SWAMI DAYANANDA COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE
MANJAKKUDI

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SEMESTER: ODD (V)

CLASS: III BA ENGLISH

SUBJECT CODE: 16ACCEN9

SUBJECT: SHAKESPEARE

Compiled by,

K. EZHUMALAI
Assistant Professor of English
Swami Dayananda College of Arts &
Science College, Manjakkudi.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Summary

Duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia's head if she flouts her father's will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father's wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon, the fairy king, and Titania, his queen, who has recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania are at odds over a young Indian prince given to Titania by the prince's mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a knight, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his merry servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person's eyelids to make that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania's eyelids. Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck encounters Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck afflicts him with the love potion. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with her, abandoning Hermia. As the night progresses and Puck attempts to

undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are mocking her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena's love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in the forest.

When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, whose head Puck has mockingly transformed into that of an ass. Titania passes a ludicrous interlude doting on the ass-headed weaver. Eventually, Oberon obtains the Indian boy, Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens to be married—Demetrius now loves Helena, and Lysander now loves Hermia. After the group wedding, the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream.

Act I, scene i

At his palace, Theseus, duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, his fiancée, discuss their wedding, to be held in four days, under the new moon. Impatient for the event and in a celebratory mood, Theseus orders Philostrate, his Master of the Revels, to "stir up the Athenian youth to merriments" and devise entertainments with which the couple might pass the time until their wedding (I.i.12). Philostrate takes his leave, and Theseus promises Hippolyta that though he wooed her with his sword (Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, presumably met Theseus in combat), he will wed her "with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling"—with a grand celebration to begin at once and last until the wedding (I.i.19).

Egeus, a citizen of Athens, strides into the room, followed by his daughter Hermia and the Athenian youths Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus has come to see Theseus with a complaint against his daughter: although Egeus has promised her in marriage to Demetrius, who loves her, Lysander has won Hermia's heart, and Hermia refuses to obey her father and marry Demetrius. Egeus demands that the law punish Hermia if she fails to comply with his demands. Theseus speaks to Hermia sharply, telling her to expect to be sent to a nunnery or put to death. Lysander interrupts, accusing Demetrius of being fickle in love, saying that he was once engaged to

Hermia's friend Helena but abandoned her after he met Hermia. Theseus admits that he has heard this story, and he takes Egeus and Demetrius aside to discuss it. Before they go, he orders Hermia to take the time remaining before his marriage to Hippolyta to make up her mind. Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and Demetrius depart, leaving Hermia alone with Lysander.

Hermia and Lysander discuss the trials that must be faced by those who are in love: "The course of true love never did run smooth," Lysander says (I.i.134). He proposes a plan: he has an aunt, wealthy and childless, who lives seven leagues from Athens and who dotes on Lysander like a son. At her house, Hermia and Lysander can be married—and, because the manor is outside of Athens, they would be free from Athenian law. Hermia is overjoyed, and they agree to travel to the house the following night.

Helena, Hermia's friend whom Demetrius jilted, enters the room, lovesick and deeply melancholy because Demetrius no longer loves her. Hermia and Lysander confide their plan to her and wish her luck with Demetrius. They depart to prepare for the following night's journey. Helena remarks to herself that she envies them their happiness. She thinks up a plan: if she tells Demetrius of the elopement that Lysander and Hermia are planning, he will be bound to follow them to the woods to try to stop them; if she then follows him into the woods, she might have a chance to win back his love.

In another part of Athens, far from Theseus's palace, a group of common laborers meets at the house of Peter Quince to rehearse a play that the men hope to perform for the grand celebration preceding the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. Quince, a carpenter, tries to conduct the meeting, but the talkative weaver Nick Bottom continually interrupts him with advice and direction. Quince tells the group what play they are to perform: *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe,* which tells the story of two lovers, separated by their parents' feud, who speak to each other at night through a hole in a wall. In the play, a lion surprises Thisbe one night and tatters her mantle before she escapes. When Pyramus finds the shredded garment, he assumes that the lion has killed Thisbe; stricken with grief, he commits suicide. When Thisbe finds Pyramus's bloody corpse, she too commits suicide. Quince assigns their parts: Bottom is to play Pyramus; Francis Flute, Thisbe; Robin Starveling, Thisbe's mother; Tom Snout, Pyramus's father; Quince himself, Thisbe's father; and Snug, the lion.

As Quince doles out the parts, Bottom often interrupts, announcing that he should be the one to play the assigned part. He says that his ability to speak in a woman's voice would make

him a wonderful Thisbe and that his ability to roar would make him a wonderful lion. Quince eventually convinces him that Pyramus is the part for him, by virtue of the fact that Pyramus is supposed to be very handsome. Snug worries that he will be unable to learn the lion's part, but Quince reassures him that it will be very easy to learn, since the lion speaks no words and only growls and roars. This worries the craftsmen, who reason that if the lion frightens any of the noble ladies in the audience, they will all be executed; since they are only common laborers, they do not want to risk upsetting powerful people. Bottom says that *he* could roar as sweetly as a nightingale so as not to frighten anyone, but Quince again convinces him that he can only play Pyramus. The group disperses, agreeing to meet in the woods the following night to rehearse their play.

Act II, scene i

In the forest, two fairies, one a servant of Titania, the other a servant of Oberon, meet by chance in a glade. Oberon's servant tells Titania's to be sure to keep Titania out of Oberon's sight, for the two are very angry with each other. Titania, he says, has taken a little Indian prince as her attendant, and the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him his knight. Titania, however, refuses to give the boy up.

Titania's servant is delighted to recognize Oberon's servant as Robin Goodfellow, better known as Puck, a mischievous sprite notorious for his pranks and jests. Puck admits his identity and describes some of the tricks he plays on mortals.

The two are interrupted when Oberon enters from one side of the glade, followed by a train of attendants. At the same moment, Titania enters from the other side of the glade, followed by her own train. The two fairy royals confront one another, each questioning the other's motive for coming so near to Athens just before the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. Titania accuses Oberon of loving Hippolyta and of thus wishing to bless the marriage; Oberon accuses Titania of loving Theseus. The conversation turns to the little Indian boy, whom Oberon asks Titania to give him. But Titania responds that the boy's mother was a devotee of hers before she died; in honor of his mother's memory, Titania will hold the boy near to her. She invites Oberon to go with her to dance in a fairy round and see her nightly revels, but Oberon declines, saying that they will be at odds until she gives him the boy.

Titania storms away, and Oberon vows to take revenge on her before the night is out. He sends Puck to seek a white-and-purple flower called love-in-idleness, which was once hit with

one of Cupid's arrows. He says that the flower's juice, if rubbed on a sleeper's eyelids, will cause the sleeper to fall in love with the first living thing he or she sees upon waking. Oberon announces that he will use this juice on Titania, hoping that she will fall in love with some ridiculous creature; he will then refuse to lift the juice's effect until she yields the Indian prince to him.

Act II, scene ii

As Puck flies off to seek the flower, Demetrius and Helena pass through the glade. Oberon makes himself invisible so that he can watch and hear them. Demetrius harangues Helena, saying that he does not love her, does not want to see her, and wishes that she would stop following him immediately. He curses Lysander and Hermia, whom he is pursuing, hoping to prevent their marriage and slay Lysander. Helena repeatedly declares her adoration for, and loyalty to, Demetrius, who repeatedly insults her. They exit the grove, with Helena following closely behind Demetrius, and Oberon materializes. He declares that before the night is out, Demetrius will be the one chasing Helena.

Puck appears, carrying the flower whose juice will serve as the love potion. Oberon takes the flower and says that he knows of a fragrant stream bank surrounded with flowers where Titania often sleeps. Before hurrying away to anoint Titania's eyelids with the flower's juice, Oberon orders Puck to look for an Athenian youth being pursued by a lady and to put some of the juice on the disdainful youth's eyelids, so that when he wakes he will fall in love with the lady. He informs Puck that he will know the youth by his Athenian garb. Puck agrees to carry out his master's wishes.

After her dancing and revelry, Titania falls asleep by the stream bank. Oberon creeps up on her and squeezes the flower's juice onto her eyelids, chanting a spell, so that Titania will fall in love with the first creature she sees upon waking. Oberon departs, and Lysander and Hermia wander into the glade. Lysander admits that he has forgotten the way to his aunt's house and says that they should sleep in the forest until morning, when they can find their way by daylight. Lysander wishes to sleep close to Hermia, but she insists that they sleep apart, to respect custom and propriety. At some distance from each other, they fall asleep.

Puck enters, complaining that he has looked everywhere but cannot find an Athenian youth and pursuing lady. He is relieved when he finally happens upon the sleeping forms of Lysander and Hermia, assuming that they are the Athenians of whom Oberon spoke. Noticing

that the two are sleeping apart, Puck surmises that the youth refused to let Hermia come closer to him. Calling him a "churl," Puck spreads the potion on Lysander's eyelids, and he departs.

Simultaneously, Helena pursues Demetrius through the glade. He insults her again and insists that she no longer follow him. She complains that she is afraid of the dark, but he nonetheless storms off without her. Saying that she is out of breath, Helena remains behind, bemoaning her unrequited love. She sees the sleeping Lysander and wakes him up. The potion takes effect, and Lysander falls deeply in love with Helena. He begins to praise her beauty and to declare his undying passion for her. Disbelieving, Helena reminds him that he loves Hermia; he declares that Hermia is nothing to him. Helena believes that Lysander is making fun of her, and she grows angry. She leaves in a huff, and Lysander follows after her. Hermia soon wakes and is shocked to find that Lysander is gone. She stumbles into the woods to find him.

Act III, scene i

The craftsmen meet in the woods at the appointed time to rehearse their play. Since they will be performing in front of a large group of nobles (and since they have an exaggerated sense of the delicacy of noble ladies), Bottom declares that certain elements of the play must be changed. He fears that Pyramus's suicide and the lion's roaring will frighten the ladies and lead to the actors' executions. The other men share Bottom's concern, and they decide to write a prologue explaining that the lion is not *really* a lion nor the sword *really* a sword and assuring the ladies that no one will *really* die. They decide also that, to clarify the fact that the story takes place at night and that Pyramus and Thisbe are separated by a wall, one man must play the wall and another the moonlight by carrying a bush and a lantern.

As the craftsmen rehearse, Puck enters and marvels at the scene of the "hempen homespuns" trying to act (III.i.65). When Bottom steps aside, temporarily out of view of the other craftsmen, Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. When the ass-headed Bottom reenters the scene, the other men become terrified and run for their lives. Delighting in the mischief, Puck chases after them. Bottom, perplexed, remains behind.

In the same grove, the sleeping Titania wakes. When she sees Bottom, the flower juice on her eyelids works its magic, and she falls deeply and instantly in love with the ass-headed weaver. She insists that he remain with her, embraces him, and appoints a group of fairies—Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed—to see to his every wish. Bottom takes these events in stride, having no notion that his head has been replaced with that of an ass. He

comments that his friends have acted like asses in leaving him, and he introduces himself to the fairies. Titania looks on him with undisguised love as he follows her to her forest bower.

Act III, scenes ii–iii

In another part of the forest, Puck tells Oberon about the predicament involving Titania and Bottom. Oberon is delighted that his plan is working so well. Hermia, having discovered Demetrius after losing Lysander, enters the clearing with Demetrius. Puck is surprised to see the woman he saw earlier with a different man from the one he enchanted. Oberon is surprised to see the man he ordered Puck to enchant with a different woman. He realizes that a mistake has been made and says that he and Puck will have to remedy it. Hermia presses Demetrius about Lysander's whereabouts, fearing that he is dead, but Demetrius does not know where Lysander has gone, and he is bitter and reproachful that Hermia would rather be with Lysander than with him. Hermia grows angrier and angrier, and Demetrius decides that it is pointless to follow her. He lies down and falls asleep, and Hermia stalks away to find Lysander.

When Hermia is gone, Oberon sends Puck to find Helena and squeezes the flower juice onto Demetrius's eyelids. Puck quickly returns, saying that Helena is close behind him. Helena enters with Lysander still pledging his undying love to her. Still believing that he is mocking her, Helena remains angry and hurt. The noise of their bickering wakes Demetrius, who sees Helena and immediately falls in love with her. Demetrius joins Lysander in declaring this love. Lysander argues that Demetrius does not really love Helena; Demetrius argues that Lysander is truly in love with Hermia. Helena believes that they are both mocking her and refuses to believe that either one loves her.

Hermia reenters, having heard Lysander from a distance. When she learns that her beloved Lysander now claims to love Helena, as does Demetrius, she is appalled and incredulous. Helena, who is likewise unable to fathom that both men could be in love with her, assumes that Hermia is involved in the joke that she believes the men are playing on her, and she chides Hermia furiously for treating their friendship so lightly. Lysander and Demetrius are ready to fight one another for Helena's love; as they lunge at one another, Hermia holds Lysander back, provoking his scorn and disgust: "I will shake thee from me like a serpent" (III.ii.262). Hermia begins to suspect that Helena has somehow acted to steal Lysander's love from her, and she surmises that, because she is short and Helena is tall, Helena must have used her height to lure Lysander. She grows furious with Helena and threatens to scratch out her eyes.

Helena becomes afraid, saying that Hermia was always much quicker than she to fight. Demetrius and Lysander vow to protect Helena from Hermia, but they quickly become angry with each other and storm off into the forest to have a duel. Helena runs away from Hermia, and Hermia, reannouncing her amazement at the turn of events, departs.

Oberon dispatches Puck to prevent Lysander and Demetrius from fighting and says that they must resolve this confusion by morning. Puck flies through the forest hurling insults in the voices of both Lysander and Demetrius, confusing the would-be combatants until they are hopelessly lost.

Act IV, scene i

As the Athenian lovers lie asleep in the grove, Titania enters with Bottom, still with the head of an ass, and their fairy attendants. Titania tells Bottom to lie down with his head in her lap, so that she may twine roses into his hair and kiss his "fair large ears" (IV.i.4). Bottom orders Peaseblossom to scratch his head and sends Cobweb to find him some honey. Titania asks Bottom if he is hungry, and he replies that he has a strange appetite for hay. Titania suggests that she send a fairy to fetch him nuts from a squirrel's hoard, but Bottom says that he would rather have a handful of dried peas. Yawning, he declares that he is very tired. Titania tells him to sleep in her arms, and she sends the fairies away. Gazing at Bottom's head, she cries, "O how I love thee, how I dote on thee!" and they fall asleep (IV.i.42).

Puck and Oberon enter the glade and comment on the success of Oberon's revenge. Oberon says that he saw Titania earlier in the woods and taunted her about her love for the ass-headed Bottom; he asked her for the Indian child, promising to undo the spell if she would yield him, to which she consented. Satisfied, Oberon bends over the sleeping Titania and speaks the charm to undo the love potion. Titania wakes and is amazed to find that she is sleeping with the donkey-like Bottom. Oberon calls for music and takes his queen away to dance. She says that she hears the morning lark, and they exit. Puck speaks a charm over Bottom to restore his normal head, and he follows after his master.

As dawn breaks, Theseus, his attendants, Hippolyta, and Egeus enter to hear the baying of Theseus's hounds. They are startled to find the Athenian youths sleeping in the glade. They wake them and demand their story, which the youths are only partly able to recall—to them, the previous night seems as insubstantial as a dream. All that is clear to them is that Demetrius and Helena love each other, as do Lysander and Hermia. Theseus orders them to follow him to

the temple for a great wedding feast. As they leave, Bottom wakes. He says that he has had a wondrous dream and that he will have Peter Quince write a ballad of his dream to perform at the end of their play.

Act IV, scene ii

At Quince's house, the craftsmen sit somberly and worry about their missing friend Bottom. Having last seen him shortly before the appearance of the ass-headed monster in the forest, the craftsmen worry that he has been felled by this terrifying creature. Starveling suspects that the fairies have cast some enchantment on Bottom. Flute asks whether they will go through with the play if Bottom does not return from the woods, and Peter Quince declares that to do so would be impossible, as Bottom is the only man in Athens capable of portraying Pyramus. The sad craftsmen agree that their friend is the wittiest, most intelligent, and best person in all of Athens.

Snug enters with an alarming piece of news: Theseus has been married, along with "two or three lords and ladies" (presumably Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena), and the newlyweds are eager to see a play (IV.ii.16). Flute laments Bottom's absence, noting that Bottom would certainly have won a great deal of money from the admiring duke for his portrayal of Pyramus.

Just then, Bottom bursts triumphantly into the room and asks why everyone looks so sad. The men are overjoyed to see him, and he declares that he has an amazing story to tell them about his adventure in the forest. Quince asks to hear it, but Bottom says that there is no time: they must don their costumes and go straight to the duke's palace to perform their play. As they leave, Bottom tells them not to eat onions or garlic before the play, as they must be prepared to "utter sweet breath" (IV.ii.36).

Act V, scene I

At his palace, Theseus speaks with Hippolyta about the story that the Athenian youths have told them concerning the magical romantic mix-ups of the previous night. Theseus says that he does not believe the story, adding that darkness and love have a way of exciting the imagination. Hippolyta notes, however, that if their story is not true, then it is quite strange that all of the lovers managed to narrate the events in exactly the same way.

The youths enter and Theseus greets them heartily. He says that they should pass the time before bed with a performance, and he summons Egeus (or, in some editions of *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream, Philostrate) to read him a list of plays, each of which Theseus deems unacceptable. Egeus then tells him of the Pyramus and Thisbe story that the common craftsmen have prepared; warning that it is terrible in every respect, he urges Theseus not to see it. Theseus, however, says that if the craftsmen's intentions are dutiful, there will be something of merit in the play no matter how poor the performance.

The lords and ladies take their seats, and Quince enters to present a prologue, which he speaks haltingly. His strange pauses put the meaning of his words in question, so that he says, "Our true intent is. All for your delight / We are not here. That you should here repent you," though he means to communicate that "Our true intent is all for your delight. / We are not here that you should here repent you" (V.i.114–115). The other players then enter, including two characters performing the roles of Wall and Moonshine. They act out a clumsy version of the story, during which the noblemen and women joke among themselves about the actors' strange speeches and misapprehensions. Bottom, in particular, makes many perplexing statements while playing Pyramus, such as "I see a voice...I can hear my Thisbe's face" (V.i.190–191). Pyramus and Thisbe meet at, and speak across, the actor playing Wall, who holds up his fingers to indicate a chink. Snug, as the lion, enters and pours forth a speech explaining to the ladies that he is not really a lion. He roars, scaring Thisbe away, and clumsily rends her mantle. Finding the bloody mantle, Pyramus duly commits suicide. Thisbe does likewise when she finds her Pyramus dead. After the conclusion of the play, during which Bottom pretends to kill himself, with a cry of "die, die, die, die, die," Bottom asks if the audience would like an epilogue or a bergamask dance; Theseus replies that they will see the dance (V.i.295). Bottom and Flute perform the dance, and the whole group exits for bed.

Characters

Puck

Though there is little character development in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and no true protagonist, critics generally point to Puck as the most important character in the play. The mischievous, quick-witted sprite sets many of the play's events in motion with his magic, by means of both deliberate pranks on the human characters (transforming Bottom's head into that of an ass) and unfortunate mistakes (smearing the love potion on Lysander's eyelids instead of Demetrius's).

More important, Puck's capricious spirit, magical fancy, fun-loving humor, and lovely, evocative language permeate the atmosphere of the play. Wild contrasts, such as the implicit comparison between the rough, earthy craftsmen and the delicate, graceful fairies, dominate *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Puck seems to illustrate many of these contrasts within his own character: he is graceful but not so saccharine as the other fairies; as Oberon's jester, he is given to a certain coarseness, which leads him to transform Bottom's head into that of an ass merely for the sake of enjoyment. He is good-hearted but capable of cruel tricks. Finally, whereas most of the fairies are beautiful and ethereal, Puck is often portrayed as somewhat bizarre looking. Indeed, another fairy mentions that some call Puck a "hobgoblin," a term whose connotations are decidedly less glamorous than those of "fairy" (II.i.40).

Nick Bottom

Whereas Puck's humor is often mischievous and subtle, the comedy surrounding the overconfident weaver Nick Bottom is hilariously overt. The central figure in the subplot involving the craftsmen's production of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, Bottom dominates his fellow actors with an extraordinary belief in his own abilities (he thinks he is perfect for every part in the play) and his comical incompetence (he is a terrible actor and frequently makes rhetorical and grammatical mistakes in his speech). The humor surrounding Bottom often stems from the fact that he is totally unaware of his own ridiculousness; his speeches are overdramatic and self-aggrandizing, and he seems to believe that everyone takes him as seriously as he does himself. This foolish self-importance reaches its pinnacle after Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. When Titania, whose eyes have been anointed with a love potion, falls in love with the now ass-headed Bottom, he believes that the devotion of the beautiful, magical fairy queen is nothing out of the ordinary and that all of the trappings of her affection, including having servants attend him, are his proper due. His unawareness of the fact that his head has been transformed into that of an ass parallels his inability to perceive the absurdity of the idea that Titania could fall in love with him.

Helena

Although Puck and Bottom stand out as the most personable characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they themselves are not involved in the main dramatic events. Of the other characters, Helena, the lovesick young woman desperately in love with Demetrius, is perhaps the most fully drawn. Among the quartet of Athenian lovers, Helena is the one who thinks most

about the nature of love—which makes sense, given that at the beginning of the play she is left out of the love triangle involving Lysander, Hermia, and Demetrius. She says, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind," believing that Demetrius has built up a fantastic notion of Hermia's beauty that prevents him from recognizing Helena's own beauty (I.i.234). Utterly faithful to Demetrius despite her recognition of his shortcomings, Helena sets out to win his love by telling him about the plan of Lysander and Hermia to elope into the forest. Once Helena enters the forest, many of her traits are drawn out by the confusion that the love potion engenders: compared to the other lovers, she is extremely unsure of herself, worrying about her appearance and believing that Lysander is mocking her when he declares his love for her.

Theseus

As the duke of Athens, Theseus is the play's central patriarchal figure. The audience gets a glimpse of Theseus's patriarchal nature in the very first lines of the play, where he compares his forthcoming marriage to Hippolyta to a long-awaited inheritance. The comparison Theseus makes between marriage and wealth reveals his ideas about the value and meaning of love. Hippolyta is an Amazonian queen whom Theseus abducted during a battle and brought back to Athens like a trophy. Theseus's patriarchal attitude is also partly responsible for setting the events of the play in motion. In the opening act of the play he presides over the dispute between Egeus and Hermia, and his overbearing attempt to get Hermia to obey her father's command causes Hermia to flee Athens altogether. Theseus doesn't change much over the course of the play. When Hippolyta points out that the lovers have told a consistent (if strange) story about their night in the forest, Theseus adamantly refuses to believe the lovers. By play's end Theseus' patriarchal attitude seems less problematic. After all, the quarrel between the lovers has worked itself out—though no thanks to him.

In addition to his role in *Midsummer*, Theseus is also an important figure in Greek myth, as educated members of Shakespeare's audience would likely have known. One of the most notable themes that follows Theseus throughout Greek mythology is his relationships with women. In addition to stealing away with Hippolyta, he also abducted Helen and attempted to abduct the goddess Persephone. However, Theseus primarily gained fame as the heroic founder and defender of Athens. Perhaps the most famous myth involving Theseus is the story in which he kills the Minotaur, a legendary hybrid creature with the torso of a man and the head of a bull. The story of Theseus and the Minotaur also involves a relationship with a woman. In order to kill

the Minotaur, Theseus has to find his way to the center of a labyrinth and back out again. He accomplishes this with the help of Ariadne, who gives him a ball of thread to mark his path in and out of the labyrinth. After escaping the labyrinth Theseus promises to marry Ariadne, but ends up abandoning her.

Hermia

Hermia is one of the strongest female characters in the play. She passionately rejects male authority figures in order to make a powerful claim for her own "sovereignty" in the realm of love. Hermia's strength is most evident in the opening scene, where she faces off with her father, Egeus, in front of Duke Theseus. In the face of these men's patriarchal attitudes, Hermia handles herself with poise and unflinching directness. For example, she responds to Theseus's demand for obedience with these uncompromising words: "So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord, / Ere I will yield my virgin patent up / Unto his Lordship" (I.i.). Theseus outlines harsh consequences if Hermia persists in disobeying her father's authority. Hermia faces a difficult choice: she must either marry Demetrius, or else give up all freedom and become a nun. In order to avoid the awful choice presented to her, Hermia decides to pursue true love by fleeing Athens with Lysander. Hermia's flight represents her greatest act of defiance against the patriarchal order.

Despite Hermia's powerful demonstration of autonomy, the chaos that ensues in the forest wears Hermia down. Once Lysander is charmed by Puck and directs his affections toward Helena, Hermia quickly succumbs to anger. In Act III she takes her frustration out on Helena, calling her oldest friend names and saying cruel things. By the middle of the play Hermia no longer seems a paragon of female autonomy. Her animosity fades once morning comes and order is restored; with Lysander at Hermia's side once again, and with Demetrius at Helena's side, all quarrels cease. Hermia admits in Act IV that she still feels the residue of the night's confusion, but she shows no further sign of emotional disturbance. Intriguingly, given her prominent role in the plays first four acts, Hermia has no lines in Act V. Despite being present for the craftsmen's performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, she effectively disappears from the play. Although there are ultimately no major consequences for Hermia's defiance earlier in the play, her disappearance may indicate a different kind of punishment: a silencing of her impassioned voice.

Julius Caesar

Summary

When the play opens, Julius Caesar has just returned to Rome after defeating the sons of Pompey in battle. Before we go any further, let's pause for a brief Roman history lesson. Pompey (a.k.a. "Pompey the Great") was a member of the "first triumvirate," and he and Caesar used to share power over Rome. Then Caesar and Pompey got into a big fight. Pompey lost. When he tried to run away to Egypt in 48 B.C., he was assassinated. But Caesar still had a problem: Pompey's sons were determined to avenge their father's death and overthrow Caesar. So Caesar tracked down Pompey's sons in Spain and stomped them out at the Battle of Munda in 45 B.C. Now back to the play.

As Caesar parades through the streets of Rome like a rock star, the higher-ups in Rome are nervous about his growing power and his popularity with the commoners, who have abandoned their work to celebrate Caesar's triumphant return. Caesar seems headed toward absolute power, which is a big no-no in the Roman Republic.

Meanwhile, the festival of the Lupercal (a big party where people run around in goatskin g-strings in the middle of February) is in full swing. Caesar is chilling at the festival with his entourage when a soothsayer runs up and says "beware the Ides of March" (meaning, "hey, watch your back on March 15"). Caesar looks at the soothsayer and is all "whatever man."

While Caesar parties with his fans, Brutus and Cassius huddle together and talk trash about him. Cassius is all bent out of shape because he thinks Caesar is running around acting like a king. Without coming right out and saying so directly, Cassius (who has been plotting against Caesar with a group of conspirators) suggests that maybe Brutus should lead Rome. Brutus says he gets what Cassius is saying, but he is also good friends with Caesar, so he needs a little time to think about things before he makes any decisions. (Psst. If you read the play closely, there's some evidence that Brutus has *already* been thinking about getting rid of Caesar, because he confesses that he's been "at war" with himself, meaning something's been bothering him.)

Brutus and Cassius run into Casca, a conspirator, who reports that Antony just offered Caesar the crown three times. Casca is mad, because each time Caesar pretended he didn't want the crown, which made the crowd of plebeians (common folk) love him even more. Not only that, but Caesar acted like a total drama queen and fainted (or pretended to) the third time Antony offered him the crown. This made the "stinking" crowd go nuts.

A month passes, which means we're approaching the "Ides of March." (Cue the ominous music.) Casca and Cicero are running around in a violent thunderstorm and comment on all the crazy stuff that's been happening in Rome lately: a lion was roaming around and a bunch of men in flames were spotted walking around the streets. Cassius, who interprets these omens to mean that Caesar must be taken down, continues to plot against Caesar. He sends someone to plant fake letters from Roman commoners urging Brutus to eliminate Caesar, and attends a meeting that night to plot Caesar's death.

Meanwhile, Brutus has decided to go ahead and kill his friend Caesar because the man *might* become a complete tyrant if he gains more power. Brutus reasons that, even though he and Caesar are BFFs, killing Caesar is the only way to save the Roman Republic. (Is he right? We don't know for sure, but Shakespeare definitely wants us to think about this.) Brutus finally meets with all the conspirators, and they hatch a plan: they'll arrange to bring Caesar to the Capitol so they can hack him into a million little pieces.

Meanwhile, Caesar has had a rough night, complete with a crying wife (Calphurnia) who wants Caesar to stay at home because she's had a bad dream and fears something awful is about to happen to him. But Caesar ultimately decides to go to the Capitol, because Decius (one of the conspirators!) steps in and says something like, "Oh, hey, when Calphurnia dreamed that you were a statue full of holes and spouting blood, that just meant that you're going to be the greatest leader Rome has ever seen." Caesar is all, "Yeah, I think you're right." Decius promises that Caesar's going to be crowned king that day. Caesar goes skipping off to the Senate. On the way to the Capitol, an old man tries to give Caesar a letter warning him about the assassination plot, but Caesar blows him off.

At the Capitol, Caesar stands around bragging about how awesome he is. Just as he's making a big speech about how he's the brightest star in the sky, Cassius, Brutus, and the other plotters surround him and stab him to death – 33 times, just to be sure. Before falling, Caesar looks up and says "Et tu, Brute?" Translation: "Even you, Brutus? What happened to us being best buds forever?"

The conspirators wash their hands in Caesar's blood (hmm...seems like Calphurnia's dream was pretty accurate after all) so they can walk the streets and calmly tell everyone that Rome is free of tyranny. The idea is that they'll seem more convincing about their plans for a new dawn of peace if they're dripping with Caesar's fresh blood. Surprisingly, instead of hailing

Brutus and Cassius as saviors, the people of Rome run around declaring that it's Doomsday. The situation is not going according to plan.

Things really go awry when Antony shows up to weep over Caesar's body. While clearly distraught, he promises not to blame the conspirators as long as he's allowed to speak at the funeral in praise of Caesar's virtues. Of course, we hear in an aside that Antony plans mayhem and murder, so we're not surprised when he gets to the funeral pulpit and urges the people of Rome to riot against Julius Caesar's murderers. (An "aside," by the way, is when a character says something to the audience that no other characters on stage can hear.)

Meanwhile, Brutus and Cassius have fled and chaos has ensued. Even politically unimportant folks like poets are being killed on the street. Antony has met up with Lepidus and Caesar's adopted son, Octavius. Together they'll form the new triumvirate to lead Rome and battle against Cassius and Brutus.

Meanwhile, Cassius and Brutus get into a big argument at their first meeting after the funeral. Cassius has been accepting bribes on the side, which compromises their credibility. (Remember, the only reason Brutus agreed to join the conspiracy was that he believed killing Caesar was for the greater good, not for any self-serving reason. At least, that's what Brutus says.) Still, they agree to march and meet the enemy (Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus) at Philippi, despite a visit from Caesar's ghost to Brutus to say he'll be at Philippi too. It's going to be like a family reunion, except this one will mostly end in death. Everyone has steeled himself for this possibility, and Cassius and Brutus implicitly agree to pull a *Romeo and Juliet* (kill themselves) in case anything goes wrong in the battle.

On the battlefield the two enemy factions exchange some rough words, and Brutus claims he's not a traitor. Fighting ensues, and Cassius and Brutus set up on different parts of the field. Brutus is having some success in overtaking Octavius' army, but Cassius' guys are held fast by Antony's, so they're at a stalemate.

Then Cassius jumps the gun and kills himself over a misunderstanding: he thought his friend Titinius had been overtaken by enemy hordes, when it was really only Brutus' friends trying to hand a crown to Titinius so he could give it to Cassius. Titinius finds Cassius' body and kills himself too, so when Brutus arrives, his buddies are already dead. Then Brutus decides to kill himself. He gets his old friend Strato to hold his sword while he runs at it. As he dies, he says

he didn't kill Caesar with half so strong a will as he kills himself now, so we know he dies willingly.

Antony and Octavius know they've won even before they arrive to find Brutus' body. Antony gives a nice speech over the body in his usual style, saying Brutus was the noblest Roman ever and the only one of the conspirators who killed Caesar for Rome's good and not out of envy. Finally, Octavius agrees that Brutus's body can stay in his tent for the night, befitting a dead soldier, and they won't even have to share a bunk, as Octavius and his friends will be out celebrating all the death and victory.

Act 1, Scene 1

The play opens on a crowded and noisy street in Rome as Julius Caesar returns from battle, where he stomped Pompey's sons into the ground. Pompey is a guy who used to rule Rome with Caesar (they were called "tribunes"). After disagreeing with Caesar about how Rome should be run, Pompey was defeated in battle and assassinated. Just to be sure that Pompey's family and supporters couldn't come after him, Caesar chased Pompey's sons to Spain and defeated them in battle, too. Boo-yah. Murellus and Flavius, Roman tribunes who are friends of Brutus and Cassius, come upon a group of common people running about the street in their Sunday best when they should be working. The pair asks about the commoners' professions and what they're up to and finds out that they're on the way to celebrate and honor Julius Caesar. Murellus and Flavius point out that rather than celebrate this victory, the people should get on their knees and pray against whatever evil will come to them because of their ingratitude. Pompey was once their leader, after all, and they all used to gather outside to watch his chariot go by. And now that Caesar has defeated Pompey's sons, it's like they've totally forgotten that.

Before parting ways, Murellus and Flavius disperse the crowd and remove the party favors the people have left around Caesar's statue. They hope this will slow Caesar's row a little bit as he prepares to overthrow the republic and make himself king. If they can keep him from getting too full of himself, perhaps they can prevent him from becoming a tyrant.

Act 1, Scene 2

Caesar, Brutus, their wives, and all sorts of other folks are gathered in a public place. They're ready to celebrate the feast of the Lupercal, an annual party which involves a bunch of Romans dressed in leather loincloths running around the city lashing whoever they find with a goatskin whip. Caesar's friend Antony will be running in the festival this year, and Caesar tells

Antony not to forget to "touch Calphurnia." She is Caesar's wife, and the whip is supposed to cure her "barrenness." (Before we forget, this is the same "Antony" who shows up later in Shakespeare's steamy play *Antony and Cleopatra*.) After broadcasting his wife's business in the street, Caesar hears a soothsayer (a prophet or fortuneteller) call out to him in the crowd. Caesar now hears the famous warning to "beware the Ides of March," but he ignores it.

Brutus and Cassius meet and talk while everyone else moves on to the next event. Cassius says his good friend Brutus hasn't seemed very friendly recently. Brutus reassures Cassius that "it's not you, it's me," claiming that he's been preoccupied with some thoughts that he'd rather keep to himself. Cassius then starts to suggest things that Brutus' own humbleness won't let him acknowledge. Cassius hints that Brutus has a reputation for being a really honorable guy, and that everybody agrees about this except Caesar. As Brutus begins to catch the whiff of treachery in Cassius' talk, Cassius assures Brutus he's being serious about the whole "noble" thing and not just flattering him. Without saying so, Cassius suggests that a lot of respected Romans think it would be really nice if someone like Brutus led Rome, even though it would mean "disposing" of Caesar.

Their conversation is interrupted by shouts, and Brutus ends by pointing out that he loves Caesar but hopes the Roman people haven't crowned him king. (Remember, they live in a republic, which has no place for monarchs.)

Brutus adds that he loves honor more than he fears death, which spurs Cassius to continue suggesting they do something to stop Caesar. Cassius harps on the fact that Caesar isn't any better than them, so they have no reason to be his subjects. In fact, Cassius says, Caesar is a gutless wonder. Cassius tells a story of how Caesar challenged him to a race on the Tiber River, but Caesar got so tired that Cassius had to rescue him from drowning. Cassius describes how Caesar became sick in Spain, had a seizure, and whimpered. Cassius is clearly implying that Caesar is weak and not fit to be a king. There's some more shouting that seems to imply that the people are the crowning Caesar, which helps Cassius' cause. Cassius drives his point home: Brutus is just as good as Caesar, and they would be cowards if they didn't do something to stop Caesar becoming the "first man" of Rome. Cassius then appeals to Brutus' family history. Apparently one of Brutus' ancestors helped establish the Roman Republic by fighting the tyrant Tarquin. Cassius is basically calling for Brutus to uphold the family name. Brutus promises he's not suspicious of Cassius' motives or flattery but asks him to lay off trying to get him to kill

Caesar for a little bit. Brutus will think about whatever Cassius has to say, and he gives Cassius hope with the final thought that he'd "rather be a villager" than call himself "a son of Rome" if things continue on the current path (meaning, if Rome ceases to be a republic). Which would be fine, except Brutus has no interest in being a villager. When Caesar returns, Brutus notices he and the rest of his crew look pretty unhappy. Caesar spots Cassius giving him the stink eye and calls out instructions to Antony: he'd like to be surrounded with fat, happy men, because the "lean and hungry look" of Cassius strikes him as dangerous. Antony assures Caesar that Cassius is noble and not dangerous. Caesar continues to say mean things about Cassius: that he doesn't like music, or smiling, or people who are better than him. (Who is this guy, the Grinch?) Obviously, Caesar has figured out that he should not trust Cassius.

Just then Brutus and Cassius confer with Casca, who has been at the festivities with Caesar. Brutus asks what has put Caesar in such a bad mood. Casca tells him that the crowd was gathered to watch Caesar receive a (symbolic) crown. Antony offered Caesar the crown three times, Caesar refused it all three times, and three times the crowd cheered wildly (presumably because of the humility of their fearless leader). Casca thinks the crowd was stupid for not noticing how hard it was for Caesar to resist taking the crown. Each time Caesar refused it a little less wholeheartedly. Apparently the whole thing was so upsetting that it prompted one of Caesar's epileptic seizures in the middle of the marketplace. Caesar had fallen down and started foaming at the mouth, unable to speak. Even weirder, before Caesar had the seizure, he stood up before the crowd and opened his jacket, offering the crowd his throat to cut. When he came to, he apologized for any weird behavior, blaming it on his sickness, and everyone happily forgave him. Casca is convinced the people would've forgiven him for stabbing their mothers, as they are foolish sheep.

Brutus asks if Cicero, the great orator, had anything to say about this. Casca says Cicero did speak, but Casca couldn't understand it because he was speaking Greek. (Casca, not an orator himself, doesn't know Greek.) Hence the phrase, "It's all Greek to me." (See, you're smarter every day.) Casca also notes that Murellus and Flavius (remember them from Scene 1?) have been punished. They've lost their positions after their little adventure stripping the people's ornaments off of Caesar's statues. Finally, Casca agrees to have dinner at Cassius' place sometime, though he's pretty rude about it.

After Brutus and Cassius part ways, Cassius thinks he'll convince Brutus to get on the conspiratorial bandwagon eventually, even though the man is noble, or honorable. Cassius is convinced that Caesar treats Brutus with favoritism, making it harder for Brutus to rebel against him.

Still, Cassius thinks he'll sway Brutus by faking some letters and throwing them through his window at night. The letters will supposedly be from citizens praising Brutus, and, between the lines, Cassius will suggest that Caesar is too ambitious and should be put down by someone like Brutus. Cassius is certain he can shake Brutus' loyalty to Caesar.

Act 1, Scene 3

Cicero runs into Casca on the street that night. Casca's a little shaken up. Though he's seen his fair share of bad nights, he says the sky dropping hot fire is definitely a first. Casca thinks maybe there's a civil war in heaven, or maybe the gods are raining down fury because the world has displeased them. This would all be crazy talk except that Casca's seen worse than bad weather tonight. A slave boy's hand was lit on fire by a torch, and yet it didn't burn. Then there was a surly lion at the Capitol. Also a bunch of women were terrified by a vision they swore they saw of men walking the streets covered in flames. Casca reports the strangest thing of all: a nighttime bird was in the market, during the daytime! Since it doesn't get any crazier than that, it's clear all these things are bad omens. (Seriously, a nighttime bird.)

Cicero thinks they should hold off on crazy interpretations of the flaming men, lions, and various insomniac birds. He says people basically interpret things to mean whatever they want them to mean. After confirming that Caesar will be at the Capitol tomorrow, Cicero leaves. Casca then runs into Cassius, who has been presenting himself to the heavens to be struck by lightning. A tad concerned by this behavior, Casca asks Cassius if maybe he should have trembled at the gods' warning instead of going out for a lightning tan. Cassius thinks Casca is an idiot. Obviously the heavens are making the world disco-fabulous to signal their serious displeasure with the state of affairs in Rome, where a certain someone, though he is no better than Cassius, has grown too powerful for his own good. Casca, dumb as socks, asks whether Cassius is talking about Julius Caesar. A true politician, Cassius does the old "maybe, maybe not." Either way, Casca says the Romans are acting like cowards by doing nothing to stop the tyranny, which will only get worse. Casca has heard that tomorrow the senators will crown Caesar king, and that he plans to wear his crown everywhere but Italy. Cassius points out where

he'll wear his dagger, and basically blabs his plan to murder Caesar.The thunder stops (drama!), and Cassius contends that Caesar is only a tyrant because people are stupid and beg to be taken advantage of.

Cassius pretends to be surprised about revealing so much in front of Casca, who he suggests might *like* being Caesar's stupidstooge. Casca takes the bait and pledges not to tattle. More important, he pledges to join in on the conspiracy to kill Caesar. Conveniently, there's a meeting of all the conspirators starting right now at the old theater, Pompey's Porch. They're waiting for Cassius. Cinna, another conspirator, happens to be on his way to that same secret meeting, and they all stop for a chat. Cinna mentions it would be really nice if Brutus was also interested in killing his friend, Caesar. To further this goal, Cassius sends Cinna on an errand to plant some letters Cassius has written in various places where Brutus will find them. Cassius has impersonated other Romans in the letters, all of which praise Brutus and suggest that somebody should really off Caesar for Rome's sake.

Cassius confides to Casca that they'll have Brutus on their side in no time. Casca is glad, as Brutus is well regarded and will make all the nasty things they do seem virtuous and worthy. Cassius agrees they really do need Brutus, and by morning they'll have confirmation on whether or not he'll join them.

Act 2, Scene 1

Brutus contemplates the conspiracy in his garden late into the night. He has reached the conclusion that Julius Caesar must die. Brutus can't justify Caesar's death by any personal acts of Caesar's; Caesar has just got to go for the public good. Brutus reasons that, although Caesar isn't bad now, getting a crown would change his nature. Brutus admits he's seen no *evidence* that ambition would change Caesar, but he reckons it isn't worth taking the chance. Thus Brutus decides action must be taken now, as Caesar is like a serpent's egg—dangerous once hatched. While doing all this thinking, Brutus sends his servant Lucius to light a candle in his room. Lucius returns with a letter he's found (Cassius's invention). The letter says Brutus should recognize his own noble nature and do something before Rome falls to the tyranny of a monarch. Brutus is taken in and promises that, for Rome's sake, he won't fail.

Lucius then confirms that tomorrow is indeed the Ides of March (March 15th, the fateful day Caesar was warned about). After this healthy bit of foreshadowing for the audience, Brutus admits he's been kept up every night since Cassius planted the fear of tyranny in his mind.

The group of conspirators then shows up at Brutus' door to try to win Brutus over to their cause. They're all disguised and looking shady. Cassius introduces all the conspirators, and Brutus says they are all welcome in his home. As Cassius takes Brutus aside to chat, the others discuss exactly where the sun will rise on the horizon. Brutus steps forward and asks to hold everyone's hand for the Roman version of Kumbaya over their murdering plan. Cassius thinks he wants everyone to swear an oath to their cause, but Brutus opposes that idea violently. They are Romans, and Romans don't do oaths—they're just true to their word, even if that word is murder.

Then they all have a little debate about whether to include Cicero, but it's decided he'd never be a follower and shouldn't be invited to join Team Secret Conspiracy. It's important here to note that the minor conspirators are easily swayed one direction or another regarding whether Cicero should be asked to join, at first thinking he'd be great and then insisting he's totally unfit. They're easily persuaded. Cassius then suggests they also kill Antony (Caesar's young friend) while they're at it. Brutus disagrees, thinking that would be overkill. (Get it? *Ugh. Sorry.*) He talks about how they should murder Caesar nobly, carving him up like a dish for the gods, not like a "carcass fit for hounds." The conspirators should think of the murder as an act of sacrifice for the state and not as a bloodbath.

Brutus also contends that because Antony is like Caesar's arm, once they kill Caesar, Antony will be powerless. An arm without a head can do nothing, and Brutus is sure they have nothing to fear from Caesar's friend. Trebonius, another conspiratorial lackey, suggests that Antony will be sad after the murder but will eventually laugh about the whole thing...which kind of makes us wonder about Trebonius's emotional IQ. The clock strikes 3 (actually, ancient Rome had no clocks, but Shakespeare was more concerned with drama than historical accuracy), and they agree to part. Before they do, Cassius points out that Caesar has been cautious lately because of all the bad omens floating about. Cassius further worries that Caesar's prophets might convince him to take a sick day from the Capitol. Decius tells everyone not to worry; he'll show up at Caesar's place in the morning to make sure Caesar goes the Capitol. He can sway Caesar easily with fairy-tale interpretations of whatever worries Caesar. In fact, *everyone* will meet at Caesar's to make sure he shows up at the Capitol for the murder. It's a team effort. Cassius prompts them to be "good Romans" and keep their word. Brutus tells them to make sure they don't look like suspicious murderers. After everyone leaves Brutus, his wife, Portia, whom he left in bed, shows up to have a little husband-wife chat. The other night Brutus gave her a mean

look at dinner and dismissed her when she wanted to talk about what was bothering him. (Apparently the plan to murder Caesar didn't make it into pillow talk.) Portia pleads with him to tell her what's making him so unhappy.

Brutus claims he's just a bit sick, and Portia says that pacing about at all hours of the night is surely not the best cure. She points out it must be a sickness of the mind that plagues him. She says she has a right to know who the masked men who were just at their house in the middle of the night were. Portia claims she does more than simply serve Brutus, and she asks that he confide in her as a beloved wife rather than ignore her like a kept woman. Though she knows she's a woman, she's his wife and the daughter of noble Cato, and she can keep a secret, no matter what it is. Brutus then asks the gods to make him worthy of such a noble wife. Just then, there's a knock at the door. Brutus sends Portia back to bed, promising to tell her everything later. Caius Ligarius, a guy who one of the conspirators wanted to bring onto the team, has shown up. Although he's sick, he says he's filled with spirit after hearing of the killing plan. The two walk and talk about the murder afoot.

Act 2, Scene 2

Caesar's also up late, pacing around in his nightgown, with lightning and thunder as the backdrop. His wife Calphurnia has cried out "Help, ho! They murder Caesar" three times in her sleep, which he's taken as a bad sign. Caesar tells a servant to order the priests to make a sacrifice and see if they can rustle up a good omen. The now-awake Calphurnia approaches Caesar and demands that he not leave the house that day. Caesar of course refuses her. He claims that danger can't look him in the eye. Still, Calphurnia is pretty dead-set against Caesar leaving. She's not a superstitious lady, but she's seen lions walking around, the dead rising from their graves, and warriors in the sky. Plus, she's dreamt of the Capitol covered in blood. All of this makes her worry. Caesar points out that the gods will get their way, no matter what he does. Here he delivers the famous line, "Cowards die many times before their deaths; the Valiant never taste of death, but once." He sees no reason to fear death, since death comes to everyone in the end. Caesar then gets word that the sacrifice didn't go so well: the beast they killed didn't have a heart! Caesar—maybe arrogant, maybe brave—takes this to mean that he would have no heart (or courage) if he stayed home today. He then claims he's more dangerous than danger itself. Calphurnia pleads with Caesar to stay home. If anyone asks, he can say it's his wife that kept him home so he won't look like a coward for not showing up at the Capitol. He doesn't agree until

she's gotten down on her knees. He decides to humor her and have Antony cover for him with some excuse about feeling ill. It's about morning now, and Decius shows up as promised to take Caesar to the Capitol. Caesar tells him he won't be going, and Calphurnia adds that Decius should tell the Senate that Caesar is sick. Caesar points out that he's conquered nations and is not worried about some old senators knowing why he had to stay home.

Caesar tells Decius to just tell the Senate he won't come—they don't deserve any more of an explanation than that. Still, Caesar says, because he loves Decius, he'll tell him the real reason he's staying home. He confides in Decius that Calphurnia had a dream in which Caesar's statue poured blood from a hundred spouts, like a fountain, and that happy Romans surrounded the statue bathing their hands in the blood. Decius is a quick thinker, and he knows he's got to get Caesar to the Capitol to kill him. So he deliberately misinterprets the dream. He says that of course Caesar had blood spilling all over happy Romans. Decius claims the dream means Rome will be revived by Caesar's blood, and everybody will want a little bit of that wonderful infusion.

To end all discussion on the topic, Decius offers Caesar the cherry on top: today the Senate is planning on crowning Caesar king, and if he doesn't show up they might change their minds. They'll make fun of him for being a scaredy-cat and staying home because of his wife's dreams. Decius claims he only says these things out of love. Caesar takes the bait, calls Calphurnia foolish, and heads off with Decius to the Capitol.

It's 8 in the morning by this time, and all the other conspirators have gathered at Caesar's house to make small talk as promised. Caesar invites them all to have a friendly morning drink with him before they go, and Brutus privately laments that Caesar can't tell that his supposed friends are his soon-to-be murderers.

Act 2, Scene 3

Artemidorius, a soothsayer, reads aloud (to himself) a note that he's written to Caesar. In the note, he lists all the conspirators that Caesar should stay away from and warns of their plot. Artemidorius plans to pass the note to Caesar as he walks to the Capitol. He hopes the note will save Caesar's life.

Act 2 Scene 4

Portia, Brutus' wife, is a mess. She tells Lucius, the servant, to run to the Capitol, then yells at him for not leaving, even though she hasn't yet given him any instruction on what to do when he gets there. Portia is worried, but she doesn't even know what Lucius should look for.

Brutus didn't look well when he left the house that morning, and she decides Lucius should look after her husband and see what Caesar is up to and whom he's surrounded by. Though she hasn't heard the murder plan directly from Brutus' mouth, it's clear she suspects something awful. Portia then starts with a fright, thinking she has heard a noise, though Lucius claims he's heard nothing. A soothsayer (they pop up a lot in ancient Rome) arrives at Brutus' house to tell Portia that Caesar hasn't come to the Capitol yet. The soothsayer hopes to meet him on the way there, with an offer to befriend him.

Portia worries about this and asks whether something is being plotted against Caesar – why does he need more friends? The soothsayer says he hasn't heard of anything, but he fears something will happen.

The soothsayer heads off in hopes of finding a place to speak with Caesar himself and not be crushed by the crowd. Portia grows even more faint. She asks that heaven speed Brutus in his "enterprise." Worrying that Lucius has overheard her, she covers herself with a paltry lie, pretending that the "enterprise" is some small request Brutus has made that Caesar won't grant. She does know something, and she's not saying what. Finally Portia tells Lucius to tell Brutus that she's "merry," and that she'd like Lucius to bring back news of Brutus. She clearly isn't merry, dear reader, and seems to suspect the worst.

Act 3, Scene 1

The crowd of traitorous senators and a bunch of hangers-on surround Julius Caesar just outside the Capitol. Decius, a traitor, offers a "suit" or a request from Trebonius to Caesar while Artemidorius tries to get his attention. After a vague but ominous interaction between Caesar and the soothsayer, Artemidorius pleads with Caesar to read his suit (letter) first, as it's dearest to Caesar. (This note tells Caesar of the plot and names the conspirators.) Caesar, the picture of humility, says that, because he puts the affairs of Rome before his own, he'll read Artemidorius' suit last. Artemidorius presses him, and Caesar brushes him off: "What, is the fellow mad?"

Before Caesar has time to consider that he's committed the biggest mistake of his life, he is hustled to the Capitol by Cassius. Cassius says Caesar shouldn't just give audience to every Tom, Dick, and Roman in the street—he needs to hurry to the Capitol. As Caesar enters the Capitol, Senator Popilius wishes Cassius good luck in "today's enterprise."Naturally, the conspirators flip out a little bit – Popilius, who is now chatting up Caesar, seems to know about the plot. Brutus, calm and collected, assures everyone that they're just scaring themselves.

Popilius smiles with Caesar, who looks unconcerned, so he clearly hasn't just heard about the murder plot. Meanwhile, Trebonius is busy luring Antony away, and the plan is falling into place. Metellus will come up close to Caesar, pretending to have some request, and everyone will gather around him to fall into killing position. Cinna says Casca will strike first. The team breaks and hustles as Caesar calls the Senate to order. Metellus is the first to come before Caesar, and he begins to kneel, but Caesar cuts him off. Pretentiously referring to himself in the third person, Caesar says such stooping might appeal to lesser men, but it won't sway him. Caesar declares that Metellus's brother (whom Metellus is making a request on behalf of) will remain banished. Further, no amount of begging and pleading will shake the great Caesar, it only makes him scorn the beggar.

As Metellus is making his plea for his brother Publius, Brutus joins in and kisses Caesar's hand, which totally surprises Caesar. Cassius falls to Caesar's feet. As Caesar is surrounded, he declares he definitely won't change the law to accommodate Publius. He declares himself to be "as constant as the northern star." While every man might be a fiery star, all the stars move except the northern one. Caesar identifies with that star, so he's not about to change his mind.

The conspirators press on, and Caesar demands that they go away, saying that their pleading is as useless as trying to lift up Olympus, mountain of the gods.After all, he hasn't even been swayed by his best buddy, Brutus, kneeling before him. Come on, guys! Give it up. Suddenly Casca rises to stabs Caesar. Brutus stabs him too. Caesar's last words are some of literature's most famous: "Et tu, Brute? [You too, Brutus?] – Then fall, Caesar!" It seems Caesar is willing to fall if one of his most noble friends, Brutus, would betray him. This is moving, even after the whole, "I'm the most special star in the whole galaxy" speech.

Immediately after Caesar falls, Cinna proclaims, "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" and tells everybody to run and spread the message in the streets. Brutus realizes that all the other folks standing around in the Capitol watching Caesar bleed might be a bit shocked. He tells them to stay and relax, as "ambition's debt is paid," meaning Caesar's death is the cost and consequence of Caesar's ambition. Casca directs Brutus and Cassius to the pulpit, probably to address the crowd, when Brutus notices he can't find Publius. Cinna points out that Publius is looking shocked by the great mutiny, and Metellus urges the conspirators to stand together in case Caesar's friends in the Capitol want to start a fight. Brutus then challenges everyone to come back to their senses. No one wants to hurt anybody, and he hopes no one wants to hurt them.

Brutus, maybe sensing that the plan to become heroes for killing Caesar has not come to pass, adds that only the men who've done this deed will bear its consequences. Trebonius enters to confirm the worst: Antony has run to his house, shocked by the act, and people are shrieking in the street like it's Doomsday. Brutus then basically says: "We all know we'll die eventually, and life is just the process of waiting for the days to pass before it happens." (Maybe Brutus should get a hobby, or a support group.) Cassius and Brutus go on to suggest that, as Caesar's friends, they've done him a favor by shortening the period of time he would've spent worrying about death. Interesting logic. Weirdly, Cassius then calls everyone to bathe their hands up to their elbows in Caesar's blood and to cover their swords with it, so they can walk out into the streets and the marketplace declaring peace, freedom, and liberty in the land. (This is notably reminiscent of Calphurnia's dream.) Cassius says he's sure this bloodbath will go down in history as a noble act, and everyone agrees that Brutus should lead the procession into the street, as he has the boldest and best heart in Rome. Just then, Antony's servant enters, causing the marching band of merry, bloody men to take pause. Antony has sent word with his servant to say Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest, and, further, that while Antony loves Brutus and honors him, Antony also feared, loved, and honored Caesar. Antony thus pledges to love Brutus if he can get some assurance that it's safe to come around for a visit sometime and hear the story of why Brutus thought it was okay to kill their leader. Regardless, he'll be faithful to Brutus from now on. Brutus tells Antony's servant that his master will be safe if he comes to the Capitol. Brutus is sure glad they can all be friends again.

Cassius, however, is still suspicious of Antony, and as the resident expert in treachery, he's usually right about spotting it in others. Antony shows up and makes a great show over Caesar's body, weeping and wailing. He worries aloud about who else will be killed over some secret grudge the conspirators might hold. Antony then pleas with the conspirators to kill him right now if they want him dead, as to die by swords still fresh with Caesar's blood would be the greatest death ever, hands down. Brutus then pleads with Antony that, though the conspirators' hands are bloody, their hearts are pitiful. After all, someone needed to do this terrible deed for Rome, to drive out fire with fire. Brutus promises Antony he will only met with love. Brutus promises to soon explain the reason they've killed Caesar. Right now, though, they've got to go out and quiet the public, which is a bit frightened of the men who stopped for a quick dip in Caesar's blood. Antony says he has no doubt that Brutus probably had some very good reason to

kill Caesar, and he shakes bloody hands with the conspirators all around. He then looks on Caesar's corpse and begins a long-winded speech in praise of Caesar, whom he has betrayed by becoming loyal to his murderers. Cassius interrupts this dramatic posturing and flat-out asks whether Antony is with them or against them. Antony says he was committed to the conspirators, but then he noticed Caesar's corpse again (still lying on the ground at their feet), and the plan to be down with the murderers suddenly looked a little less savory. Still, Antony will remain their friend if they can provide some reason to believe Caesar was dangerous. Brutus promises they can and must. Antony's only other little request is that he be allowed to take the body to the marketplace and to speak at Caesar's funeral. Brutus, ever trusting, readily gives in to Antony's request, but Cassius senses foul play and pulls Brutus aside. Cassius warns Brutus to bar Antony from speaking at Caesar's funeral, as he's likely to say things that will incite the people against the conspirators. Brutus will solve this problem by going to the pulpit first and explaining in a calm and rational manner his reasons for killing Caesar. (Rationality always goes over well with angry mobs, right?) Brutus will explain that the conspirators have given Antony permission to speak (meaning he's not an adversary), and that Caesar will have all the lawful burial ceremonies. Brutus is certain this will win them good PR all around. Just to make sure, Brutus makes Antony promise not to say anything inflammatory at Caesar's funeral. Instead of blaming the killers, he should speak of Caesar's virtue by focusing more on Caesar's life than his death.

Antony promises and is left alone to give a little soliloquy, in which he reveals that he fully intends to incite the crowd to bloody murder against the conspirators. In fact, there'll be so much blood and destruction that Caesar might show up from hell with the goddess of discord at his side, and mothers will smile to see their infants torn limb from limb. (Ew.) Well, the man has a plan. Just then a servant arrives with the news that Octavius is on his way. Octavius is Julius Caesar's adopted son and heir, and Caesar had recently sent him a letter asking him to come to Rome, and he is now just seven leagues away. Antony tells the servant to hold Octavius where he is, as it's not safe for him in the city yet. He says Octavius should come after Antony has had a chance to give his speech and kick-start the mob rioting. The servant lends Antony a hand to carry Caesar's body out of the Capitol.

Act 3, Scene 2

Brutus and Cassius hit the streets, surrounded by crowds of common folks. So many people are clamoring to hear them that Cassius takes one group off while the others stay to listen

to Brutus speak. Brutus ascends to the pulpit and the crowd falls silent. He delivers an earnest, honest, and simple speech.

First, he says that the people should trust his honor, which they know to be true. He asks if anyone can say they loved Caesar more than he did. No one can.

Brutus says he rose against Caesar not because he didn't love him, but because he loved Rome more. If Caesar were still living, they'd all be slaves. While Caesar was a lot of good things, he had to die for his ambition. To have let him live would be to submit to slavery, and that's downright un-Roman. Brutus asks whether anyone doesn't love Rome and freedom, and of course the answer is no. So obviously Caesar had to die.

Everybody is buying this, but then Antony shows up with Caesar's body. Brutus introduces Antony to the crowd and closes his speech by restating that he slew his best friend for Rome's sake and that he will turn the same dagger on himself if his country ever needs his death. (Sounds like foreshadowing.) Everyone is so happy with Brutus that there are some calls to give him a statue among his ancestors and to make him the new Caesar. (These folks are really missing the democratic message of his speech.) Brutus politely dismisses himself and asks everyone to stay and listen to Antony's speech. The crowd is firmly behind Brutus, and they shout out that Caesar was a tyrant and Brutus has done them all a favor. Then Antony takes over, with the famous speech beginning: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones; so let it be with Caesar."

The crowd is as good as sold there, but Antony manages to stealthily bring it around to the opinion that Caesar has been killed wrongfully. He begins by insisting that Brutus and the other murderers are honorable, but then proceeds to slowly undermine that statement by pointing out how their chief gripe against Caesar, his ambition, could not be true. Antony gives examples of how Caesar loved his people, bringing in money to the country, weeping with the poor, and even refusing the crown three times. Clearly, he suggests, Caesar wasn't ambitious at all, but was devoted and loving to his citizens. Antony uses a little reverse psychology on the crowd, getting them to clamor to hear Caesar's will by insisting that they shouldn't hear it. He descends to read them the private document but gets sidetracked by mourning over Caesar's body. Again Antony insists Brutus is honorable, but then points out the gash Brutus made in his friend's bloody body.

Antony repeats this pattern over and over, until all are in agreement to burn, slay, and otherwise do not-so-nice things to Brutus and the other conspirators.

They're so caught up and ready to go a-rioting that they forget about Caesar's will. Antony has to remind them that they wanted to hear it. After the mob gets the news that Caesar left them some nice gardens and 75 drachmas each, they decide to cremate Caesar in the holy place and burn down the traitors' houses with the same fire. (Even the mob has a sense of poetic justice.) As the mob sets off to carry out the chaos and killing, Antony delights that his plan has worked. He then gets the news that Octavius has come to Rome with Lepidus. Both men are waiting for him at Caesar's house. Good fortune is upon them, as they'll be the new triumvirate (the three-man team that ruled Rome).

Act 3, Scene 3

The poet Cinna, who is traveling the streets, gets caught up by the mob. After asking him a few questions, they confuse him with Cinna the conspirator. He tries to explain that they've got the wrong guy, but the mob has no mercy. They decide to tear him to pieces anyway for his bad poetry. As they drag him offstage, they list the names of the conspirators whose houses they're off to pillage and burn.

Act 4, Scene 1

Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus are gathered with a checklist of the men they plan to murder for conspiracy. Lepidus agrees that his brother can be killed as long as Antony agrees for his nephew to be killed. Lepidus is sent to collect Caesar's will, to see if they can divert some of his money their way.

As soon as Lepidus has gone, Antony begins to talk trash about him. Antony thinks Lepidus is weak, so it's a shame that he'll be sharing power with Antony and Octavius in the triumvirate. Antony says he only took Lepidus' word about who should die because he's more experienced than Octavius. The plan is to let Lepidus bear the burden of ruling while doing as he's told by the other two. Octavius is more in the pro-Lepidus camp and insists that he's a good solider. Antony replies that his (Antony's) horse is a good soldier too – good at being led and ordered. To them, Lepidus should only be a puppet. They then discuss the fact that Brutus and Cassius are raising an army, which they have to fight by allying their friends and funds.

They go off to sit in council and discuss how they'll fight their enemies and weed out the traitors.

Act 4, Scene 2

Brutus and his friend Lucilius meet Pindarus, servant and friend to Cassius, with Titinius, another mutual buddy. (Wow, that's a lot of "us"es.) Brutus says Cassius, who isn't there yet, has engaged in or overseen some shady business that makes Brutus wish they had never killed Caesar. Still, if Cassius is on his way, that's okay. Lucilius admits, when asked by Brutus, that Cassius wasn't his usual friendly self. To Brutus, it sounds like the friendship is cooling. Cassius' army will stay in Sardis (in what's now Turkey) that night, and the cavalry will arrive with Cassius. Cassius enters and announces that Brutus has done him wrong. Brutus is shocked: how could he wrong someone who's like a brother to him? The two men are about to have a spat, and Brutus suggests it's best to do it privately rather than let the troops know they're fighting. They order their armies to be moved away so they can go to Brutus' tent and argue in private, with Lucilius and Titinius guarding the door.

Act 4, Scene 3

The root of Cassius and Brutus' argument comes out: Brutus has condemned a man, Lucius Pella, for taking bribes from the Sardians. Cassius wrote a letter saying Pella shouldn't be punished, but Brutus ignored it. He accuses Cassius of being dishonorable for suggesting they let bribery slide. Cassius resents being called greedy, but Brutus gets to the heart of the matter: they all killed Caesar for justice's sake, but when they start getting involved in petty robbery, it compromises their honor and calls into question their noble motives for killing Caesar. Cassius and Brutus then argue, and Brutus is all "I don't even know who you are anymore." Brutus tells Cassius to get out of his sight, which doesn't go over well, and the two start threatening each other. Brutus brings up an old problem: he had asked Cassius to send gold to pay his soldiers, but Cassius denied him, which was not cool. Cassius claims he didn't deny Brutus; it must've been some bad messenger's fault. Still, Brutus should be a good friend, Cassius says, and ignore his faults. That's what friends do. Things come to a head when Cassius offers Brutus his blade and naked chest. Cassius points out that Brutus stabbed Caesar out of love, which is more than Cassius is getting from Brutus right now. With the offer of murder on the table, they both realize they're being a bit moody and melodramatic. They agree that Cassius is showing his mother's temper again. From now on they'll be friends and not get angry at each other. As they step out of the tent, they find a poet waiting to tell them they should be friends. It's really nice of the poet to be so concerned. They laugh at him and send him off, then they direct Lucilius and Titinius to

get their armies ready to lodge for the night. Then the big news about what put Brutus in such a bad mood comes out. Portia, Brutus's loving wife, was driven to grief by his flight from Rome and by Antony and Octavius's growing strength. Long story short, she has killed herself by swallowing coals. (Ouch.) After he tells all this to Cassius, Brutus gets some wine and aims to drink the pain away, saying they should speak no more of his dead wife. Messala and Titinius come in, and though Cassius would like to dwell on Portia's death a bit, Brutus is all business.

They've learned that Octavius and Antony have decreed that a hundred senators must die in Rome. Both men are now on their way to Philippi. Brutus says he's only heard the names of seventy senators, and that Cicero is one of them. Messala then pipes up that Cicero is dead, and tries to skirt around the issue of Portia's death with Brutus. Brutus is less hurt than anyone expected him to be. He says Portia had to die only once, and he can bear that death. The talk then turns to beating their enemies at Philippi. Cassius thinks it's better for them to sit tight until Antony and Octavius wear out their own armies with travel. That way Brutus and Cassius' army will still be fresh to fight.

Brutus points out, though, that the enemy army might gather strength as it goes. Because more and more men between Rome and Philippi don't support Brutus and Cassius, they might be willing to join Antony and Octavius' forces. Brutus thinks his and Cassius' army is at its peak right now. They'll only get weaker, so it's better to act right away. They all agree to go to Philippi and meet Antony and Octavius' army. Everyone decides to get a little sleep. They all say their "goodnights" to one another, and Brutus has Lucius call in some soldiers to sleep in his tent just in case he needs them to take messages to Cassius in the night. Brutus is apparently pretty keyed up. He asks Lucius to play him a tune on his instrument, even though Lucius is sleepy.

Lucius plays, but falls asleep mid-song. With everyone else asleep, Brutus picks up his book to read. Just then Caesar's ghost shows up, claiming he is "thy evil spirit, Brutus." Brutus is a bit shaken, and the ghost explains that he'll see him again at Philippi. Brutus is all "see you then, I guess." After the ghost disappears, Brutus wakes the men who've been sleeping in his tent. None of them saw the ghost. Brutus has one of the men tell Cassius to send his army off early in the morning; Brutus' army will follow. It seems Caesar's ghost has only cemented Brutus' willingness to meet his fate, whatever it be.

Act 5, Scene 1

Octavius and Anthony confer on the plains of Philippi. Octavius is surprised to see that Brutus and Cassius' army has come to meet them, especially since Antony thought the enemy would stay put. Antony thinks the enemy is fronting: clearly Brutus and Cassius mean to appear courageous and brave, but Antony can see right through that. Antony and Octavius set up a battle plan and are met by Brutus and Cassius—each with his army behind him—for a pre-battle parley, or negotiation. As Brutus tries to get them to reason (and maybe avoid the fight), Antony and Octavius bait him. They claim Brutus' words are no good when they're accompanied by bad strokes (of the sword). Antony's like, remember that time you cried "Long live! Hail Caesar!" while you stabbed him in the heart? This is a sore point for Brutus.

There's some more back and forth, and folks get testy. Finally Octavius draws his sword and says he won't put it back again until he's dead or Caesar's 33 wounds (not that anybody's counting) are avenged. After more of this taunting, Antony and Octavius challenge Brutus and Cassius to meet them on the battlefield. As Brutus talks with Lucilius privately, Cassius confides in Messala that it's his birthday. Though Cassius claims to be an Epicurean (meaning he doesn't believe in "signs and omens" mumbo jumbo), he's inclined to begin thinking differently after seeing something weird on his way from Sardis: two eagles swooped down from the sky, feeding out of the soldiers' hands. In the morning they were replaced by "ravens, crows, and kites" that spread like a shadow of death over the army. (Not a good sign.) Messala tries to sway Cassius from the bad-omen talk, but Cassius brushes it off, saying he's still ready to face his peril.

Then Brutus and Cassius speak and agree to say goodbye to each other in a way that would be fitting if this were to be their last meeting ever. Cassius asks Brutus what he'll do if things get bad, possibly hinting at suicide. Brutus points out that he condemned his father-in-law, Cato (who had fought on Pompey's side), for killing himself instead of giving himself over to Caesar. He's not sure what he'll do if they're defeated, as he finds suicide to be cowardly, especially if no one's really sure how things might turn out of they stay alive.

Cassius points out that if they lose, Brutus will be dragged through the streets of Rome. Without explicitly saying he's decided to kill himself if they fail, Brutus declares that he'll never be taken to Rome in chains. Unless Brutus plans to catch the next plane to Vegas, we've just seen the great man commit himself to suicide. Brutus and Cassius part nobly, saying that if they never see each other again, this was a good goodbye. Brutus ends on a sort of Darryl Downer note,

saying that although they don't know how, this day will come to an end. This is nice foreshadowing if you like that sort of "death is inevitable" talk.

Act 5, Scene 2

Brutus sends Messala to ride out and instruct the soldiers to bear down on Octavius' side of the enemy's army. That group lacks spirit and might easily fall after a good push.

Act 5, Scene 3

Cassius and Titinius watch the battle from another part of the field. When Cassius' standard-bearer (the guy who carries his battle flag) tried to run away, Cassius killed him and took up the flag himself. Titinius doesn't comment on this behavior but points out that Brutus came down on Octavius's army too early. Though they were initially weaker, Octavius's men now appear to be overtaking Brutus's, and Antony is enclosing Cassius's. The situation is looking pretty dire for Cassius and Brutus. Pindarus comes to Cassius and Titinius with the news that Antony has invaded Cassius's tents. He tries to get Cassius to run away, but Cassius is distracted by a set of fire in the distance. Cassius sends Titinius off on horseback to see whether the troops are friends or enemies. He also sends Pindarus higher up the hill to watch and report on Titinius' progress. Cassius notes to himself that his birthday is a good day to die, his life having come full circle. Cassius is resigned to his fate, but he still fights on. Pindarus reports on Titinius play by play. A horde of horsemen has surrounded Titinius. Now they've overtaken him. And now they're shouting with joy. It looks like the worst has happened. Cassius calls for Pindarus to stop watching. He laments that he's such a coward to have sent his best friend Titinius to his death. Pindarus returns to Cassius' side, and Cassius speaks to him. Cassius reminds Pindarus how he took him prisoner at Parthia and spared his life on the condition that he do whatever Cassius asked him to. Cassius then tells Pindarus how to make himself a free man: he should kill him with the very blade he used to kill Caesar. Pindarus stabs Cassius, who dies declaring that Caesar is avenged by the same sword that killed him. Pindarus, now hovering around Cassius' body, claims that this wasn't the way he wanted to gain his freedom, and that if he had his own will (and hadn't been Cassius' servant), he wouldn't have done it. He declares that he'll run far away so no Roman will ever see (or enslave) him again.

Messala then enters the scene with Titinius (who—surprise!—is not dead), announcing the new state of the battle: they're basically even on both sides. Brutus has overtaken Octavius' forces, while Antony's forces have beaten Cassius' men.The men are stoked to tell Cassius that

all isn't lost, but then they see his dead body, which is in no condition to accept good news. Messala is more Action Jackson than super-sleuth; he goes off unhappily to inform Brutus of Cassius' death. Meanwhile, Titinius is left to find Pindarus. While he looks around, Titinius realizes that Cassius must have misunderstood what had happened on the hilltop. It doesn't matter where Pindarus is, and Titinius doesn't even look for him. Instead, Titinius explains what actually happened in the scene that Cassius killed himself over. Titinius was indeed overtaken, but by friends of Brutus and Cassius on horseback. The shouts Pindarus heard were shouts of joy for Cassius' side. They overtook Titinius to put a wreath of victory on his head, which Brutus then wanted the rider to give to Cassius. Titinius still has the doomed crown, which, in a dramatic moment, he places on dead Cassius' head.

Titinius then cries, "By your leave, gods! – this is a Roman's part," and proceeds to stab himself with Cassius' sword. Titinius dies beside his friend. Messala and Brutus arrive just in time to find that Titinius has played Ultimate Mourning and killed himself. Brutus cries out, "Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!" (He might be suggesting that the ghost is out convincing people to kill themselves, or he might be talking about his effect on the conspirators' consciences.) Brutus laments that two of Rome's bravest men should lie here this way. He prophetically calls Cassius "the last of all the Romans," meaning the last of the old school Romans that prefer death to subjugation. Brutus says he knows he ought to cry over Cassius, but now is not the time for crying. In the meantime, they decide not to hold the funerals in the camp, as funerals are no way to boost troop morale. Still, it's only 3 o'clock, which means there's time to try their luck against the enemy again, in the hopes something might be accomplished before dinnertime. Brutus gathers his remaining friends for the fight.

Act 5, Scene 4

Everyone goes out onto the battlefield in a blaze of glory. Young Cato runs around shouting his name as a challenge to anyone who stands for tyranny and against the Roman Republic. Lucilius is running around pretending to be Brutus. Some enemy soldiers unceremoniously kill Young Cato. They're ready to kill Lucilius too, but he says he's Brutus, and they should be honored to kill him. The soldiers take him prisoner and are excited to show off their catch to Antony. (They really believe he's Brutus.) The captive Lucilius tells Antony that no one will ever take Brutus alive. Lucilius promises that when Antony finds Brutus, whether alive or dead, he'll still be Brutus, with the same noble character and unchanged by these events.

Antony tells his overeager soldiers that this guy isn't Brutus, but he's no less worth capturing. Antony orders the soldiers to keep Lucilius safe and to be kind to him, as he'd rather have such men for friends than enemies. Antony then sends some folks off to find out whether Brutus is alive or dead. He goes to Octavius' tent to hear news of how things are going.

Act 5, Scene 5

Elsewhere in the field, Brutus stops and asks his remaining friends to rest on a rock. He calls Clitus aside and asks him to do something in a whisper. Clitus declines to do the mystery deed, saying he'd rather kill himself. The process is repeated with Dardanius. The two men, Clitus and Dardanius, reveal to each other that Brutus has asked them to kill him. They share the news while Brutus tears up a little bit. Brutus calls Volumnius over now and tells him that Caesar's ghost has appeared to him twice, once at night and once again in the fields of Philippi. Brutus knows his hour has come and he would rather leap into the pit than loiter around and wait for his enemies to push him in. He asks Volumnius to kill him, since they were old friends from school. Volumnius points out that this is the very reason he can't do it. Just then the alarums (call to arms) are sounding, so Clitus urges everyone to get away before the enemy arrives. Brutus speaks to his men valiantly. He says that even though he has lost to Antony and Octavius, he will find more glory in this day than either of them can hope to achieve through their vile conquest of Rome. As the alarums continue to sound out, Brutus tells everyone to flee and promises to follow after everyone else has left. The only man left with Brutus now is Strato, who's slept through all the speeches and sadness. Strato has woken up just in time to be asked to hold Brutus' sword while he runs into it. Strato thinks this is a good idea and asks only to shake hands with Brutus before doing the deed.

Brutus' final words assure that what he does now is twice as pure as what he did to Caesar, who is avenged by this act: "Caesar, now be still, I kill'd not thee with half so good a will." Antony, Octavius, and their armies, along with the captive Lucilius and Messala, now approach the site of Brutus' death. Messala asks Strato where their master is, and Strato says that Brutus is free. Only Brutus overcame Brutus, Strato says, and Brutus himself is the only one who gained honor in his death. There's a bit of a conference, and Octavius will entertain all the men who nobly served Brutus. Brutus' enemies are a lot friendlier to him now that he's dead. Antony declares Brutus the "noblest Roman" of them all, as he alone among the conspirators killed Caesar not out of envy but out of concern and care for the public good.

Octavius says Brutus will be buried as an honorable soldier, and his body will stay in Octavius' tent for the night. After that, they agree it's time to celebrate and share "the glories of this happy day."

King Lear

Summary

Lear, the aging king of Britain, decides to step down from the throne and divide his kingdom evenly among his three daughters. First, however, he puts his daughters through a test, asking each to tell him how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan, Lear's older daughters, give their father flattering answers. But Cordelia, Lear's youngest and favorite daughter, remains silent, saying that she has no words to describe how much she loves her father. Lear flies into a rage and disowns Cordelia. The king of France, who has courted Cordelia, says that he still wants to marry her even without her land, and she accompanies him to France without her father's blessing.

Lear quickly learns that he made a bad decision. Goneril and Regan swiftly begin to undermine the little authority that Lear still holds. Unable to believe that his beloved daughters are betraying him, Lear slowly goes insane. He flees his daughters' houses to wander on a heath during a great thunderstorm, accompanied by his Fool and by Kent, a loyal nobleman in disguise. Meanwhile, an elderly nobleman named Gloucester also experiences family problems. His illegitimate son, Edmund, tricks him into believing that his legitimate son, Edgar, is trying to kill him. Fleeing the manhunt that his father has set for him, Edgar disguises himself as a crazy beggar and calls himself "Poor Tom." Like Lear, he heads out onto the heath.

When the loyal Gloucester realizes that Lear's daughters have turned against their father, he decides to help Lear in spite of the danger. Regan and her husband, Cornwall, discover him helping Lear, accuse him of treason, blind him, and turn him out to wander the countryside. He ends up being led by his disguised son, Edgar, toward the city of Dover, where Lear has also been brought.

In Dover, a French army lands as part of an invasion led by Cordelia in an effort to save her father. Edmund apparently becomes romantically entangled with both Regan and Goneril, whose husband, Albany, is increasingly sympathetic to Lear's cause. Goneril and Edmund conspire to kill Albany.

The despairing Gloucester tries to commit suicide, but Edgar saves him by pulling the strange trick of leading him off an imaginary cliff. Meanwhile, the English troops reach Dover, and the English, led by Edmund, defeat the Cordelia-led French. Lear and Cordelia are captured. In the climactic scene, Edgar duels with and kills Edmund; we learn of the death of Gloucester; Goneril poisons Regan out of jealousy over Edmund and then kills herself when her treachery is revealed to Albany; Edmund's betrayal of Cordelia leads to her needless execution in prison; and Lear finally dies out of grief at Cordelia's passing. Albany, Edgar, and the elderly Kent are left to take care of the country under a cloud of sorrow and regret.

Act 1, scene 1

the play begins with two noblemen, Gloucester and Kent, discussing the fact that King Lear is about to divide his kingdom. Their conversation quickly changes, however, when Kent asks Gloucester to introduce his son. Gloucester introduces Edmund, explaining that Edmund is a bastard being raised away from home, but that he nevertheless loves his son dearly.

Lear, the ruler of Britain, enters his throne room and announces his plan to divide the kingdom among his three daughters. He intends to give up the responsibilities of government and spend his old age visiting his children. He commands his daughters to say which of them loves him the most, promising to give the greatest share to that daughter.

Lear's scheming older daughters, Goneril and Regan, respond to his test with flattery, telling him in wildly overblown terms that they love him more than anything else. But Cordelia, Lear's youngest (and favorite) daughter, refuses to speak. When pressed, she says that she cannot "heave her heart into her mouth," that she loves him exactly as much as a daughter should love her father, and that her sisters wouldn't have husbands if they loved their father as much as they say (1.1.90–91). In response, Lear flies into a rage, disowns Cordelia, and divides her share of the kingdom between her two sisters.

The earl of Kent, a nobleman who has served Lear faithfully for many years, is the only courtier who disagrees with the king's actions. Kent tells Lear he is insane to reward the flattery of his older daughters and disown Cordelia, who loves him more than her sisters do. Lear turns his anger on Kent, banishing him from the kingdom and telling him that he must be gone within six days.

The king of France and duke of Burgundy are at Lear's court, awaiting his decision as to which of them will marry Cordelia. Lear calls them in and tells them that Cordelia no longer has

any title or land. Burgundy withdraws his offer of marriage, but France is impressed by Cordelia's honesty and decides to make her his queen. Lear sends her away without his blessing.

Goneril and Regan scheme together in secrecy. Although they recognize that they now have complete power over the kingdom, they agree that they must act to reduce their father's remaining authority.

Act 1, scene 2

Edmund enters and delivers a soliloquy expressing his dissatisfaction with society's attitude toward bastards. He bitterly resents his legitimate half-brother, Edgar, who stands to inherit their father's estate. He resolves to do away with Edgar and seize the privileges that society has denied him.

Edmund begins his campaign to discredit Edgar by forging a letter in which Edgar appears to plot the death of their father, Gloucester. Edmund makes a show of hiding this letter from his father and so, naturally, Gloucester demands to read it. Edmund answers his father with careful lies, so that Gloucester ends up thinking that his legitimate son, Edgar, has been scheming to kill him in order to hasten his inheritance of Gloucester's wealth and lands. Later, when Edmund talks to Edgar, he tells him that Gloucester is very angry with him and that Edgar should avoid him as much as possible and carry a sword with him at all times. Thus, Edmund carefully arranges circumstances so that Gloucester will be certain that Edgar is trying to murder him.

Act 1, scene 3

Lear is spending the first portion of his retirement at Goneril's castle. Goneril complains to her steward, Oswald, that Lear's knights are becoming "riotous" and that Lear himself is an obnoxious guest (1.3.6). Seeking to provoke a confrontation, she orders her servants to behave rudely toward Lear and his attendants.

Act 1, scene 4

Disguised as a simple peasant, Kent appears in Goneril's castle, calling himself Caius. He puts himself in Lear's way, and after an exchange of words in which Caius emphasizes his plainspokenness and honesty, Lear accepts him into service.

Lear's servants and knights notice that Goneril's servants no longer obey their commands. When Lear asks Oswald where Goneril is, Oswald rudely leaves the room without

replying. Oswald soon returns, but his disrespectful replies to Lear's questions induce Lear to strike him. Kent steps in to aid Lear and trips Oswald.

The Fool arrives and, in a series of puns and double entendres, tells Lear that he has made a great mistake in handing over his power to Goneril and Regan. After a long delay, Goneril herself arrives to speak with Lear. She tells him that his servants and knights have been so disorderly that he will have to send some of them away whether he likes it or not.

Lear is shocked at Goneril's treasonous betrayal. Nonetheless, Goneril remains adamant in her demand that Lear send away half of his one hundred knights. An enraged Lear repents ever handing his power over to Goneril. He curses his daughter, calling on Nature to make her childless. Surprised by his own tears, he calls for his horses. He declares that he will stay with Regan, whom he believes will be a true daughter and give him the respect that he deserves. When Lear has gone, Goneril argues with her husband, Albany, who is upset with the harsh way she has treated Lear. She says that she has written a letter to her sister Regan, who is likewise determined not to house Lear's hundred knights.

Act 1, scene 5

Lear sends Kent to deliver a message to Gloucester. The Fool needles Lear further about his bad decisions, foreseeing that Regan will treat Lear no better than Goneril did. Lear calls on heaven to keep him from going mad. Lear and his attendants leave for Regan's castle.

Act 2, scene 1

In Gloucester's castle, Gloucester's servant Curan tells Edmund that he has informed Gloucester that the duke of Cornwall and his wife, Regan, are coming to the castle that very night. Curan also mentions vague rumors about trouble brewing between the duke of Cornwall and the duke of Albany.

Edmund is delighted to hear of Cornwall's visit, realizing that he can make use of him in his scheme to get rid of Edgar. Edmund calls Edgar out of his hiding place and tells him that Cornwall is angry with him for being on Albany's side of their disagreement. Edgar has no idea what Edmund is talking about. Edmund tells Edgar further that Gloucester has discovered his hiding place and that he ought to flee the house immediately under cover of night. When he hears Gloucester coming, Edmund draws his sword and pretends to fight with Edgar, while Edgar runs away. Edmund cuts his arm with his sword and lies to Gloucester, telling him that Edgar wanted him to join in a plot against Gloucester's life and that Edgar tried to kill him for refusing. The

unhappy Gloucester praises Edmund and vows to pursue Edgar, sending men out to search for him.

Cornwall and Regan arrive at Gloucester's house. They believe Edmund's lies about Edgar, and Regan asks if Edgar is one of the disorderly knights that attend Lear. Edmund replies that he is, and Regan speculates further that these knights put Edgar up to the idea of killing Gloucester in order to acquire Gloucester's wealth. Regan then asks Gloucester for his advice in answering letters from Lear and Goneril.

Act 2, scene 2

Outside Gloucester's castle, Kent, still in peasant disguise, meets Oswald, the chief steward of Goneril's household. Oswald doesn't recognize Kent from their scuffle in Act 1, scene 4. Kent roundly abuses Oswald, describing him as cowardly, vain, boastful, overdressed, servile, and groveling. Oswald still maintains that he doesn't know Kent; Kent draws his sword and attacks him.

Oswald's cries for help bring Cornwall, Regan, and Gloucester. Kent replies rudely to their calls for explanation, and Cornwall orders him to be punished in the stocks, a wooden device that shackles a person's ankles and renders him immobile. Gloucester objects that this humiliating punishment of Lear's messenger will be seen as disrespectful of Lear himself and that the former king will take offense. But Cornwall and Regan maintain that Kent deserves this treatment for assaulting Goneril's servant, and they put him in the stocks.

After everyone leaves, Kent reads a letter that he has received from Cordelia in which she promises that she will find some way, from her current position in France, to help improve conditions in Britain. The unhappy and resigned Kent dozes off in the stocks.

Act 2, scene 3

As Kent sleeps in the stocks, Edgar enters. He has thus far escaped the manhunt for him, but he is afraid that he will soon be caught. Stripping off his fine clothing and covering himself with dirt, he turns himself into "poor Tom" (2.3.20). He states that he will pretend to be one of the beggars who, having been released from insane asylums, wander the countryside constantly seeking food and shelter.

Act 2, scene 4

Lear, accompanied by the Fool and a knight, arrives at Gloucester's castle. Lear spies Kent in the stocks and is shocked that anyone would treat one of his servants so badly. When

Kent tells him that Regan and Cornwall put him there, Lear cannot believe it and demands to speak with them. Regan and Cornwall refuse to speak with Lear, however, excusing themselves on the grounds that they are sick and weary from traveling. Lear insists. He has difficulty controlling his emotions, but he finally acknowledges to himself that sickness can make people behave strangely. When Regan and Cornwall eventually appear, Lear starts to tell Regan about Goneril's "sharp-toothed unkindness" toward him (2.4.128). Regan suggests that Goneril may have been justified in her actions, that Lear is growing old and unreasonable, and that he should return to Goneril and beg her forgiveness.

Lear asks Regan to shelter him, but she refuses. He complains more strenuously about Goneril and falls to cursing her. Much to Lear's dismay, Goneril herself arrives at Gloucester's castle. Regan, who had known from Goneril's letters that she was coming, takes her sister's hand and allies herself with Goneril against their father. They both tell Lear that he is getting old and weak and that he must give up half of his men if he wants to stay with either of his daughters.

Lear, confused, says that he and his hundred men will stay with Regan. Regan, however, responds that she will allow him only twenty-five men. Lear turns back to Goneril, saying that he will be willing to come down to fifty men if he can stay with her. But Goneril is no longer willing to allow him even that many. A moment later, things get even worse for Lear: both Goneril and Regan refuse to allow him any servants.

Outraged, Lear curses his daughters and heads outside, where a wild storm is brewing. Gloucester begs Goneril and Regan to bring Lear back inside, but the daughters prove unyielding and state that it is best to let him do as he will. They order that the doors be shut and locked, leaving their father outside in the threatening storm.

Act 3, scene 1

A storm rages on the heath. Kent, seeking Lear in vain, runs into one of Lear's knights and learns that Lear is somewhere in the area, accompanied only by his Fool. Kent gives the knight secret information: he has heard that there is unrest between Albany and Cornwall and that there are spies for the French in the English courts. Kent tells the knight to go to Dover, the city in England nearest to France, where he may find friends who will help Lear's cause. He gives the knight a ring and orders him to give it to Cordelia, who will know who has sent the knight when she sees the ring. Kent leaves to search for Lear.

Act 3, scene 2

Meanwhile, Lear wanders around in the storm, cursing the weather and challenging it to do its worst against him. He seems slightly irrational, his thoughts wandering from idea to idea but always returning to fixate on his two cruel daughters. The Fool, who accompanies him, urges him to humble himself before his daughters and seek shelter indoors, but Lear ignores him. Kent finds the two of them and urges them to take shelter inside a nearby hovel. Lear finally agrees and follows Kent toward the hovel. The Fool makes a strange and confusing prophecy.

Act 3, scene 3

Inside his castle, a worried Gloucester speaks with Edmund. The loyal Gloucester recounts how he became uncomfortable when Regan, Goneril, and Cornwall shut Lear out in the storm. But when he urged them to give him permission to go out and help Lear, they became angry, took possession of his castle, and ordered him never to speak to Lear or plead on his behalf.

Gloucester tells Edmund that he has received news of a conflict between Albany and Cornwall. He also informs him that a French army is invading and that part of it has already landed in England. Gloucester feels that he must take Lear's side and now plans to go seek him out in the storm. He tells Edmund that there is a letter with news of the French army locked in his room, and he asks his son to go and distract the duke of Cornwall while he, Gloucester, goes onto the heath to search for Lear. He adds that it is imperative that Cornwall not notice his absence; otherwise, Gloucester might die for his treachery.

When Gloucester leaves, Edmund privately rejoices at the opportunity that has presented itself. He plans to betray his father immediately, going to Cornwall to tell him about both Gloucester's plans to help Lear and the location of the traitorous letter from the French. Edmund expects to inherit his father's title, land, and fortune as soon as Gloucester is put to death.

Act 3, scene 4

Kent leads Lear through the storm to the hovel. He tries to get him to go inside, but Lear resists, saying that his own mental anguish makes him hardly feel the storm. He sends his Fool inside to take shelter and then kneels and prays. He reflects that, as king, he took too little care of the wretched and homeless, who have scant protection from storms such as this one.

The Fool runs out of the hovel, claiming that there is a spirit inside. The spirit turns out to be Edgar in his disguise as Tom O'Bedlam. Edgar plays the part of the madman by complaining

that he is being chased by a devil. He adds that fiends possess and inhabit his body. Lear, whose grip on reality is loosening, sees nothing strange about these statements. He sympathizes with Edgar, asking him whether bad daughters have been the ruin of him as well.

Lear asks the disguised Edgar what he used to be before he went mad and became a beggar. Edgar replies that he was once a wealthy courtier who spent his days having sex with many women and drinking wine. Observing Edgar's nakedness, Lear tears off his own clothes in sympathy.

Gloucester, carrying a torch, comes looking for the king. He is unimpressed by Lear's companions and tries to bring Lear back inside the castle with him, despite the possibility of evoking Regan and Goneril's anger. Kent and Gloucester finally convince Lear to go with Gloucester, but Lear insists on bringing the disguised Edgar, whom he has begun to like, with him.

Act 3, scene 5

Inside Gloucester's castle, Cornwall vows revenge against Gloucester, whom Edmund has betrayed by showing Cornwall a letter that proves Gloucester's secret support of a French invasion. Edmund pretends to be horrified at the discovery of his father's "treason," but he is actually delighted, since the powerful Cornwall, now his ally, confers upon him the title of earl of Gloucester (3.5.10). Cornwall sends Edmund to find Gloucester, and Edmund reasons to himself that if he can catch his father in the act of helping Lear, Cornwall's suspicions will be confirmed.

Act 3, scene 6

Gloucester, Kent, Lear, and the Fool take shelter in a small building (perhaps a shed or farmhouse) on Gloucester's property. Gloucester leaves to find provisions for the king. Lear, whose mind is wandering ever more widely, holds a mock trial of his wicked daughters, with Edgar, Kent, and the Fool presiding. Both Edgar and the Fool speak like madmen, and the trial is an exercise in hallucination and eccentricity.

Gloucester hurries back in to tell Kent that he has overheard a plot to kill Lear. Gloucester begs Kent to quickly transport Lear toward Dover, in the south of England, where allies will be waiting for him. Gloucester, Kent, and the Fool leave. Edgar remains behind for a moment and speaks in his own, undisguised voice about how much less important his own suffering feels now that he has seen Lear's far worse suffering

Act 3, scene 7

Back in Gloucester's castle, Cornwall gives Goneril the treasonous letter concerning the French army at Dover and tells her to take it and show it to her husband, Albany. He then sends his servants to apprehend Gloucester so that Gloucester can be punished. He orders Edmund to go with Goneril to Albany's palace so that Edmund will not have to witness the violent punishment of his father.

Oswald brings word that Gloucester has helped Lear escape to Dover. Gloucester is found and brought before Regan and Cornwall. They treat him cruelly, tying him up like a thief, insulting him, and pulling his white beard. Cornwall remarks to himself that he cannot put Gloucester to death without holding a formal trial but that he can still punish him brutally and get away with it.

Admitting that he helped Lear escape, Gloucester swears that he will see Lear's wrongs avenged. Cornwall replies, "See 't shalt thou never," and proceeds to dig out one of Gloucester's eyes, throw it on the floor, and step on it (3.7.68). Gloucester screams, and Regan demands that Cornwall put out the other eye too.

One of Gloucester's servants suddenly steps in, saying that he cannot stand by and let this outrage happen. Cornwall draws his sword and the two fight. The servant wounds Cornwall, but Regan grabs a sword from another servant and kills the first servant before he can injure Cornwall further. Irate, the wounded Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's remaining eye.

Gloucester calls out for his son Edmund to help him, but Regan triumphantly tells him that it was Edmund who betrayed him to Cornwall in the first place. Gloucester, realizing immediately that Edgar was the son who really loved him, laments his folly and prays to the gods to help Edgar. Regan and Cornwall order that Gloucester be thrown out of the house to "smell / His way to Dover" (3.7.96–97). Cornwall, realizing that his wound is bleeding heavily, exits with Regan's aid.

Left alone with Gloucester, Cornwall's and Regan's servants express their shock and horror at what has just happened. They decide to treat Gloucester's bleeding face and hand him over to the mad beggar to lead Gloucester where he will.

Act 4, scenes 1–2

Edgar talks to himself on the heath, reflecting that his situation is not as bad as it could be. He is immediately presented with the horrifying sight of his blinded father. Gloucester is led

by an old man who has been a tenant of both Gloucester and Gloucester's father for eighty years. Edgar hears Gloucester tell the old man that if he could only touch his son Edgar again, it would be worth more to him than his lost eyesight. But Edgar chooses to remain disguised as Poor Tom rather than reveal himself to his father. Gloucester asks the old man to bring some clothing to cover Tom, and he asks Tom to lead him to Dover. Edgar agrees. Specifically, Gloucester asks to be led to the top of the highest cliff.

Act 4, scene 2

Goneril and Edmund arrive outside of her palace, and Goneril expresses surprise that Albany did not meet them on the way. Oswald tells her that Albany is displeased with Goneril's and Regan's actions, glad to hear that the French army had landed, and sorry to hear that Goneril is returning home.

Goneril realizes that Albany is no longer her ally and criticizes his cowardice, resolving to assert greater control over her husband's military forces. She directs Edmund to return to Cornwall's house and raise Cornwall's troops for the fight against the French. She informs him that she will likewise take over power from her husband. She promises to send Oswald with messages. She bids Edmund goodbye with a kiss, strongly hinting that she wants to become his mistress.

As Edmund leaves, Albany enters. He harshly criticizes Goneril. He has not yet learned about Gloucester's blinding, but he is outraged at the news that Lear has been driven mad by Goneril and Regan's abuse. Goneril angrily insults Albany, accusing him of being a coward. She tells him that he ought to be preparing to fight against the French invaders. Albany retorts by calling her monstrous and condemns the evil that she has done to Lear.

A messenger arrives and delivers the news that Cornwall has died from the wound that he received while putting out Gloucester's eyes. Albany reacts with horror to the report of Gloucester's blinding and interprets Cornwall's death as divine retribution. Meanwhile, Goneril displays mixed feelings about Cornwall's death: on the one hand, it makes her sister Regan less powerful; on the other hand, it leaves Regan free to pursue Edmund herself. Goneril leaves to answer her sister's letters.

Albany demands to know where Edmund was when his father was being blinded. When he hears that it was Edmund who betrayed Gloucester and that Edmund left the house

specifically so that Cornwall could punish Gloucester, Albany resolves to take revenge upon Edmund and help Gloucester.

Act 4, scene 3

Kent, still disguised as an ordinary serving man, speaks with a gentleman in the French camp near Dover. The gentleman tells Kent that the king of France landed with his troops but quickly departed to deal with a problem at home. Kent's letters have been brought to Cordelia, who is now the queen of France and who has been left in charge of the army. Kent questions the gentleman about Cordelia's reaction to the letters, and the gentleman gives a moving account of Cordelia's sorrow upon reading about her father's mistreatment.

Kent tells the gentleman that Lear, who now wavers unpredictably between sanity and madness, has also arrived safely in Dover. Lear, however, refuses to see Cordelia because he is ashamed of the way he treated her. The gentleman informs Kent that the armies of both Albany and the late Cornwall are on the march, presumably to fight against the French troops.

Act 4, scene 4

Cordelia enters, leading her soldiers. Lear has hidden from her in the cornfields, draping himself in weeds and flowers and singing madly to himself. Cordelia sends one hundred of her soldiers to find Lear and bring him back. She consults with a doctor about Lear's chances for recovering his sanity. The doctor tells her that what Lear most needs is sleep and that there are medicines that can make him sleep. A messenger brings Cordelia the news that the British armies of Cornwall and Albany are marching toward them. Cordelia expected this news, and her army stands ready to fight.

Act 4, scene 5

Back at Gloucester's castle, Oswald tells Regan that Albany's army has set out, although Albany has been dragging his feet about the expedition. It seems that Goneril is a "better soldier" than Albany (4.5.4). Regan is extremely curious about the letter that Oswald carries from Goneril to Edmund, but Oswald refuses to show it to her. Regan guesses that the letter concerns Goneril's love affair with Edmund, and she tells Oswald plainly that she wants Edmund for herself. Regan reveals that she has already spoken with Edmund about this possibility; it would be more appropriate for Edmund to get involved with her, now a widow, than with Goneril, with whom such involvement would constitute adultery. She gives Oswald a token or a letter (the text

doesn't specify which) to deliver to Edmund, whenever he may find him. Finally, she promises Oswald a reward if he can find and kill Gloucester.

Act 4, scene 6

Still disguised, Edgar leads Gloucester toward Dover. Edgar pretends to take Gloucester to the cliff, telling him that they are going up steep ground and that they can hear the sea. Finally, he tells Gloucester that they are at the top of the cliff and that looking down from the great height gives him vertigo. He waits quietly nearby as Gloucester prays to the gods to forgive him. Gloucester can no longer bear his suffering and intends to commit suicide. He falls to the ground, fainting.

Edgar wakes Gloucester up. He no longer pretends to be Poor Tom but now acts like an ordinary gentleman, although he still doesn't tell Gloucester that he is his son. Edgar says that he saw him fall all the way from the cliffs of Dover and that it is a miracle that he is still alive. Clearly, Edgar states, the gods do not want Gloucester to die just yet. Edgar also informs Gloucester that he saw the creature who had been with him at the top of the cliff and that this creature was not a human being but a devil. Gloucester accepts Edgar's explanation that the gods have preserved him and resolves to endure his sufferings patiently.

Lear, wandering across the plain, stumbles upon Edgar and Gloucester. Crowned with wild flowers, he is clearly mad. He babbles to Edgar and Gloucester, speaking both irrationally and with a strange perceptiveness. He recognizes Gloucester, alluding to Gloucester's sin and source of shame—his adultery. Lear pardons Gloucester for this crime, but his thoughts then follow a chain of associations from adultery to copulation to womankind, culminating in a tirade against women and sexuality in general. Lear's disgust carries him to the point of incoherence, as he deserts iambic pentameter (the verse form in which his speeches are written) and spits out the words "Fie, fie, fie! pah! pah!" (4.6.126).

Cordelia's people enter seeking King Lear. Relieved to find him at last, they try to take him into custody to bring him to Cordelia. When Lear runs away, Cordelia's men follow him.

Oswald comes across Edgar and Gloucester on the plain. He does not recognize Edgar, but he plans to kill Gloucester and collect the reward from Regan. Edgar adopts yet another persona, imitating the dialect of a peasant from the west of England. He defends Gloucester and kills Oswald with a cudgel. As he dies, Oswald entrusts Edgar with his letters.

Gloucester is disappointed not to have been killed. Edgar reads with interest the letter that Oswald carries to Edmund. In the letter, Goneril urges Edmund to kill Albany if he gets the opportunity, so that Edmund and Goneril can be together. Edgar is outraged; he decides to keep the letter and show it to Albany when the time is right. Meanwhile, he buries Oswald nearby and leads Gloucester off to temporary safety.

Act 4, scene 7

In the French camp, Cordelia speaks with Kent. She knows his real identity, but he wishes it to remain a secret to everyone else. Lear, who has been sleeping, is brought in to Cordelia. He only partially recognizes her. He says that he knows now that he is senile and not in his right mind, and he assumes that Cordelia hates him and wants to kill him, just as her sisters do. Cordelia tells him that she forgives him for banishing her.

Meanwhile, the news of Cornwall's death is repeated in the camp, and we learn that Edmund is now leading Cornwall's troops. The battle between France and England rapidly approaches.

Act 5, scene 1

In the British camp near Dover, Regan asks Edmund if he loves Goneril and if he has found his way into her bed. Edmund responds in the negative to both questions. Regan expresses jealousy of her sister and beseeches Edmund not to be familiar with her.

Abruptly, Goneril and Albany enter with their troops. Albany states that he has heard that the invading French army has been joined by Lear and unnamed others who may have legitimate grievances against the present government. Despite his sympathy toward Lear and these other dissidents, Albany declares that he intends to fight alongside Edmund, Regan, and Goneril to repel the foreign invasion. Goneril and Regan jealously spar over Edmund, neither willing to leave the other alone with him. The three exit together.

Just as Albany begins to leave, Edgar, now disguised as an ordinary peasant, catches up to him. He gives Albany the letter that he took from Oswald's body—the letter in which Goneril's involvement with Edmund is revealed and in which Goneril asks Edmund to kill Albany. Edgar tells Albany to read the letter and says that if Albany wins the upcoming battle, he can sound a trumpet and Edgar will provide a champion to defend the claims made in the letter. Edgar vanishes and Edmund returns. Edmund tells Albany that the battle is almost upon them, and Albany leaves. Alone, Edmund addresses the audience, stating that he has sworn his love to

both Regan and Goneril. He debates what he should do, reflecting that choosing either one would anger the other. He decides to put off the decision until after the battle, observing that if Albany survives it, Goneril can take care of killing him herself. He asserts menacingly that if the British win the battle and he captures Lear and Cordelia, he will show them no mercy.

Act 5, scene 2

The battle begins. Edgar, in peasant's clothing, leads Gloucester to the shelter of a tree and goes into battle to fight on Lear's side. He soon returns, shouting that Lear's side has lost and that Lear and Cordelia have been captured. Gloucester states that he will stay where he is and wait to be captured or killed, but Edgar says that one's death occurs at a predestined time. Persuaded, Gloucester goes with Edgar.

Act 5, scene 3

Edmund leads in Lear and Cordelia as his prisoners. Cordelia expects to confront Regan and Goneril, but Lear vehemently refuses to do so. He describes a vividly imagined fantasy, in which he and Cordelia live alone together like birds in a cage, hearing about the outside world but observed by no one. Edmund sends them away, giving the captain who guards them a note with instructions as to what to do with them. He doesn't make the note's contents clear to the audience, but he speaks ominously. The captain agrees to follow Edmund's orders.

Albany enters accompanied by Goneril and Regan. He praises Edmund for his brave fighting on the British side and orders that he produce Lear and Cordelia. Edmund lies to Albany, claiming that he sent Lear and Cordelia far away because he feared that they would excite the sympathy of the British forces and create a mutiny. Albany rebukes him for putting himself above his place, but Regan breaks in to declare that she plans to make Edmund her husband. Goneril tells Regan that Edmund will not marry her, but Regan, who is unexpectedly beginning to feel sick, claims Edmund as her husband and lord.

Albany intervenes, arresting Edmund on a charge of treason. Albany challenges Edmund to defend himself against the charge in a trial by combat, and he sounds the trumpet to summon his champion. While Regan, who is growing ill, is helped to Albany's tent, Edgar appears in full armor to accuse Edmund of treason and face him in single combat. Edgar defeats Edmund, and Albany cries out to Edgar to leave Edmund alive for questioning. Goneril tries to help the wounded Edmund, but Albany brings out the treacherous letter to show that he knows of her conspiracy against him. Goneril rushes off in desperation.

Edgar takes off his helmet and reveals his identity. He reconciles with Albany and tells the company how he disguised himself as a mad beggar and led Gloucester through the countryside. He adds that he revealed himself to his father only as he was preparing to fight Edmund and that Gloucester, torn between joy and grief, died.

A gentleman rushes in carrying a bloody knife. He announces that Goneril has committed suicide. Moreover, she fatally poisoned Regan before she died. The two bodies are carried in and laid out.

Kent enters and asks where Lear is. Albany recalls with horror that Lear and Cordelia are still imprisoned and demands from Edmund their whereabouts. Edmund repents his crimes and determines to do good before his death. He tells the others that he had ordered that Cordelia be hanged and sends a messenger to try to intervene.

Lear enters, carrying the dead Cordelia in his arms: the messenger arrived too late. Slipping in and out of sanity, Lear grieves over Cordelia's body. Kent speaks to Lear, but Lear barely recognizes him. A messenger enters and reveals that Edmund has also died. Lear asks Edgar to loosen Cordelia's button; then, just as Lear thinks that he sees her beginning to breathe again, he dies.

Albany gives Edgar and Kent their power and titles back, inviting them to rule with him. Kent, feeling himself near death, refuses, but Edgar seems to accept. The few remaining survivors exit sadly as a funeral march plays.

King Lear

Characters King Lear

Lear's basic flaw at the beginning of the play is that he values appearances above reality. He wants to be treated as a king and to enjoy the title, but he doesn't want to fulfill a king's obligations of governing for the good of his subjects. Similarly, his test of his daughters demonstrates that he values a flattering public display of love over real love. He doesn't ask "which of you doth love us most," but rather, "which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (1.1.49). Most readers conclude that Lear is simply blind to the truth, but Cordelia is already his favorite daughter at the beginning of the play, so presumably he knows that she loves him the most. Nevertheless, Lear values Goneril and Regan's fawning over Cordelia's sincere sense of filial duty.

An important question to ask is whether Lear develops as a character—whether he learns from his mistakes and becomes a better and more insightful human being. In some ways the answer is no: he doesn't completely recover his sanity and emerge as a better king. But his values do change over the course of the play. As he realizes his weakness and insignificance in comparison to the awesome forces of the natural world, he becomes a humble and caring individual. He comes to cherish Cordelia above everything else and to place his own love for Cordelia above every other consideration, to the point that he would rather live in prison with her than rule as a king again.

Cordelia

Cordelia's chief characteristics are devotion, kindness, beauty, and honesty—honesty to a fault, perhaps. She is contrasted throughout the play with Goneril and Regan, who are neither honest nor loving, and who manipulate their father for their own ends. By refusing to take part in Lear's love test at the beginning of the play, Cordelia establishes herself as a repository of virtue, and the obvious authenticity of her love for Lear makes clear the extent of the king's error in banishing her. For most of the middle section of the play, she is offstage, but as we observe the depredations of Goneril and Regan and watch Lear's descent into madness, Cordelia is never far from the audience's thoughts, and her beauty is venerably described in religious terms. Indeed, rumors of her return to Britain begin to surface almost immediately, and once she lands at Dover, the action of the play begins to move toward her, as all the characters converge on the coast. Cordelia's reunion with Lear marks the apparent restoration of order in the kingdom and the triumph of love and forgiveness over hatred and spite. This fleeting moment of familial happiness makes the devastating finale of *King Lear* that much more cruel, as Cordelia, the personification of kindness and virtue, becomes a literal sacrifice to the heartlessness of an apparently unjust world.

Edmund

Of all of the play's villains, Edmund is the most complex and sympathetic. He is a consummate schemer, a Machiavellian character eager to seize any opportunity and willing to do anything to achieve his goals. However, his ambition is interesting insofar as it reflects not only a thirst for land and power but also a desire for the recognition denied to him by his status as a bastard. His serial treachery is not merely self-interested; it is a conscious rebellion against the social order that has denied him the same status as Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar. "Now,

gods, stand up for bastards," Edmund commands, but in fact he depends not on divine aid but on his own initiative (1.2.22). He is the ultimate self-made man, and he is such a cold and capable villain that it is entertaining to watch him work, much as the audience can appreciate the clever wickedness of Iago in *Othello*. Only at the close of the play does Edmund show a flicker of weakness. Mortally wounded, he sees that both Goneril and Regan have died for him, and whispers, "Yet Edmund was beloved" (5.3.238). After this ambiguous statement, he seems to repent of his villainy and admits to having ordered Cordelia's death. His peculiar change of heart, rare among Shakespearean villains, is enough to make the audience wonder, amid the carnage, whether Edmund's villainy sprang not from some innate cruelty but simply from a thwarted, misdirected desire for the familial love that he witnessed around him.

Goneril and Regan

There is little good to be said for Lear's older daughters, who are largely indistinguishable in their villainy and spite. Goneril and Regan are clever—or at least clever enough to flatter their father in the play's opening scene—and, early in the play, their bad behavior toward Lear seems matched by his own pride and temper. But any sympathy that the audience can muster for them evaporates quickly, first when they turn their father out into the storm at the end of Act 2 and then when they viciously put out Gloucester's eyes in Act 3. Goneril and Regan are, in a sense, personifications of evil—they have no conscience, only appetite. It is this greedy ambition that enables them to crush all opposition and make themselves mistresses of Britain. Ultimately, however, this same appetite brings about their undoing. Their desire for power is satisfied, but both harbor sexual desire for Edmund, which destroys their alliance and eventually leads them to destroy each other. Evil, the play suggests, inevitably turns in on itself.

Gloucester

Gloucester's story runs parallel to Lear's. Like Lear, Gloucester is introduced as a father who does not understand his children. He jokes about Edmund and calls him a "whoreson" (I.i.) when Edmund is standing right next to him. In his first soliloquy Edmund reveals how much he resents the way his father treats him. While the audience understands that Gloucester shouldn't trust Edmund, Gloucester himself is blind to his son's true motivations. Just as Lear falls for Goneril and Regan's flattery, Gloucester falls for Edmund's deception. Lear banishes Cordelia, the daughter who loves him, and Gloucester tries to execute Edgar, the son who loves him. Both

Lear and Gloucester end up homeless, wandering on the beach near Dover. The close similarity between Gloucester's story and Lear's serves to underline that Lear's fate is not exceptional. In the bleak universe of *King Lear*, it's normal for old men to suffer at the hands of their own children and to end up with nothing. he justness or unjustness of Gloucester's fate remains unclear. Edmund, who deliberately sets out to destroy Gloucester, claims that he is acting in the name of natural justice: "Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law / My services are bound" (I.ii.). Before he blinds Gloucester, Cornwall admits that it is unjust to harm him without a proper trial. Edgar argues that Gloucester deserves to lose his eyes for fathering an illegitimate son. Gloucester himself comes to believe that the world is unjust and cruel: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods / They kill us for their sport" (IV.i.). Gloucester's blinding is one of the most violent and shocking scenes in any of Shakespeare's plays, but the fact that no two characters can agree if or why Gloucester deserves blinding suggests that the act is not only unjust, but random and meaningless.

Twelfth Night

Summary

Twelfth Night is a play by Shakespeare that deals with the nobles of Illyria. Viola disguises herself as a male servant after she gets shipwrecked off the coast of Illyria. Furthermore, her name as a disguised male servant was Cesario. She then comes into contact of Duke Orsino. Moreover, Orsino asks Cesario to try to gain the love of Countess Olivia for him.

However, Olivia falls in love with Cesario instead. Viola has a twin brother and his name is Sebastian. The earlier assumption of Viola was that death overtook Sebastian in the shipwreck. Sebastian later arrives in Illyria. When this happens, Olivia mistakenly believes that Sebastian is Cesario and marries him. Due to this Orsina accuses Cesario of treachery. Afterwards, Viola reveals her true identity to end the confusion. Summary of Twelfth Night ends with Viola agreeing to marry Orsino.

In summary of Twelfth Night, Duke Orsino of Illyria falls in love with Olivia. Orsino and Olivio are important Twelfth Night characters among others. Moreover, Olivia rejects the advances of Duke Orsino. A shipwrecked Viola arrives on the shores of Illyria with the help of a Captain. She then disguises herself as a boy and takes the name Cesario. This disguise of Viola plays a very important role in this summary of Twelfth Night. After taking this disguise, she enters into the service of Orsino. Orsino asks Cesario to try to woo Olivia for him. However, Viola begins to fall in

love with Cesario rather than Orsino. When Cesario arrives to woo Olivia, she develops feelings of love for him. She rejects the approach of Orsino and asks Cesario to return. Orsino once again sends Cesario to Olivia after discussing the nature of love. On this occasion, Olivia makes her confession of love for Cesario. Meanwhile, Sebastian arrives in Illyria. Furthermore, Sebastian is the twin brother of Viola and he was expected to be dead due to the shipwreck. Sebastian then decides to look around the town. Olivia's uncle is Sir Toby who is staying with her. Sir Toby encourages his drinking companion Sir Andrew to woo Olivia. One late night, they enter into a quarrel with Malvolio and decided to trick him with the help of Olivia's maid Maria. Maria writes a letter with forged Olivia handwriting to Malvolio. Due to this, Malvolio believes that Olivia loves him. The letter asks Malvolio to appear eccentric. When Malvolio approaches Olivia with an eccentric appearance, she believes him to be mad. Malvolio then writes a letter of complaint to Olivia.\ Meanwhile, Andrew decides to leave the house after witnessing Cesario being more successful with Olivia. However, Sir Toby persuades him to stay and instead challenge Cesario to a duel. Antonio arrives during the duel with the intention to defend Cesario. This is because Antonio mistakes the identities of Cesario and Sebastian. Antonio is arrested because he is recognized as Orsino's enemy. Cesario professes to have no knowledge of Antonio's purse. Later, Andrew strikes Sebastian mistaking him for Cesario. Andrew gets beaten for his pains. Afterwards, Olivia marries Sebastian due to confusing him with Cesario.

Orsino thinks Antonio is mad when he says that he has been with Cesario. Olivia once again rejects the advances of Orsino. As Cesario was preparing to leave, Olivia requests Cesario to stay and believes him to be her husband.

She brings a priest as confirmation when Cesario denies his marriage with Olivia. Finally, there is a revelation of the true identity of Viola when Sebastian arrives. Consequently, she decides to marry Orsino. The Summary of Twelfth Night deals with the lives, loves, complications, and confusions among the nobles of Illyria.

Major Characters

Viola: Viola is the twin sister of Sebastian who disguises herself as Cesario. Twelfth Night summary reveals her immense importance in the play. Viola is a courageous character. She tries to woo Olivia on behalf of Duke Orsino. When Olivia sees her, she becomes infatuated with her. Viola reveals her true identity after her brother Sebastian arrives. In the end, she decides to marry Duke Orsino.

Duke Orsino: As the count of Illyria, Orsino is a significant character in Twelfth Night. He wants Olivia to marry him and asks Cesario to persuade her. Viola tries to make him see things in a different manner. When the play ends, Orsino decides to marry Viola.

Sebastian: He is the brother of Viola and was earlier presumed dead. Later, he is considered as Cesario when he visits Illyria.

Olivia: She is a fickle-minded character who falls for Cesario. This happened in spite of Malvolio's wooing thoughts and pranks of Sir Toby. Later, she happily marries Sebastian.

Malvolio: Malvolio is a self-righteous servant of Olivia. Furthermore, he loves Olivia in his heart. He is a devout fellow who expresses his dislike for Toby and Maria. Malvolio becomes very determined when his feelings get hurt due to Sir Toby and Maria.

Antonio: Antonio is a very mysterious character. Till he reaches the duke's court, he stays with Sebastian. He secretly loves Sebastian.

Sir Toby: He is Olivia's uncle and is funny by nature. Sir Toby and Maria prank Malvolio. His marriage with Maria happens towards the end.

Maria: She is Olivia's maid and works along with Malvolio. Maria plays pranks with Malvolio with the help of Sir Toby. She marries Sir Toby later in the play.

Act I:

Count Orsino of Illyria is introduced; he laments that he is lovesick, and wishes that "if music be the food of love," he could kill his unrequited love through an overdose of music. Orsino's servant Valentine, whom Orsino sent to give his affections to Olivia, returns; Valentine was not allowed to speak directly to Olivia, but Olivia sent a message, via her handmaiden, that Olivia will continue to mourn her dead brother, and will neither allow Orsino to see her or to woo her.

Viola lands in Illyria, after a terrible shipwreck in which she was separated from her twin brother, Sebastian. Viola hopes that her brother was saved, as she was; the Captain, who also managed to get ashore, tries to console her of the hopes of finding her brother alive. The Captain recalls seeing her brother in the water after the shipwreck, clinging onto a mast, and riding above the waves. As it happens, the Captain is from Illyria, and tells Viola of Count Orsino, and of his love for Lady Olivia; the Captain also mentions Olivia's recent loss of both her father and her brother, and Viola, having lost her brother as well, commiserates with Olivia's situation. Viola proposes that she serve Orsino, since he is a good and just man; she conspires with the Captain

that she may be presented to Orsino as a eunuch, and that her true identity as a foreign woman be concealed. The Captain agrees to help her, and he leads her to Orsino.

Sir Toby, Olivia's drunken uncle, is approached by Olivia's handmaiden, Maria, about his late hours and disorderly habits. Maria also objects to one of Sir Toby's drinking buddies, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a rather foolish man who Sir Toby has brought as a potential suitor to Olivia. Sir Toby has great affection for Sir Andrew, but Maria does not; she believes that Sir Andrew is a drunkard and a fool, and not to be suffered. Sir Toby attempts to introduce Sir Andrew to Maria; wordplay ensues from a series of misunderstandings, puns, and differing usages of words. Maria exits, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew continue to quibble, with some amusing results; at last, they decide to start drinking.

Viola has now disguised herself as a boy, Cesario, and has been taken into the service of Count Orsino. Valentine remarks that Orsino and Viola, as Cesario, have become close in the short time that Viola has been employed; indeed, Orsino has already told Viola of his great love for Olivia. Orsino asks Viola to go to Olivia and make Orsino's case to the lady; Viola says she will obey, although she confesses in an aside that she already feels love for Orsino, and would rather be his wife than try to woo Olivia for him.

Feste first appears in the play in Act I. Olivia enters, with her attendants, and is somewhat displeased and short with Feste; Feste says she is a fool for mourning her brother, if she knows that her brother is in heaven. Viola/ Cesario arrives at Olivia's house, and is admitted after much waiting, and being examined by both Sir Toby and Malvolio. Viola is brought in to meet Olivia, who finds out Viola is a messenger on Orsino's behalf, and Olivia discourages Viola from wooing her for the Count. Viola tries to make Orsino's suit, but is unsuccessful; Olivia begins to show interest in Viola as Cesario in this scene. Viola is sent away at last, and Olivia has Malvolio go after Viola, with a ring and an invitation to come back tomorrow.

Act II:

Sebastian, Viola's brother, is shown alive, and in the company of Antonio, a somewhat shady sea-captain. Sebastian tells Antonio of his sister, Viola, who he fears has been drowned; he thanks Antonio for his kindness in saving him and resolves that he must be off alone.

Malvolio catches up to Viola, with the ring he was instructed to give Viola by Olivia. Viola is surprised, since she left no ring with Olivia; Malvolio grows impatient with Viola, throws it down onto the ground, and storms off. Viola realizes that the ring is proof that Olivia

has some affection for her as Cesario; she regrets that Olivia is in love with her disguise, as that will come to nothing, and also that she is in love with her master, but that she can do nothing in her present disguise.

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are up late, drinking, and Feste joins them. They proceed to make a great deal of noise, by singing, drinking, and talking nonsense; Maria tries to get them to be quiet, but Malvolio is awakened by the noise, and comes down to berate them for disturbing the household. Once Malvolio leaves, Maria concocts a plan to make Malvolio look like a complete fool: she will write love letters to Malvolio and make it look like the letters have come from Olivia. The party decides to try this out and see if it will work; Maria leaves to go to bed, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew decide to drink the rest of the night away.

Orsino calls upon Feste to sing an old song, that pleases him very well; Orsino then begins to talk to Viola/ Cesario of love, and its imperfections. Orsino compares women to roses "whose fair flower/ being once displayed, doth fall that very hour"; Viola does not approve of Orsino's slightly cynical view of women.

Viola attempts to soothe Orsino's melancholy by getting him to accept that Olivia might not love him, but that perhaps another woman does; Orsino counters this with the argument that women are very inconstant in their love, and could not have a feeling as deep as the love he has for Olivia. Viola knows that this is not true, in light of the great amount of feeling she has for Orsino; she attempts to persuade him that women are "as true of heart" as men, by telling him a story she makes up about a sister that loved only too constantly and too well. Orsino asks Viola to go again to Olivia, and make his suit; Viola obeys.

Maria appears, with the love-letter she has written for the purposes of baiting Malvolio. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and their friend Fabian are present; they hide behind a tree as Malvolio approaches, and Maria places the letter somewhere where he is certain to find it. Malvolio approaches, already muttering nonsense about thinking that Olivia fancies him, and about how things would be if they were married; this angers Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, who want to beat Malvolio for his pretension. Malvolio finally spots the letter, and thinks he recognizes the handwriting as Olivia's; he takes the bait completely.

Act III:

Viola enters, on her way to see Olivia; she comes across Feste, who is full of wit and foolery as usual. Feste expresses his dislike for Viola, which Viola does not take personally;

Viola gives him a few coins for his wordplay, and mentions the wit that it takes to act the fool as well as Feste does. Olivia then comes to meet Viola, and Viola again attempts to make Orsino's case.

Olivia confesses her affection for Viola/ Cesario, and begs to know if Viola does indeed feel the same way. Viola says no, then asks again if Olivia will have anything to do with Orsino; Olivia is constant in her lack of response to Orsino, but makes one last attempt to win Cesario over. Viola warns Olivia as best she can, telling Olivia that "I am not what I am," though Olivia does not guess at the statement's real meaning (III.i.139). Viola leaves‹but not without an entreaty to return.

Sir Andrew finally comes to his senses, realizing that Olivia favors. His friend Fabian tries to convince him that Olivia is just trying to make him jealous; this does not soothe Sir Andrew's anger. Sir Toby then persuades Sir Andrew that he should challenge Cesario to a duel. Sir Toby tells him to write a letter of challenge, which Sir Toby will deliver; Toby actually has no intent of sponsoring a duel, but thinks the exercise might cool Sir Andrew off a little.

Antonio fears some accident may happen to Sebastian since he is completely ignorant of the country. Sebastian wants to go about and see the sights, but Antonio tells him that he cannot; Antonio confesses that he was involved with some piracy against Illyria, and that he is wanted by the Count because of it. Antonio proposes that they meet up at an inn in one hour, and that Sebastian can wander about until then.

Maria warns Olivia of Malvolio's very strange behavior; Malvolio is wearing yellow, cross-gartered stockings, which Olivia abhors. Malvolio continues his absurdity, making remarks of unwarranted familiarity, and completely baffling Olivia with his misguided attempts to be amorous toward her. Olivia dismisses Malvolio's odd behavior as being some kind of passing madness, and orders that Malvolio be looked after.

Sir Toby, Maria, and Fabian approach Malvolio; they treat Malvolio's case as an instance of witchcraft or possession. Not satisfied with the havoc they have already caused, they decide to make Malvolio go mad, if they can. Sir Andrew returns, with his "saucy" letter for Cesario, and Viola as Cesario appears, having patched up any bad feelings with Olivia over their last, dramatic scene.

Sir Toby conveys Sir Andrew's challenge to Viola, and tries to make Viola shrink from the confrontation by greatly exaggerating Sir Andrew's meanness and anger. Sir Andrew and

Viola come close to some sort of reluctant confrontation, when Antonio stumbles on them; Antonio is arrested by officers of the Count, and asks Viola for his purse, mistaking Viola for her brother Sebastian. Antonio is taken aback when Viola will not give him his purse, thinking that she, as Sebastian, is ungrateful for his help; he speaks of rescuing Sebastian from drowning, which lets Viola know that her brother might be alive. Viola hopes that what Antonio said is indeed true, and that her brother might have been saved from the wreck.

Act IV:

Feste approaches Sebastian, thinking that Sebastian is 'Cesario'; when Sebastian tells Feste that he does not know him, nor Olivia, whom Feste tells him to meet, Feste becomes rather upset, and accuses Sebastian of "strangeness". Then Sir Andrew comes, and strikes Sebastian out of anger, as if he were Cesario; Sir Toby and Sebastian come close to getting in a duel of their own, when Olivia finds them, and charges them to stop. Olivia dismisses Sir Toby, and asks Sebastian "would thou'dst be ruled by me," thinking that he is Cesario, due to his great resemblance to his sister. Sebastian decides to go along with it, struck by Olivia's beauty, thinking it all a pleasant dream from which he hopes he will not awaken.

Maria and Feste conspire to present Feste as Sir Topaz, the curate, to Malvolio, who is hidden from view. Feste tries to convince that Malvolio that he is crazy, and Malvolio continues to insist that he is not, that he has been wrongly incarcerated. Feste then confronts Malvolio as himself, and torments him some more; he fakes a conversation with himself as Feste and Sir Topaz, and Malvolio begs for paper and ink so that he can send a message to Olivia. Feste promises to fetch these things, and exits with a song.

Sebastian debates with himself whether he is mad, or whether it is the Lady Olivia who is crazy, though this does not stop him. Olivia asks him to come with her to the parson and be married to her; Sebastian, though he is completely confused, goes to be married to her.

Act V:

Fabian asks Feste for the letter Malvolio has written; Feste refuses this request, and then Orsino, with Viola, finds them. Viola points out Antonio, who is being brought to them by officers; Orsino remembers Antonio from a sea-battle, and Viola tries to defend Antonio from charges of crime by noting his kindness to her. Antonio claims that he rescued Viola from drowning, and that they have been in each other's company ever since; Orsino says that this is nonsense, since Viola has been serving him the whole time.

Then, Olivia approaches them, still denying Orsino's love, while admitting her affection for Viola. Orsino becomes angry at Viola, rather than Olivia, because of these developments; he begins to suspect Viola of double-dealings, and out of his anger, he admits his love for Viola, still disguised as a boy. Viola, for the first time, declares her love for Orsino, much to Olivia's consternation; Olivia counters this declaration by divulging that she was married, to Viola as Cesario, she thinks. A priest confirms Olivia's account, and Orsino becomes even more angry at Viola. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby enter, charging Viola with fighting them and injuring them; Viola is again shocked, and confused.

Suddenly, Sebastian dashes in, apologizing for injuring Sir Toby; he expresses his happiness at seeing Antonio again, and acknowledges Olivia as his wife. Viola and Sebastian see each other again, and there is a joyful reunion. Sebastian reveals to Olivia that she married him, rather than his sister in disguise; Orsino swears that he loves Viola, and will marry her.

Then, the action turns to Malvolio's condition; his letter is read, and his condition explained. Malvolio is upset at his mistreatment, and Olivia attempts to smooth things over; Fabian explains his, Sir Toby's, and Maria's part in Malvolio's torment. Then, Feste inflames Malvolio's anger, and he leaves, in a huff.

Orsino pronounces that happiness will stay with all of them, and that his marriage to Viola will soon be performed. Feste closes the play with a song about "the wind and the rain," a reminder that even great happiness is not safe from life's storms.

General Shakespeare

Shakespearean Supernatural Elements

The vast and diverse powers in many forms of fiction feature characters attributed with superhuman, supernatural, or paranormal abilities, often referred to as “superpowers” (also spelled “super powers” and “super-powers”) or “powers”. The supernatural has been claimed to exist, which cannot be explained by the laws of nature, including things characteristic of or relating to ghosts, gods, or other types of spirits and other non-material beings, or to things beyond nature. Supernaturalism, as opposed to naturalism, is a belief in the supernatural in interpreting the world or attempting to control it. It can vary from those who believe that supernatural powers or entities are constantly or continuously intervening in the natural world to those who like Deists.

Shakespeare’s specific scenes focus the suspense and involvement of the supernatural. The use of witches, apparitions and ghosts are an important element in making the play interesting. Shakespeare has created immortal characters whose characteristics transcends those of the normal supernatural beings, but most students of literature agree that his uses of the supernatural aren’t merely figments of his creative imagination. Every man, woman, and child is influenced by the age into which they are born and Shakespeare was no exception. Not only does his use of supernatural elements within his works reveal the Elizabethans’ obsession with mythical beliefs, but it also reveals his attitude toward these beliefs at different points of his writing career.

Witches appear in Macbeth, a ghost appears in Hamlet, and fairies appear in A Mid-Summer Nights Dream. In addition, magic cures are given in All’s Well, evil curses are chanted

in Richard III, and prophecies are told in Julius Caesar. Most of Shakespeare's works contain some form of the supernatural. Shakespeare, however, was too great of a writer to lower the quality of his work to satisfy the taste of the Elizabethans. Although the court sometimes pressured his into including some form of the supernatural in his plays that had nothing to do with his themes, he rarely allowed Elizabethans' demands to affect his own conception of how the supernatural should be used.

To understand how far Shakespeare exceeded other writers, a comparison of their supernatural characters is necessary. In other pieces of literature the ghosts, witches, and devils are merely monsters whose purpose is to scare. However, the characters are real in Shakespearean literature, and while they are evil and terrifying, and embody most of the current superstitions, they never fail to be impressive and dramatic. Another point that sets Shakespeare apart from other writers is his refusal to use the supernatural for its own sake and not for the purpose of his plot.

I. In *A Winter's Tale,* III, 2, an oracle tells what the spectator already knows, its chief part being its effect upon the mind of Leontes, furnishing also a reason for his sudden conversion after the death of his son.

II. In *Henry VI, Part I,* V. 3, the English and the prevailing French view of the demoniac character of Joan's power is indicated by fiends, which appear to her upon the field of battle. Except to enfeeble her powers, they play no part.

III. In *Henry VI, Part II,* I, 4, Eleanor, of Gloster, consults witches and dabbles in magic. The incident is brief and plays but little part. IV. In *Richard III,* V., 3, ghosts appear to both Richard and Richmond. In both cases the supernaturalism is merely a convenient stage expedient for representing the dreams of good and bad men upon the eve of battle.

V. In *Henry VIII*, IV, 3, Catherine's dream of peace is presented in the form of a vision. This is a mere stage expedient.

VI. In *Cymbeline*, V, 4, a vision of gods and mortals appears to Posthumus, and a written tablet is left, upon whose interpretation depends the denouement. While this is otherwise one of the most delightful dramas the master has left us, both the vision and the interpretation are unworthy the great dramatist, apparently a mere clumsy invention to get the play ended. It is pure supernaturalism of the poetic kind.

VII. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Cassandra prophesies in II, 2, and in V, 3.

VIII. In *Julius Caesar*, IV, 3, the ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus. This is such stage expedient as we have in "Richard III." It is mere personification of the inner thoughts and sentiments.

IX. Diana appears to Pericles, V, 2, and gives him such directions as bring about the denouement.

X. The ghost of Banquo, “blood-boltered,” appears to Macbeth. This is mere personification, for stage purposes, of the diseased fancies of Macbeth. It is presentable and is sometimes presented, without the actual appearance, although not best presented so to any modern audience. It differs in no essential way from the dagger soliloquy, which is giving, in words and actions, the assassin's thoughts and feelings upon the threshold of murder.

Shakespearean Fools and Clowns

The appearance of fools and clowns in Shakespeare’s plays is one of the most interesting stage characters in the Shakespearean oeuvre (works) and has frequently captured the interest of contemporary critics and modern audiences. Taking many forms, Shakespearean fools may be generally divided into two categories: the clown, a general term that was originally intended to choose a rustic or otherwise uneducated individual whose dramatic purpose was to evoke

laughter with his ignorance and the courtly fool or (jester) clown, in whom wit and pointed satire accompany low comedy.

The dramatic sources of Shakespeare's simple-minded clowns are at least as old as classical antiquity. In the plays themselves, such figures Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* are typically classified as clowns, their principal function is to stir the mirth of audiences. The history of the courtly fool or jester in England is somewhat briefer, with these fools making early appearances in the courts of medieval aristocracy during the twelfth century. By the time of Queen Elizabeth's reign, courtly fools were a common feature of English society, and were seen as one of two types: natural or artificial. The former could include misshapen or mentally-deficient individuals, or those afflicted with dwarfism. Such fools were often considered pets—though generally dearly loved by their masters—and appear infrequently in Shakespeare's writing. The artificial fool, in contrast, was possessed of a verbal wit and talent for intellectual repartee. Into this category critics place Shakespeare's intellectual or "wise-fools," notably Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and unnamed fool in *King Lear*.

Shakespearean fools and clowns has largely explored the thematic function of these peculiar individuals. Many commentators have observed the satirical potential of the fool. Considered an outcast to a degree, the fool was frequently given reign to comment on society and the actions of his social betters; thus, some Shakespearean fools demonstrate a rebellious potential. They may present a radically different worldview than those held by the majority of characters in plays. Likewise, such figures can be understood as disrupting the traditional order of society and the meaning of conventional language. As for so-called clowns—including the simple "mechanicals" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Trinculo in *The Tempest*, and Launcelot

Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*—most are thought to parody the actions of other characters in the main plots of their respective plays and to provide low humor for the entertainment of groundlings. Several critics, however, have acknowledged the deeper, thematic functions of Shakespeare's clowns, some of whom are said to possess a degree of wisdom within their apparent ignorance.

The significance of certain Elizabethan actors who were thought to have initially enacted the roles Shakespeare wrote. Preeminent among these is the comedic actor Robert Armin, for whom several critics have suggested Shakespeare created the witty, even philosophical, fool roles of Feste, Touchstone, and Lear's Fool. Still other critics have focused on Shakespeare's less easily categorized clowns. Falstaff is multifaceted function in the *Henry IV Part I*, which bears similarities to those of Shakespeare's other "wise fools." The darker side of foolishness by exploring the title character of *Hamlet* as a unique form of the Shakespearean fool. Shakespeare's characteristic blending of comedy and tragedy through the use of clowns and other source of amusement in his tragic plays.

SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN

Shakespeare's illustration of women and the ways of his female roles are interpreted and enacted have become the subjects of scholarly interest. Shakespeare's women are more remarkable than his men. His women are mostly unclear visions of youthful fancy, and they are in form of exaggerated qualities. The mind of Elizabeth was particularly instilled with every weakness for woman. The weakness of the court-life was worshipping a woman in every form especially her beauty, speech, action, thoughts and manners. Her qualities and vices were planted too high in the eyes of the new renaissance. Shakespeare portrayed various types of women with every point of difference and similarity. He has given another type of women only through the

feature of her distinct soul, tongue and even own limbs. Shakespeare was the one who discovered the real mystery of woman's nature. The nature of woman caught in her very flesh and blood, and viewed her total personality in the light of earthly perfection and worldly limitation. Shakespeare has also used with his irony paints the affections of womanhood. Women are never more practical than men, they are also extremely sentimental. Men are extra-imaginative, thoughtful, calculating, prudent and practical with a touch of imagination and sentiment.

Shakespeare has shown how his woman characters are wit and humour, their courage and love, hatred, nobleness, malice, jealousy and even their smiles and tears are the fruits of indistinct. Some critics believe that Shakespeare's heroines have got more freedom and thought, more of deliberate forwardness, more of personality and rational character, which other women lack. Even Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Portia and others are not very much under the domination of their motivation. Their courage also fails when the moment comes for screwing it up to the sticking place. Some critics said that Shakespeare's women are mostly timid, petty, shy, impulsive and without any independent personality of their own. These things happen only when the situation is weak.

Shakespeare has covered the entire gallery of women and his plays focused on the absolute portrayal of the "essence" of femininity. His portraits of women have never been surpassed. Critics have classified Shakespeare's heroines into different types:

Clever and assertive - Portia in *The Merchant of Venice,*

- Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*

- Rosalind in *As You Like lt*

Loving and fanciful women – Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*.

- Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- Viola in *Twelfth Night*

- Ophelia in *Hamlet*

- Miranda in *The Tempest*

Tragic heroines - Desdemona in *Othello*

- Cordelia youngest daughter in *King Lear*

- Hero in *A Much Ado About Nothing*

- Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*

- Aggressive and dominant women is Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*

- Goneril is eldest of all three daughters in *King Lear*

- Regan in *King Lear*

- Cleopatra in *Antonio and Cleopatra*

Viola, **Beatrice**, **Rosalind** and **Portia** are bright, beautiful and witty. They can solve their problems in which they are involved by their cleverness.

Helena in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is a passive and sentimental young woman. Juliet is passionate constant and self-sacrificing. **Ophelia** is pitiable and weak. **Miranda** is a loving and fanciful but she is a passive character. **Desdemona**, the tragic heroine evokes our sympathy. **Cordelia** is passive but is selfless.

Lady Macbeth, who stands first in the list of aggressive and evil women, has an iron will. **Goneril** and **Regan**, the wicked or evil daughters of King Lear are remorseless. **Cleopatra**, the vanquished queen of Egypt, she is considered as an earthly Venus both in her power of attraction and wealth and charm character of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Theatre and Audience

Theatre

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, descended from tenant farmers and landed gentry. His traditional birth date, April 23, 1564, is conjectural. Baptism was on April 26, so April 23 is a good guess—and a tidy one, since that date is also St. George's Day as well as the date of Shakespeare's own death.

Shakespeare lived during a remarkable period of English history, a time of relative political stability that followed and preceded eras of extensive upheaval. Elizabeth-I became the Queen of England in 1558, six years before Shakespeare's birth. During her 45-year reign, London became a cultural and commercial center where learning and literature thrived.

When Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne, there were violent clashes throughout Europe between Protestant and Catholic leaders and their followers. Though Elizabeth honored many of the Protestant edicts of her late father, King Henry VIII, she made significant concessions to Catholic sympathizers, which kept them from attempting rebellion.

Queen Elizabeth also recognized the importance of the arts to the life and legacy of her nation. She was fond of the theater, and many of England's greatest playwrights were active during her reign, including Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare. With her permission, professional theaters were built in England for the first time, attracting 15,000 theatergoers per week in London, a city of 150,000 to 250,000.

The Performance of the gospel stories within the church was the beginning of the theatre in England. As interest grew in the plays, the performance was shifted to the churchyard. Due to the large number of Spectators, this resulted in the desecration of the graveyards. The stage had to be shifted thus into the green or any other open space in the outskirts of the town, particularly

to inn-yard. In the year 1576 three theatres were setup either in the open air or in some yard in London. The original Globe theatre was built in 1599, destroyed by fire in 1613, rebuilt in 1614, and then demolished in 1644. It is considered quite realistic, though contemporary safety requirements mean that it accommodates only 1400 spectators compared to the original theatre's 3000.

The stage had a bare room whose walls were covered with tapestry. The theatre was a rectangular platform with a thatched roof and hangings above. It had no side or front curtains. It projected far into the yard which was occupied by the lower classes who watched performance while standing. They were known as "the groundlings of the pit". A groundling was a person who visited the Globe Theatre in the early 17th century. They were too poor to pay to be able to sit on one of the three levels of the theatre. If they paid one penny, they could stand in "the pit", also called "the yard", just below the stage to watch the play. The nobility sat either in the boxes on each side of the stage or on the rough strewn stage. The back of the stage has two wings. Each wing had a door opening obliquely on to the stage. The recess between the two doors formed the inner stage. Lastly there was a balcony or gallery behind the inner stage, and above the actors, "tiring house". Scenes of the inner stage were performed in the inner stage. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries often using cushions for comfort! Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the Globe stage itself.

A flag was unfurled on the roof of a theatre when a performance was about to be given. A flourish of trumpets was the signal that the play was about to commence. When trumpets had sounded a third time, a figure clothed in a long black robe came forward and recited the prologue. Most common way to change of scene was by hanging out a board bearing in large letters the name of the place of action.

Although there was no scenery, mangers spared no expense on the most lavish costumes. Plays were not acted in the period of costume, though some bizarre attempts were made to suggest a period. Women were not allowed to act by law, and their parts had to be taken by boys with broken voices. This was the reason dramatists preferred women characters so few.

Audience

Audience London theaters like the Globe could accommodate up to 3,000 people watching popular plays. There were three different class people were accommodating the theatre. The 'groundlings' would pay 1 penny to stand in the 'Yard' of the Globe Theatre. One penny was one day income of daily wages. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries often using cushions for comfort, and the cost of their ticket started from 6 penny. Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the Globe stage itself. With theaters running most afternoons, that could mean as many as 10,000-20,000 people could see a play every week! Who were these people? Shakespeare's audience was the very rich, the upper middle class, and the lower middle class. All of these people would seek entertainment just as do today, and they could afford to spend money going to the theater. Audiences in Shakespeare's time behaved much differently than think of today when go to the theater. In general, audiences were much noisier and directly involved in the show than today. There was no electricity for special theater lights, so both the stage and the audience were in broad daylight, allowing them to see each other and interact. Shakespeare's soliloquies would be said directly to the audience, who could potentially answer back! The audience would move around, buy food and ale in the theater, clap for the hero, boo the villain, and cheer for the special effects. The audience might dance at the end of a comedy along with the characters onstage. If an audience didn't like a play, they might even throw

furniture and damage the theater! Shakespeare used several tricks to get and hold his audience's attention.

One that may notice that his plays rarely began with the main characters onstage; usually a minor character began the first scene. This was because at an Elizabethan theater the lights could not dim to indicate the beginning of a play, it would just begin with characters walking onstage and beginning to speak, usually over the audience's noise as they settled in to watch the play. The first scene would usually set the mood of the play, but the opening dialogue would not be vital because it might not be easily heard. Another trick that Shakespeare used was to break up the main action of the play with clowning. In most of his plays, there is comic relief in the form of "clown" or "fool" characters sprinkled throughout the show, making jokes or clowning around onstage. This ensured that even during a 3-hour history play, there would be something that appealed to everyone. Most of the poorer audience members, referred to as groundlings, would pay one penny (which was almost an entire day's wage) to stand in front of the stage, while the richer patrons would sit in the covered galleries, paying as much as half a crown each for their seats. In 1599, Thomas Platter, a Swiss doctor visiting London from Basel, reported the cost of admission in his diary: "There are separate galleries and there one stands more comfortably and moreover can sit, but one pay more for it. Thus anyone who remains on the level standing pays only one English penny: but if he wants to sit, he is let in at a farther door, and there he gives another penny. If he desires to sit on a cushion in the most comfortable place of all, where he not only sees everything well, but can also be seen then he gives yet another English penny at another door." Shakespeare's audience would have been composed of tanners, cobblers butchers, iron-workers, millers, seamen from the ships docked in the Thames, glovers, servants, shopkeepers, wig-makers, bakers, and countless other tradesmen and their families.

Shakespeare's audience was far more boisterous than are patrons of the theatre today. They were loud and hot-tempered and as interested in the happenings off stage as on.

Sources

https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/msnd

https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/julius-caesar/summary

https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/lear/summary/

https://www.toppr.com/guides/english/english-literature/twelfth-night-by-william-shakespeare-plot-summary/

https://www.gradesaver.com/twelfth-night/study-guide/summary