

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2, Scene 2, is composed of six distinct segments, defined by exits and entrances and consequent shifts in the immediate subject. Identification of the segments — and consequently of the organization of the scene as a whole — allows one to comprehend the relationship of the Helena–Lysander exchange contrasted against the larger dramatic structure.

Analysis:

- 1) Titania enters with her fairy attendants and requests a roundel and a fairy song. Her attendants sing her to sleep and then exit, leaving her asleep onstage (2.2.1–26).
- 2) Oberon enters holding the magic flower. He charms Titania by squeezing the juice onto her eyelids (2.2.27–34).
- 3) Lysander and Hermia, traveling together through the woods, enter and lie down to sleep (2.2.35–65).
- 4) Puck enters holding the magic flower and, mistaking Lysander for Demetrius, squeezes the juice onto his eyelids (2.2.66–83).
- 5) Demetrius enters with Helena pursuing him. He exits but she remains onstage where she discovers Lysander. Awakening, Lysander proclaims his love to Helena, who assumes he mocks her. Helena exits, and Lysander, after addressing the sleeping Hermia, follows (2.2.84–144).
- 6) Hermia awakens from a frightening dream, discovers that Lysander is gone, and exits to seek him (2.2.145–56).

Discussion Questions

1. Note the conspicuous parallels between segments 2 and 4: in each case a fairy figure (Oberon/Puck) enters with the magic flower in hand, speaks in soliloquy, and anoints the eye of a sleeping figure (Titania/Lysander). How might this parallelism affect the way an audience responds to the scene? Are other parallels built into the scene? Note the analogy between the lovers' verse — each couplet constructs a miniature parallelism — and the conspicuous parallelism of the scene's large design. At what other levels in the play does one find instances of parallelism?

2. Segment 5 begins with Helena entering in pursuit of a young man (Demetrius). It concludes with Helena being pursued by a young man (Lysander). The segment thus incorporates a comic reversal in action which is not unlike the reversal of the rhetorical figure *chiasmus* — repeating ideas or words in inverted order, i.e., two corresponding pairs arranged not in parallels (a-b-a-b) but in inverted order (a-b-b-a) from the shape of the Greek letter χ (chi) — in which ideas or words are repeated in reverse order. Are there other actions in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that incorporate the structure of rhetorical figures? Consider the way the reversal in this segment contributes to the play's dancelike pattern.
3. The scene begins with a charming lullaby as Titania settles herself to sleep; it concludes with Helena waking in fear from her frightening dream. What other awakenings occur in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Search the e-text of the play for the term “wake,” and then consider how the pattern of this particular scene — from sleep to waking — relates to the concerns of the play as a whole. Consider as well how a character's behavior when he or she awakens is different than before he or she went to sleep. How does love figure in these awakenings?