

### Jokes in *Midsummer Night's Dream's* play-within-a-play

Draw on Act I, scene 2 and Act II, scene 1. Find places in which Shakespeare makes jokes at the expense of his actors, or the characters. For this essay, try to identify three such jokes, and write a paragraph about each one.

In each paragraph, briefly explain each joke; you might, for example, show how certain key words have double-meanings that are intended to be ironic or humorous, or you may show how one particular actor fumbles his part or ruins the play.

For each joke, try to write about how it contributes to larger themes, motifs or symbols in the play-- perhaps it is used to characterize certain people in the play, or to bring out themes like the inconstancy of love, the ridiculousness of taking oneself too seriously, or the role of fate in our lives.

Jokes Involving the Players:

1. Bottom using words imprecisely or incorrectly:
  - a. You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.
  - b. if I do it, let the audience look to their Eyes;
  - c. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.
  - d. An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too, I'll speak in a monstrous little voice.
2. Bottom convinced of his own superiority ("God's gift...") when he is in fact a raving idiot and an awful actor
3. Bottom wants to play all the parts-- even those that require multiple parts be onstage at once
4. Bottom's name, and the jokes that come with it
5. Picking actors who are poorly suited to their parts (Flute playing Thisbe; Snug playing the "Lion's part")
6. Snug is too dumb for his part, even though it requires no speaking
7. The play seems to be thrown together in a rushed, haphazard way
8. The people acting in the play are not "professional" actors-- they are tradesmen (imagine a bunch of construction workers trying to stage *Hamilton*...)
9. Actors are recruited to play parts that should not be acted ("moonlight", "wall", "chink", etc.)
10. The actors have no sense of the original play from which their play is drawn ("Pyramus and Thisbe"). Imagine again-- people who know nothing about American history trying to understand jokes and nuances in *Hamilton*.