, and because her eye is enthralled by his shape. She then swears that she has fallen in love with him. She tells him that he is as wise as he is beautiful. In a subsequent scene, we find Titania doting upon Bottom the ass. She has collected flowers and has crowned Bottom with musk-roses. She addresses Bottom as her "gentle

joy”, and kisses his large ears which seem very beautiful to her. Bottom asks for the fairy named Peaseblossom, because he wants her to snatch his head which is itching. Bottom also now feels that his face is too hairy and that he should go to a barber’s saloon. When Titania asks if he would like to hear some music, he says that he would certainly like to hear the clang of the tongs and other kitchen tools. He also expresses a desire to chew some good dry oats, and to eat some good, sweet hay. The spectacle of the exquisitely beautiful fairy Queen dotting upon an ass really provides uproarious comedy.

A lot of comedy results from what is known as the irony of situation. Puck has by mistake applied the love-juice to the eyes of Lysander instead of applying it to the eyes of Demetrius as he had been directed to do by Oberon. The result of this error by Puck is that Lysander, on waking up from his sleep and seeing Helena before him, instantly falls in love with her. Helena is amazed on hearing him plead his love for her. He tells her that he no longer loves Hermia, and that he had fallen in love with Hermia at a time when his mind had not yet become mature. Now his mind has ripened, and he cannot love that girl any more. He says that Hermia is no better than a raven, while Helena is comparable to dove. Hermia, at this point, gets totally flummoxed as she fails to understand the change that took place in her suitor. Both Lysander and Demetrius are now in love with Helena, because both are under the influence of the juice of Cupid’s flower. We know the real facts, while none of the four lovers is aware of

what has really happened. The interaction between the real and the unreal goes on through all the stages of the comedy. The amorous entanglement between the two pairs of human lovers becomes so acute as to be almost tragic. But the troubles of loves have little meaning for Puck who exclaims, 'Lor, what fools these mortals be! (Act. III. Sc. ii. 115) Yet these are important enough to call for his interference, and if the mortal lovers behave foolishly, he, too, does not display intelligence of a superior order in the application of the juice. In spite of his professions of superiority, Puck is none other than the well-known domestic sprite, Robin Goodfellow, whom a Fairy addresses thus:

Are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?

The two rivals are now ready to fight in order to decide which of them has a better claim to Helena. However, Puck, acting under Oberon's instructions, prevents the fight. However, Puck, acting under Oberon's instructions, prevents the fight. Puck misleads both of them, speaking to each in the voice of the other and taking each away from the other, thus not allowing them to come so close to each other as to be able to fight.

A high point of the comedy in this play is the performance of the interlude by the artisans. Here it is the crudities of the technique of performance which amuse us. First of all, Quince makes a mess of the prologue. By ignoring the marks of punctuation while reading out the prologue, Quince distorts the whole meaning of the prologue. By ignoring the marks of punctuation while reading out the prologue, Quince distorts the whole meaning of the prologue. Then the actor representing the wall actually tells the audience that he signifies a wall. After the wall has served its purpose, it moves away from the stage. Similarly, when the lion appears on the stage, the actor, who is playing the role of the Moonshine. This actor says that the lantern in his hand represents the horned moon, while

he himself represents the man in the moon. Pyramus also amuses us by his confusions with regard to the use of the human faculties of sight and hearing. At one point, he says: "I see a voice; and I can hear my Thisbe's face." Indeed, the interlude which depicts the tragic love of Pyramus and Thisbe arouses more laughter in the audience than pathos.

The comments which the Duke and his guests make upon the performance of the actors are also very amusing. Theseus, Lysander, and Demetrius all make witty comments upon the performance. Lysander, commenting on the prologue, says: "He (Quince) hath rid his prologue like a rough colt; he knows not the stop." Hippolyta, commenting on the prologue, says: "Indeed, he hath played on this prologue like a child on a recorder; a shound, but not in government" Theseus thus comments on the prologue: "His speech was like a tangled chain; nothing impaired, but all disordered." Referring to the lion, Ly sander wittily says: "This lion is a very fox for his valour." With reference to the Moonshine and the lantern, Theseus makes the following sarcastic remarks: "The man should be put into the lantern;" how is it else the man in the moon?

To put an end to my contention, it should be perceived that the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is highly romantic. Most of the comedies of Shakespeare have a romantic atmosphere; and that is why they are known as romantic comedies. But the atmosphere of this play is literally steeped in romance. This play is full of magic and enchantment. Love is

the central theme of this play as of most other comedies by Shakespeare. Youthful love is always romantic; and we have here the youthful love-affairs of Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena. But this atmosphere of romance is heightened by the introduction of fairies who are invisible, supernatural beings. The magic of Cupid's flower and of Diana's bud deepens the atmosphere of enchantment in this play. The transformation of Bottom and the infatuation of Titania for him as well as the infatuation of Lysander for Helena are the work of the magicians, Oberon and his lieutenant, Puck.

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