***A Midsummer Night’s Dream***

1. i. Theseus and Hippolyta are waiting to wed. Egeus wants to make his daughter Hermia marry Demetrius; Hermia wants to marry Lysander; Demetrius and Lysander both want to marry Hermia. Therefore, Hermia and Lysander agree to elope. Helena wants to marry Demetrius; therefore, she decides to betray the elopers to Demetrius and to follow them with him.

ii. Craftsmen Peter Quince, Nick Bottom, Francis Flute, Robin Starveling, Tom Snout, and Snug plan to act “Pyramus and Thisby.”

1. i. Puck (Robin Goodfellow) enters; then Oberon and Titania enter, quarreling over a changeling. Their quarrel causes disorder in nature. Then Demetrius and Helena enter, quarreling over her love for him and his love for Hermia. Oberon decides to right Helena’s wrong.

ii. Titania is asleep; Oberon anoints her eyelids. Lysander and Hermia are asleep; Puck anoints Lysander’s eyelids. Demetrius and Helena enter; he flees, she wakes Lysander, and he deserts Hermia to follow her; Hermia awakens.

1. i. Craftsmen meet, first to alter the play and then to begin rehearsals. Puck puts an ass’s head on Bottom. The other craftsmen flee, Bottom sings, and Titania awakens to fall in love with Bottom.

ii. Puck gives Oberon a progress report. Demetrius and Hermia enter; she blames him for Lysander’s absence and leaves him to fall asleep alone. Oberon anoints Demetrius. Lysander and Helena enter; she does not believe he loves her. When Demetrius wakes and claims to love her, she is outraged. Hermia returns and quarrels with Helena. Lysander quarrels with Demetrius. Oberon rebukes Puck, who misleads the men so that they do not fight. One by one, all four young lovers come back on stage and fall asleep. Puck anoints Lysander.

1. i. Oberon tells Puck how he won the changeling from Titania, whom he sets free from her love for Bottom. Puck frees Bottom from his ass’s head. Theseus, Hippolyta, and Egeus enter, wake the four lovers, and learn they currently form two mutually loving couples. Theseus says they can be married along with him and Hippolyta. Bemused, the Athenians all go back to the city. Bottom closes the scene, unable to explain any of the experiences he has had in the forest.

ii. The craftsmen despair of their play, but Bottom enters and arranges for the show to go on.

1. i. Theseus and Hippolyta have different responses to the lovers’ tale. The lovers are grateful for their situation. The court watches the craftsmen present their tedious brief tragical comedy. Dancing and retiring to bed close the play, but the three fairies form an epilogue, blessing the three newlywed couples and their prospective offspring.

Note that the plot involves each group interacting with each other group (craftsmen, fairies, court folks).

The plots of a royal wedding, four lovers sorting themselves into couples, marital discord between fairy royals, and the craftsmen’s play about lovers opposed by parents echo each other in multiple ways.

What then is the theme? What can we conclude about the nature of love, of art, and of illusion? The answer may lie in Theseus’ speech equating the lunatic, the lover, and the poet. Madness, love, and the play are all forms of unreality – and yet they are all real.

Poetry: References to the moon as a literal physical object, as the classical mythological character, and as the Elizabethan folkloric object all appear in this play. See, in I.i., speeches of Theseus (three of them), Hippolyta, Egeus, and finally Lysander; in I.ii., Quince’s next-to-last speech; in II.i., Oberon’s first line, Titania’s account of disordered nature, and Oberon’s speech to Puck; in III.i., the craftsmen’s confusion; and in V.i., Theseus’ speech (described in previous paragraph of these notes) and the appearance of Moonshine as a character in the craftsmen’s play.

Further discussion:

Find as many parallels as possible between the situation and actions of Pyramus/Thisbe, on the one hand, and Lysander/Hermia, on the other. Reach some conclusion about the real power of the illusion we call love and about its equal potential for real sorrow or real joy.

OR, consider the rehearsal of the craftsmen’s play as one kind of dramatic criticism and the varying responses of its Athenian audience as other kinds. Also, are any of them models for Elizabethan play-goers? Reach some conclusion about the relationship between reality and illusion on the stage, taking Puck’s epilogue into account.