THE WESLEYAN ARGUS

Cross-Talk: University Production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” Slayed (Literally)

May 6, 2024, by Caleb Henning, Elias Mansell, Arts & Culture Editor, Executive Editor

In a cross-talk, two writers sit down to discuss a book, movie, TV show, or piece of art they both feel strongly about. Sometimes they disagree; other times, they’re in perfect harmony. Here, Executive Editor Elias Mansell ’24 and Arts & Culture Editor Caleb Henning ’25 sat down to talk about Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” performed in the Center for the Arts Theater by the Theater Department on Thursday, May 2 at 8:00 p.m., Friday, May 3 at 8:00 p.m., and Saturday, May 4 at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.



c/o Theater Department

Elias Mansell: I liked the play.

Caleb Henning: I also really liked the play. I thought the plot was incredibly silly. I had never read “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” or seen it before, so I had no idea what to expect.

EM: I had read the play before, but it was very fun to see it performed. I feel like with classic stuff like Oscar Wilde or Shakespeare, it’s always really different to see them performed, and it’s really nice.

CH: Yeah. There was a lot going on. There were three different groups of people that we were following around.

EM: And four couples.

CH: We start with Hippolyta (Tilora Raphael-Shirley ’27) and Theseus (Sam Slye ’25).

EM: They’re engaged.

CH: And then Egeus (Cyris Laury-Schaefer ’27) comes in with his daughter Hermia (Lila Popell ’24), who’s supposed to marry Demetrius (Michael Scott ’27) but is actually in love with Lysander (Yumiko Takahashi ’25). Egeus is like, “I wanna kill my daughter because she doesn’t love the guy I chose for her,” and Theseus and Hippolyta are like, “That’s a bit much, don’t you think?”

EM: Theseus basically says, “Well, Hermia, you should value what your father thinks ’cause he’s your father. I’ll give you until May Day to decide what you’re going to do.”

CH: That’s timely, ’cause this production took place in May. It gets more complicated because Helena (CJ Joseph ’25), Demetrius’ ex, is in love with Demetrius, but Demetrius doesn’t love Helena. Demetrius loves Hermia, but Hermia doesn’t love Demetrius. Hermia loves Lysander, [and the two] are supposed to elope. And then everything goes wrong.

EM: Yeah, Helena is jealous, so she tells Demetrius what’s going on. Demetrius follows the couple [into the forest], and Helena follows him.

CH: A whole group of mechanicals who wanna be actors [are also in the forest], and they’re putting on a play at Theseus and Hippolyta’s wedding. There are a lot of them—Bottom (Liang Liang ’26), Quince (Head Copy Editor Joe Greenfield ’24), Flute (Daniel Brugger ’26), Snout (Kiara Reeves ’26), Snug (Campbell Greenberg ’27), and Starveling (April Schwartz ’24). And they all have really fun names that are like objects.

EM: And Bottom’s is particularly poignant.



c/o Caleb Henning

CH: Oh yeah! Because he becomes an ass. Literally. And all of the people that we just mentioned—except Theseus, Hippolyta, and Egeus—are in the forest, which is a lot. And then there’re some silly fairies who come over. We’ve got Oberon (Cory Garcia ’25) and Titania (Ella Kramer ’26), the king and queen of the fairies, and they’re fighting.

EM: Yes. They’re going through a messy divorce and fighting for custody of the kids.

CH: One kid.

EM: Yes, they’re kind of separated because Titania has adopted this human child, but Oberon wants the kid for himself to become one of his followers or whatever, so he decides to contrive a very complicated plan in order to get the child with his access to a love potion. But, for some reason, instead of just making Titania fall in love with him, he decides to take revenge [on her] and make her fall in love with whatever horrific creature she first lays eyes on when she wakes up.

CH: Yeah, and the horrific creature, it turns out, is Bottom, who is turned into a donkey by Puck (Maya Lozea ’26). Puck is silly and mischievous and does whatever he wants, which is never good. So he turns Bottom into an ass, literally, and then Titania is like “Oh,

my God, I'm in love with you, you're the most beautiful creature I've ever seen." Oberon and Puck have a really good laugh about it. Lozea had such an awesome mischievous laugh.

EM: All the metatheater in there is really fun: They're a little audience, we're a little audience. Lots of audiences and little plays within plays.

CH: Titania's got a little fairy posse, too. They all have silly names.

EM: There's Peaseblossom (Adriana Alfaro Liendo '26), Cobweb (Sophie Brusini '26), and Mustardseed (Bailee Gull '24).

CH: They had wicked fairy costumes. And the lighting [designed by Assistant Professor of Theater Courtney Gaston, with Alex White '26 and Avivi Li '26] was really good. At the beginning, with Puck sleeping on stage, there were all these little unfocused lighting designs [projecting] a forest. I also really liked the fairy lights on the fake trees made of rope.

EM: The whole fairy meadow [designed by Theater Department Chair Marcela Oteiza, By Martinez-Castaneda '24, and Parker Tey '26] was beautiful.

CH: It looked really nice—mossy, soft, and comfortable all at once. Also like rope.

EM: It made me wanna be like the characters who could lie down and go to sleep on the moss.

CH: I really liked the chair too—

EM: It was the fairy's cradle!

CH: And Mustardseed, Peaseblossom, and Cobweb danced around the cradle. I didn't know there were musical elements in the show.

EM: It was insane to realize that this production demanded that people be dancers and singers, as well as actors.

CH: Right? They were all pretty good at it too. They danced in a magical way when they did their little spins, and it was enhanced by the fairies' cute, flowy dresses. Overall, the costumes [designed by Assistant Professor of the Practice April Hickman, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Theater Robin Mazzola, Sara Bateman '24, and Gull] were incredible.

EM: Oberon's had antlers made of leaves and branches. His vibe was summer-y, and so was Puck's. They both wore a lot of green, which makes sense because they're on the same side of the divorce. But Titania and her three fairies were all wearing flowery things, so more like spring. It's very cool.

We haven't covered what happened with the rest of the lovers. Oberon sees Demetrius rejecting Helena, who clearly loves [Demetrius], so Oberon—because he's a meddler and wants to change things and control the plot—tells Puck to take some of this love potion that was intended for Titania and to use it on Demetrius so that he falls in love with Helena. However, all Oberon tells Puck is to find the Athenian man, so when [Puck] stumbles upon Lysander sleeping, he accidentally gives him the potion instead. [Lysander] does see Helena, and he falls in love with her.

Oberon tells Puck to fix things. Puck enchants Demetrius so he falls in love with Helena. However…she thinks it's a prank and that [neither man] actually loves her. It's very sad for her, but it's also funny, and it works well because they're overacting the love, which makes sense, because they were given a very intense love potion.

CH: [Joseph] sounded like she was on the verge of tears for basically the entire play, which really added to the humor.

EM: It was fun for us to see the play as people who are dating.

CH: Then there was the whole scene where they were just calling Hermia short.

EM: It was very funny, because then Hermia fires back and starts calling Helena really tall. And it was even funnier because CJ and Lila are pretty similar heights.

CH: And then everyone piled on, and Lysander also did it because he was being a real jerk.

EM: I can't believe Hermia would forgive him after all that.

CH: Right? I know it's supposed to be sweet and nice that all four couples resolve their issues, but I feel like it's sad that Helena's boyfriend only loves her because he's being forced to.

EM: I think there's actually something wrong with all the couples. I don't really know what to make of the show's message on love. Maybe the message is just that part of love is a choice to be together.

CH: Later, Theseus was looking for some entertainment during his wedding, and the mechanicals were like, don't fret, we're putting on "Pyramus and Thisbe," the world's worst play.

EM: I thought it was interesting there, because in the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play, Pyramus is dead and Thisbe thinks he's asleep but he's actually dead, and that was a very fun reversal of the rest of the play where we had lots of lovers coming on stage seeing their loved one asleep and being like, oh no, they're dead. There was a certain absurdity to love, and the mechanicals were very funny.

CH: Bottom's character was an overacting person, and it felt really perfect for the role.

EM: Both Puck and Bottom did a great job of being the very silly mischievous characters, and Puck's walk was awesome. The movements, creeping around on stage and [sometimes] hopping—very mischievous. Also, the fairies climbing up from the floor was cool.

CH: The trap door on the stage was awesome. I liked [that], when people were coming up, the lighting was red, which helped emphasize the themes. Oberon and Puck are always seen [in red lighting] when doing their silly little love potion magic. The forest lighting was also cool because it was green, but mixed in with blue and purple when Titania and her fairies were on stage. When she left and it was just Oberon, it became more orange and red again.

EM: Yeah. That's so cool. I guess that also fits in with the spring-summer thing too. It almost makes me wish there was more sound sometimes.

CH: Yeah. I thought the sound was good, but it almost felt too realistic, if that makes sense.

EM: Yeah, it felt like an underutilized dimension. I would've loved to have the sound designer [Visiting Artist Evdoxia Ragkou] get more emphasis, because the visual elements were amazing.

CH: Who else was good?

EM: [Popell] was really good as Hermia.

CH: Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Lysander all did a really great job of being overly dramatic when they needed to be, which was most of the time.

EM: Yeah. My only thing with the acting was that I wish they'd spoken a bit slower sometimes. I wished that that was slightly slower so that I could follow [along better].

CH: I agree. It was impressive how natural they made Shakespeare sound, but at the same time, it sounded so natural that I didn't process the sentence [sometimes].

EM: Their emotions and their actions [conveyed a lot], so that even if you didn’t quite hear what words they were saying, you could follow the plot just by looking.

CH: Yeah. I also really liked the costumes that all the mechanicals had when they did their silly little play. Pyramus and Thisbe had these really silly faces that they were wearing.

EM: They were masks. Their faces were inside the mouths of the masks.

CH: It was so silly, and then there was the wall.

EM: The wall! So, Pyramus and Thisbe is the story “Romeo and Juliet” is based on. It’s told by Ovid. You have these two lovers living on opposite sides of a wall and falling in love through the wall, whispering their sweet nothings or whatever, and they agree to meet at a tomb at night. Thisbe gets there first, but she sees a lion there, and she’s so scared that she drops her scarf and gets colored red from the berries because it’s under a mulberry tree. When Pyramus comes later and sees the scarf, there’s no lion there anymore. He thinks, “Oh no, this must be blood on the scarf. Thisbe is dead. I’m not gonna go double check for a body or anything. Time to kill myself with a sword.” So then he’s dead and Thisbe comes in, sees he’s dead, and kills herself.

CH: In this version, the lion had a really silly main costume that kept falling off of his head. And he was a very meek lion, and then when it came time for him to actually do his lion thing, he was actually scary. I jumped.

EM: He did a really loud roar. I was impressed. The actor for the lion reminded me a lot of the Wizard of Oz.

CH: Me too! The cowardly lion. It was really cute. And the wall actor did an amazing job.

EM: I love the wall. I think we should have more plays with walls as characters.

CH: I agree. And then there was the person in the moon who was holding up a lantern and the lantern was the moon. And then the actor had a moon thing on their head.

EM: A crescent moon on their head, almost like a headband. The characters on stage came into the audience to watch the play with us, and one of them was heckling from the audience, saying: “If you’re the man in the moon, then why is the man holding the moon?” Which was such good criticism.

CH: I think that the actors watching this show within the play should be doing this cross-talk because they had great points about that play within the play and how it was terrible. But it was also the funniest thing I’ve ever seen.

EM: It was incredible. I loved when Pyramus, to show that he was crying, took a [fake] teardrop out and put it [onto his mask] under his fake eye. Just one tear for Thisbe.

CH: He was so sad. That scene was so good that the audience couldn’t stop laughing for basically the rest of the show.

EM: And it was great, too, because the actors kept looking up around the edges of their own little stage on the stage.

CH: Yeah. And then every time they got heckled and they were supposed to be dead, Pyramus would get up, go over, and talk to them about their criticism. He died like three or four times.

EM: Liang did a great job playing Bottom playing Pyramus.

CH: They killed it. Literally. I hope Wesleyan does more shows like this in the future, because this is some of the best theater I’ve seen here.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

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