Daily Bard

QUOTATION SHEET

A Midsummer Night's Dream: key quotes and analysis

The 10 A Midsummer Night's Dream quotations worth knowing by heart, each with a plain-English reading, an analysis of its language, space for your notes, and a fill-the-gap test.



How to use this sheet

These are the 10 key quotations from the **A Midsummer Night's Dream study guide**, set out for revision. Part one gives each quotation with a plain-English reading, a short analysis of what the language is doing, and space for your own notes. Part two prints them again with a word missing from each line, so that you can test yourself.

- [ ] Read the quotation aloud twice. Sound helps memory more than staring does.
- [ ] In the note space, name one method (a device, a word choice, a feature of the verse) and the effect it has.
- [ ] Add one link: to a theme, to another moment in the text, or to a point of context.
- [ ] A day later, cover part one and complete part two from memory.

Part one: the quotations

> Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword
> And won thy love doing thee injuries,
>
> THESEUS · ACT 1, SCENE 1 · 1.1.17-18

Plain English: I courted you by conquering you, and won your love by harming you.

Within the first twenty lines the play joins love to violence. The alliterative pairing of "wooed" and "won" makes courtship and conquest sound alike. Theseus promises a change of "key", a musical metaphor for the comic movement from discord to harmony.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
>
> EGEUS · ACT 1, SCENE 1 · 1.1.43

Plain English: She belongs to me, so I can do what I like with her.

The possessive "mine" and the commercial verb "dispose" reduce Hermia to property. The line is flat, regular and legalistic: Egeus is citing a right, not expressing a feeling. It states the patriarchal problem the comedy must solve.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> The course of true love never did run smooth.
>
> LYSANDER · ACT 1, SCENE 1 · 1.1.136

Plain English: True love has always met with obstacles.

The metaphor is of a river, and the line has the ring of a proverb, which is the irony: Lysander is quoting what he has read in "tale or history", unaware that he will soon prove inconstant himself. Our essay on "The course of true love" reads the whole exchange.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind;
> And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
>
> HELENA · ACT 1, SCENE 1 · 1.1.240-241

Plain English: Love sees what the mind imagines, not what is there, which is why Cupid is shown blind.

A rhyming couplet gives the idea the neatness of a maxim. “Mind” here means fancy, not judgement. The flower will later work through the eyes, so the line begins the play’s pattern of sight imagery and prepares the theme of love as projection.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> And this same progeny of evils comes
> From our debate, from our dissension;
> We are their parents and original.
>
> TITANIA · ACT 2, SCENE 1 · 2.1.118-120

Plain English: All these disasters are the offspring of our quarrel; we are their cause.

The metaphor of parenthood makes floods and rotten crops the children of a marital quarrel, pointed in a play about a disputed child. Titania accepts joint responsibility in the plural “our” and “We”. Disorder among rulers spreads to nature, a common Elizabethan idea.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> I am your spaniel, and, Demetrius,
> The more you beat me I will fawn on you.
>
> HELENA · ACT 2, SCENE 1 · 2.1.210-211

Plain English: I am your dog; the worse you treat me, the more I will adore you.

The animal metaphor is self-chosen and degrading, and it reverses the convention in which the man pursues. Helena's line is comic in its excess and disturbing in its content, a useful example of how the play keeps cruelty just inside laughter.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays.
>
> BOTTOM · ACT 3, SCENE 1 · 3.1.145-146

Plain English: To be honest, reason and love do not have much to do with each other these days.

The play's central truth is spoken in prose by a weaver wearing an ass's head to a queen under a spell. The personification of reason and love as estranged neighbours is homely and exact. Bottom is wiser here than the lovers, who keep insisting that their passions are rational.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Lord, what fools these mortals be!
>
> ROBIN · ACT 3, SCENE 2 · 3.2.117

Plain English: How foolish human beings are.

The line is one of the fairies' short, chanting lines, lighter than the lovers' pentameter. Robin speaks as a spectator about to enjoy a "fond pageant", which places the audience beside him, laughing from above. The irony is that his own error caused the foolishness.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact.
>
> THESEUS · ACT 5, SCENE 1 · 5.1.7-8

Plain English: Madmen, lovers and poets are all made entirely of imagination.

A list of three, bound by alliteration, puts the poet in doubtful company. Theseus means it as dismissal, yet he is himself a poet's invention, speaking some of the play's finest verse about the faculty he distrusts. Shakespeare lets the sceptic make the case for art.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this and all is mended:
> That you have but slumbered here
> While these visions did appear.
>
> ROBIN · ACT 5, SCENE 1 · 5.1.440-443

Plain English: If our play has displeased you, pretend you were asleep and dreamed it.

Rhymed couplets in a short four-beat line give the epilogue the sound of a charm. "Shadows" means both spirits and actors. The apology is mock-modest: by calling the play a dream, Robin extends the title to the audience and claims for theatre the strange authority dreams have.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

Part two: test yourself

Fill each gap from memory, then check against part one. Mark the ones you missed and come back to them tomorrow.

> _____, I wooed thee with my sword
> And won thy love doing thee _____,
>
> THESEUS · ACT 1, SCENE 1

> As she is mine, I may _____ of her,
>
> EGEUS · ACT 1, SCENE 1

> The _____ of true love never did run smooth.
>
> LYSANDER · ACT 1, SCENE 1

> Love _____ not with the eyes but with the mind;
> And _____ is winged Cupid painted blind.
>
> HELENA · ACT 1, SCENE 1

> And this same _____ of evils comes
> From our debate, from our _____;
> We are their parents and _____.
>
> TITANIA · ACT 2, SCENE 1

> I am your spaniel, and, _____,
> The more you beat me I will fawn on you.
>
> HELENA · ACT 2, SCENE 1

> And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company _____ nowadays.
>
> BOTTOM · ACT 3, SCENE 1

> Lord, what fools these _____ be!
>
> ROBIN · ACT 3, SCENE 2

> The _____, the lover, and the poet
> Are of _____ all compact.
>
> THESEUS · ACT 5, SCENE 1

If we shadows have _____,
Think but this and all is _____:
That you have but _____ here
While these _____ did appear.

ROBIN · ACT 5, SCENE 1

Next steps

For more quotations, sorted by theme and analysed: **love**, **dreams and illusion**, **order and misrule**. Turn three of these quotations into full paragraphs with the **essay planner**, and check your method against the **close reading toolkit**. For a small daily dose of the language, **Daily Bard** shows one passage each morning with a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.



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