

That you should think, we come not to offend,
 But with good will. To show our simple skill, 110
 That is the true beginning of our end.
 Consider then, we come but in despite.

We do not come as minding to content you,
 Our true intent is. All for your delight,
 We are not here. That you should here repent you, 115
 The actors are at hand; and by their show
 You shall know all that you are like to know.

THESEUS This fellow doth not stand upon points.

LYSANDER He hath rid his prologue like a rough colt; he knows not
 the stop. A good moral, my lord; it is not enough to speak, but to 120
 speak true.

HIPPOLYTA Indeed, he hath played on this prologue like a child on
 a recorder – a sound, but not in government.

THESEUS His speech was like a tangled chain, nothing impaired, but
 all disordered. Who is next? 125

*Enter with a Trumpeter before them [BOTTOM as] Pyramus,
 [FLUTE as] Thisbe, [SNOUT as] Wall, [STARVELING as] Moonshine and
 [SNUG as] Lion.*

BEGIN

QUINCE (*as Prologue*)

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show,
 But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.

122 this] Qq; his F 125 SD.1 *Enter... before them*] F (*Tawyer with a Trumpet before them*); not in Qq 125 SD.1-3
 BOTTOM *as... Lion*] Wells, after Qq, F (*Enter Pyramus, and Thisby, and Wall, and Moonshine, and Lyon Q1; ... Thisby,
 Wall... Q2, F*) 126 SH QUINCE (*as Prologue*)] *Prologue* Qq, F

device used to comic effect previously in Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* 3.4 (c. 1553). The Prologue is not in 'eight and six' or in 'eight and eight' (see 3.1.18-20) as promised, but in two quatrains ending with a couplet, like the continuation, 126-50.

109-10 Correctly read = 'That you should think we come, not to offend, / But with good will to show our simple skill'.

112 in despite in ill-will, to vex you.

116, 126 show This may refer merely to the appearance of the actors, but may also, as Wells notes, mean that the actors present a tableau, or dumb-show miming something of the action to come, on their entry at 125 and during the rest of the Prologue; compare Ophelia's use of the word 'show', *Ham.* 3.2.139, 143.

118 stand upon points trouble himself about punctuation (or trifling details). i.e. he is not 'punctilious'.

120 stop (1) sudden check in managing a horse, (2) mark of punctuation.

123 in government under control.

125 SD.1 *Trumpeter* Not in Qq; F has *Tawyer with a Trumpet before them*, i.e. William Tawyer who, when he died in 1625, was listed as being in the service of John Heminge, Shakespeare's fellow-actor and sharer in the King's Men. This entry presumably comes from a prompt-book, and may relate to a revival of the play; see *Textual Analysis*, p. 148 below.

127 truth... plain Varying the common proverb 'Truth will come to light' (Tilley T591).

This man is Pyramus, if you would know;
 This beauteous lady Thisbe is, certain.
 This man with lime and rough-cast doth present 130
 Wall, that vile wall which did these lovers sunder;
 And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
 To whisper – at the which let no man wonder.
 This man with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,
 Presenteth Moonshine; for, if you will know, 135
 By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn
 To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.
 This grisly beast, which Lion hight by name,
 The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,
 Did scare away, or rather did affright; 140
 And as she fled, her mantle she did fall,
 Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
 Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,
 And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain;
 Whereat with blade, with bloody, blameful blade, 145
 He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast;
 And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,
 His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,
 Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain
 At large discourse, while here they do remain. 150

END
Exeunt Quince, Bottom, Flute, Snug and Starveling

THESEUS I wonder if the lion be to speak?

DEMETRIUS No wonder, my lord; one lion may, when many asses do.

SNOUT (*as Wall*)

In this same interlude it doth befall

That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;

144 his trusty] Qq; his F 150 SD] So F (*Exit all but Wall*); *Exit* Lyon, Thysby, and Moonshine Qq (*after 152*)
 153 SH SNOUT (*as Wall*)] Wells; Wall Qq, F 154 Snout] F; Flute Qq

129 certain Accented for comic effect on the second syllable; an archaism, like 'hight' at 138.

134 lanthorn, dog An old form of 'lantern', the spelling probably arising because lanterns were commonly made of horn (so *OED*), 'lanthorn' here links with 'thorn' (see also 228–9 and n.). Starveling could have carried a stuffed dog as well as his lantern and bush of thorn, but he may have brought on a real dog, conceivably in early performances the same one that was used to notable comic effect in *TGV* 2.3 and 4.4. See 3.1.46 and n. for the legend of the man in the moon.

138–40 This is a defective quatrain, lacking a line

to rhyme with 'name', but the sense is complete; Shakespeare might count on us taking it as Quince's oversight rather than his own, as Brooks notes.

141 fall let fall, or drop.

143 tall valiant.

146 broached The original meaning is 'stabbed', but with the comic suggestion here of tapping a cask of wine or ale. The comic alliteration exaggerates a feature of the old plays Shakespeare is mocking; see, for example, *Apus and Virginia*, sig. D3^v: 'Bid him imbrue his bloody handes, in giltles bloud of mee.'

153 interlude play. As at 1.2.5.

154 Snout So F; *Flute* in Qq is an error difficult