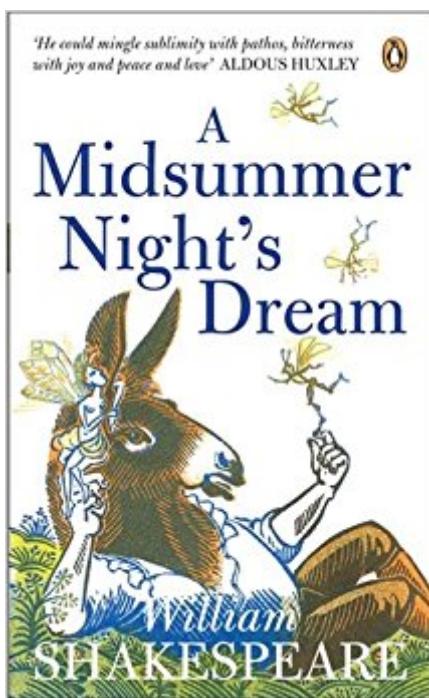


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A Midsummer Night's Dream (Penguin Shakespeare)



Synopsis

A raucous comedy that thrusts a quartet of reckless young lovers headfirst into a world of magic and fantasy, William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is edited by Stanley Wells with an introduction by Helen Hackett in Penguin Shakespeare. 'Lovers and madmen have such seething brains, Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend More than cool reason ever comprehends' Lovers Lysander and Hermia flee Athens to escape the authority of their parents, only to be pursued by Hermia's betrothed Demetrius, and her friend Helena. Unwittingly, all four find themselves in an enchanted forest where Oberon, the king of the fairies, and Titania, his queen, soon take an interest in human affairs, dispensing magical love potions and casting mischievous spells. In this dazzling comedy, confusion ends in harmony, as love is transformed, misplaced, and - ultimately - restored. This book contains a general introduction to Shakespeare's life and Elizabethan theatre, a separate introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a chronology, suggestions for further reading, an essay discussing performance options on both stage and screen, and a commentary. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden some time in late April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He wrote about 38 plays (the precise number is uncertain), many of which are regarded as the most exceptional works of drama ever produced, including *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), *Henry V* (1599), *Hamlet* (1601), *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1606) and *Macbeth* (1606), as well as a collection of 154 sonnets, which number among the most profound and influential love-poetry in English. If you enjoyed *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you might like *The Taming of the Shrew*, also available in Penguin Shakespeare. 'He could mingle sublimity with pathos, bitterness with joy and peace with love' Aldous Huxley

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Customer Reviews

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden some time in late April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He wrote about 38 plays (the precise number is uncertain), many of which are regarded as the most exceptional works of drama ever produced, including Romeo and Juliet (1595), Henry V (1599), Hamlet (1601), Othello (1604), King Lear (1606) and Macbeth (1606), as well as a collection of 154 sonnets, which number among the most profound and influential love-poetry in English.

It's neither the best nor worst of Shakespeare's many comedies, but "A Midsummer Night's Dream" definitely holds one honor -- it's the most fantastical of his works. This airy little comedy is filled with fairies, spells, love potions and romantic mixups, with only the bland human lovers making things a little confusing (who's in love with whom again?). As Athens prepares for the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, the fusty Egeus is demanding that his daughter Hermia marry the man he's chosen for her, Demetrius. Her only other options are death or nunhood. Since she's in love with a young man named Lysander (no, we never learn why her dad hates Lysander), Hermia refuses, and the two of them plot to escape Athens and marry elsewhere. But Helena, a girl who has been kicked to the curb by Demetrius, tips him off about their plans; he chases Hermia and Lysander into the woods, with Helena following him all the way. Are you confused yet? But on this same night, the fairy king Oberon and his queen Titania are feuding over a little Indian boy. Oberon decides to use a magical "love juice" from a flower to cause some trouble for Titania by making her fall in love with some random weaver named Nick Bottom (whom his henchman Puck has turned into a donkey-headed man). He also decides to have Puck iron out the four lovers' romantic troubles with the same potion. But of course, hijinks ensue. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is another one of Shakespeare's plays that REALLY needs to be seen before it's read. Not only is it meant to be seen rather than read, but the tangle of romantic problems and hijinks are a little difficult to follow... okay, scratch that. They can be VERY difficult to follow, especially if you need to keep the four lovers straight. But despite those small flaws, Shakespeare is in rare form here -- the story floats along in an enchanted haze of fairy magic, forest groves, and a love square that twists in on itself. And Shakespeare's lush, haunting poetry is absolutely lovely here ("With sweet musk-roses and with

eglantine/There sleeps Titania sometime of the night/Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight..."). But he also packs it with plenty of hilarity -- not only is it funny to read about the haughty fairy queen fawning over a guy with a donkey head (Nick Bottom = "ass's head", get it?), but there's plenty of funny moments in the dialogue ("Thisby, the flowers of odious savours sweet..."). The four main lovers are relatively bland and interchangeable, and we never find out much about them except that Helena is kind of stalkerish and not too bright (she tips off the guy she likes that the girl HE likes is eloping so he can stop her?). The real draws are the fairy creatures -- Titania and Oberon are proud alien creatures filled with both cruelty and kindness, and Puck is delightfully mischievous and.... puckish. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a shimmering little concoction of magic, romantic mayhem and fairy squabbling. Absolutely stunning.

A+

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