



A Closer Look at

"These are the forgeries of jealousy..."

This speech is spoken by Titania in Act 2, Scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Who's Titania?

Titania and Oberon are the rulers of the fairy kingdom. They are married to each other, and each has their own fairy followers. A mischievous fairy called Puck follows Oberon, while Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed follow Titania. Both Titania and Oberon are very powerful, and they have deep, personal relationships with the forces of nature. In this imagined world, the state of their relationship and their moods have a powerful impact on the natural world, which affects all living things.

What's happening when this speech is spoken?

Just before Titania's first entrance, we meet Puck and one of Titania's followers. They discuss the current rift between Titania and Oberon: the two rulers are fighting for custody of a human child. Oberon wants to take the child on adventures through the forests, while Titania wants to keep the child close, crowned with flowers. Both are obstinate and refuse to spend time with one another. Just before this speech, Oberon accuses Titania of marital infidelity.

TITANIA:

These are the forgeries of jealousy:
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable:
The human mortals want their winter cheer;
No night is now with hymn or carol blest:
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original.

The speech: thought by thought

Shakespeare's language can be overwhelming, so it helps to break it down, thought by thought. Look at the speech again below, taking your time to make sense of each thought. You can find help with any unfamiliar words on the next page. Dividing a speech into thoughts is a subjective process, so this example is just one way to break it down. Would you do it differently?

These are the forgeries of jealousy:

And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,

But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
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The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable:

The human mortals want their winter cheer;

No night is now with hymn or carol blest:
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:

And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter:

hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,

And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set:

the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries,

and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:

And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;

We are their parents and original.

Words and phrases that might be new or have an unexpected meaning

- **forgeries** – false stories or lies
- **middle summer's spring** – the beginning of midsummer, the summer solstice, around June 21
- **dale** – a small valley, or the opposite of a hill
- **mead** – a meadow
- **paved fountain** – a fountain with a pebbled base
- **rushy brook** – a rushing brook or creek
- **beached margent of the sea** – a margent is the same as a margin, so in this case it's a beach
- **ringlets** – a dance in a ring or circle
- **brawls** – noisy quarrels or fighting
- **sport** – here it means amusement or fun
- **in vain** – for no reason or result
- **pelting** – petty, small, or meaningless
- **continents** – containing boundaries, so here it means riverbanks
- **yoke** – a device fitted to the neck of a working animal that allows it to pull things like ploughs
- **ploughman** – the farmer who uses a plough (also spelled 'plow')
- **green** – here it means unripe
- **ere** – before
- **fold** – a pen or enclosure for animals, especially sheep
- **fatted** – nourished or fed
- **murrion** – the flesh of animals that have died from disease
- **nine men's morris** – this can refer to morris dancing, which evolved into an open-air game
- **quaint** – this originally meant intricate or elaborate
- **wanton** – uncontrolled or wild
- **lack of tread** – without footsteps
- **undistinguishable** – all the same, without variation
- **cheer** – cheerfulness and celebration
- **hymn** – a religious song of praise
- **carol** – a song or hymn of religious joy
- **blest** – blessed
- **governess** – here it means ruler or mistress
- **rheumatic** – sickness that causes a watery discharge, like a cold
- **abound** – to prevail widely or exist in large numbers
- **thorough** – through, but pronounced a little more slowly, with the weight of two syllables
- **distemperature** – a condition of the air or elements that's harmful to human health
- **alter** – change
- **hoary-headed** – having white or grey hair and/or beard
- **crimson** – a deep, purplish red
- **old Hiems' thin and icy crown** – old Hiem is the personification of winter who wears a crown
- **odorous** – fragrant, and not in an unpleasant way
- **chaplet** – a round garland of flowers usually worn on the head
- **mockery** – done to make fun of someone
- **chiding** – scolding
- **wonted** – usual, or accustomed
- **liveries** – uniforms with specific features, sometimes worn by servants
- **mazed** – amazed
- **progeny** – offspring or children
- **debate** – strife or argument
- **dissension** – disagreement of opinion
- **original** – the origin or source of something

Making sense of the images

Titania describes many complex images. Here are some explanations of what the images might mean. Of course, other interpretations are also possible. What do you think?

**...And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind**

Titania lists the many places the fairies ordinarily dance together to the music of the whistling wind. These places include hills, valleys, forests, meadows, near fountains and streams, and on the beach.

But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.

But the fairies are not dancing at all now. Titania claims it's because of Oberon's fighting.

**Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents:**

Offended that their music is being ignored, the winds seem to take revenge: they suck contagious fogs up from the ocean and carry them to shore. There they fall in rain so heavy that all the rivers are in flood.

**The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;**

The floods have ruined the crops, and all the work that the oxen and the farmers have done has been wasted. Titania then uses an interesting metaphor: when corn is growing on the stalk, one of the final stages in its growth is when the silk emerges in a bunch of fine strands. When a young male approaches adulthood, he often starts to grow a beard. So Titania describes the young corn rotting before it can even grow a beard, or, in other words, the corn silk.

**The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;**

This bad weather has caused an outbreak of infectious disease in the sheep; the pen where they would normally graze is empty and the field is flooded. Crows are eating the diseased flesh of the dead sheep.

**The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable:**

The space on the village green where the cheerful dance/game would normally happen is filled with mud. The intricate patterns that have been cut into the grass are no longer visible because no one has been walking on them.

The human mortals want their winter cheer;

So the humans are stuck with wintery weather without any of the fun of the winter holidays.

**No night is now with hymn or carol blest:
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound**

The suffering humans aren't blessing the night with songs like they normally would, so the moon has taken offense, making the air so moist that everyone is catching a cold.

Making sense of the images (continued)

And thorough this distemperature we see The seasons alter	These conditions are messing up the seasons.
hoary-headed frosts Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose	Sometimes frost forms in crystals that resemble hair. Right now these frosts are forming on newly blooming red roses.
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds Is, as in mockery, set	And on the icy crown of the personification of winter, sits a fragrant ring of summer flower buds, mocking the situation.
the spring, the summer, The chiding autumn, angry winter, change Their wonted liveries	Titania names the seasons, describing autumn as scolding and winter as angry. But the seasons don't appear the way they should. Instead, it's as if they've changed their usual clothing.
and the mazed world, By their increase, now knows not which is which	The world is amazed and frightened of this increasing power of the seasons and can no longer tell them apart.
And this same progeny of evils comes From our debate, from our dissension	All of these problems are like children born of the fight between Titania and Oberon.
We are their parents and original.	Titania and Oberon and the source of all this trouble.



Explore the language

Explore the words

Step 1:

- Are the words simple, everyday words, or are they more extraordinary?
- If you're a hearing person, what do the words sound like? Are there any sounds that repeat?

Step 2:

- What's the effect of this language?

Explore the thoughts

Step 1:

- Are the thoughts short and direct, or long and complex? Do they ever change?

Step 2:

- What might this tell you about what's happening for the character?

Explore the images

This speech is packed with images! Choose your favourites to visualize or create in your own way. Pick an image (or more) and let it inspire your own music, movement, visual arts pieces, or creative writing.



Explore the character

"I am a spirit of no common rate; the summer still doth tend upon my state."

Titania says this when meeting a mortal character later in the play. What would it feel like if you were 'a spirit of no common rate'? What would it feel like to control the seasons? What would it feel like to be fighting with your spouse and have that be reflected in the natural world?



Explore the ideas

For three years in the mid-1590s, England had terrible weather. The summers were rainy and unseasonably cold, with lots of flooding. Crops were ruined and many people starved. This happened around the same time that Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When Shakespeare's original audiences heard Titania's speech, they would have recognized the calamity described in it, and might have been intrigued by the imaginative suggestion that it was caused by a rift in the fairy world.

Throughout history people have debated the reasons for extreme weather events. What do scientists now identify as the causes for today's severe hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, droughts, and flooding? How do people respond differently to this science?