

Pyramus and Thisbe



The play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written in 1595 or 1596 and its first performance may well have been part of a wedding celebration. In this extract, Peter Quince and his friends are themselves planning to put on a play called *Pyramus and Thisbe*, to celebrate the wedding of the Duke. Nick Bottom the weaver wants to play all the parts ...

BOTTOM Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM What is Pyramus? a lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

5 BOTTOM That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes; I will move storms; I will condole, in some measure. Yet my chief humour is for a tyrant: I could play Eracles rarely ...

10 The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates;
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far
15 And make and mar
The foolish Fates.

Now name the rest of the players.

QUINCE Francis Flute, the bellows-mender?

FLUTE Here, Peter Quince.

20 QUINCE Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.

FLUTE What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?

QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE Nay, faith, let me not play a woman: I have a beard coming.

25 QUINCE That's all one: you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM And I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: 'Thisne, Thisne!' – 'Ah, Pyramus, lover dear! thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!'

QUINCE No, no, you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisbe.

30 BOTTOM Well, proceed.

1 The theme of this play-within-a-play is similar to the theme of the whole of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. What is this theme?

1 mark

2 Explain the meaning of the word 'proceed' (line 1).

1 mark

3 How does Nick Bottom imagine that his performance as Pyramus will affect the audience?

1 mark

4 What is a 'tyrant' (line 7)?

1 mark

5 Give an example of alliteration in the rhyming verse that Bottom recites.

1 mark

6 Why does Bottom suddenly begin reciting?

1 mark

7 Francis Flute is described as a 'bellows-mender'. What are 'bellows'?

1 mark

8 a) What excuse does Flute make to try and avoid playing the part of a woman?

1 mark

b) How does Quince quash his objection?

1 mark

9 What kind of character was Flute hoping to play when told that the character's name was Thisbe?

1 mark

10 Bottom's use of the word 'monstrous' in the phrase 'a monstrous little voice' is funny. Explain why.

1 mark

11 Judging by this extract, do you think Peter Quince and his friends will perform the play well? Explain your answer.

1 mark
