

## Classic Works

### Lesson 2

#### Assignment Material

To Autumn

By John Keats

- Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
    Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
    Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
    With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
- To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,  
    And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
    To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
    With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

## Classical Myths

By Thomas Bulfinch

### Cupid and Psyche

A certain king and queen had three daughters. The charms of the two elder were more than common, but the beauty of the youngest was so wonderful that words cannot express its due praise. The fame of her beauty was so great that strangers from neighboring countries came in crowds to enjoy the sight, and looked on her with amazement, paying her that homage which is due only to Venus herself. In fact Venus found her altars deserted, while men turned their devotion to this young virgin. As she passed along, the people sang her praises, and strewed her way with chaplets and flowers.

This homage due only to the immortal powers offended Venus. Shaking her ambrosial locks with indignation, she exclaimed, “Am I then to be eclipsed in my honors by a mortal girl? In vain then did that royal shepherd,<sup>1</sup> whose judgment was approved by Jove himself, give me the palm of beauty over my illustrious rivals, Pallas and Juno. But she shall not so quietly usurp my honors. I will make her repent of her unlawful beauty.”

She then called her winged son Cupid, mischievous enough in his own nature, and provoked him yet more by her complaints. She pointed out Psyche to him and said, “My dear son, punish that contumacious beauty. Give your

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<sup>1</sup> The **royal shepherd** was given the task of judging which of the three goddesses—Aphrodite (Venus), Hera (Juno), or Athena (Pallas)—was deserving of the golden apple which was addressed to the most beautiful. He chose Aphrodite, and as a consequence the Trojan War began, since the goddess gave him a beautiful Greek queen named Helen as a reward for his choice.

mother a revenge as sweet as her injuries are great. Pour into that haughty girl's heart a passion for some low, mean, unworthy being, so that she may reap a mortification as great as her present joy and triumph."

Cupid prepared to obey the commands of his mother. There are two fountains in Venus's garden, one of sweet waters, the other of bitter. Cupid filled two amber vases, one from each fountain, and suspending them from the top of his quiver, hastened to the chamber of Psyche, whom he found asleep. He shed a few drops from the bitter fountain over her lips, though the sight of her almost moved him to pity, then touched her side with the point of his arrow. At the touch she awoke, and opened eyes on Cupid (himself invisible), which so startled him that in his confusion he wounded himself with his own arrow. Heedless of his wound, his whole thought now was to repair the mischief he had done, and he poured the balmy drops of joy over all her silken ringlets.

Frowned on by Venus, Psyche no longer benefited from all her charms. True, everyone looked on her beauty and everyone praised it. But no king, royal youth, or plebeian asked her hand in marriage. Her two elder sisters of moderate charms had now long been married to two royal princes. But Psyche, in her lonely room, deplored her solitude, sick of that beauty which, while it earned her a lot of flattery, had failed to awaken love.

Afraid that they had unwittingly incurred the anger of the gods, her parents consulted the oracle of Apollo, and received this answer: "The virgin is destined for the bride of no mortal lover. Her future husband awaits her on the top of the mountain. He is a monster whom neither gods nor men can resist."

This dreadful decree of the oracle filled all the people with dismay, and her parents were grief-stricken. But Psyche said, "Why, my dear parents, do you now lament me? You should rather have grieved when the people showered on me undeserved honors, and with one voice called me a Venus. I can now see that I am a victim to that name. I submit. Lead me to that rock to which my unhappy fate has destined me." Accordingly, all things being prepared, the royal maid took her place in the procession, which more resembled a funeral than a wedding ceremony, and with her parents, amid the lamentations of the people, went up the mountain, on the summit where they left her alone, and with sad hearts returned home.

While Psyche stood on the ridge of the mountain, panting with fear and with eyes full of tears, the gentle Zephyr raised her from the earth and bore her with an easy motion into a flowery dale. Her mind gradually became composed, and she laid herself down on the grassy bank to sleep. When she awoke refreshed with sleep, she looked round and beheld near by a pleasant grove of tall and stately trees. She entered it, and in the midst discovered a fountain, sending forth clear and crystal waters, and nearby, a magnificent palace whose noble front told her that it was not the work of mortal hands, but the happy retreat of some god. Drawn by admiration and wonder, she

approached the building and ventured to enter. Every object she met filled her with pleasure and amazement. Golden pillars supported the vaulted roof, and the walls were enriched with carvings and paintings representing beasts of the chase and rural scenes, adapted to delight the eye of the beholder. Proceeding onward, she saw that besides the apartments of state there were others filled with all manner of treasures, and beautiful and precious productions of nature and art.

While her eyes were thus occupied, a voice addressed her, though she saw no one: "Sovereign lady, all that you see is yours. We whose voices you hear are your servants and shall obey all your commands with our utmost care and diligence. Retire, then, to your chamber and rest on your down bed, and when you see fit, repair to the bath. Supper awaits you in the adjoining alcove when it pleases you to take your seat there."

Psyche listened to the admonitions of her vocal attendants, and after some rest and the refreshment of the bath, sat down in the alcove, where a table immediately presented itself, without any visible aid from waiters or servants, and covered with the greatest delicacies of food and the most nectareous wines. Her ears too were feasted with music from invisible performers. One sang, another played on the lute, and all closed in the wonderful harmony of a full chorus.

She had not yet seen her destined husband. He came only in the hours of darkness and fled before the dawn of morning, but his accents were full of love, and inspired a like passion in her. She often begged him to stay and let her behold him, but he would not consent. On the contrary, he ordered her not to try to see him. It was his pleasure, for the best of reasons, to keep concealed. "Why should you wish to behold me?" he said. "Have you any doubt of my love? Have you any wish ungratified? If you saw me, perhaps you would fear me, perhaps adore me, but all I ask of you is to love me. I would rather you would love me as an equal than adore me as a god."

This reasoning somewhat quieted Psyche for a time, and while the novelty lasted she felt quite happy. But at length the thought of her parents, left in ignorance of her fate, and of her sisters, precluded from sharing with her the delights of her situation, preyed on her mind and made her begin to feel her palace as but a splendid prison. When her husband came one night, she told him her distress, and at last drew from him an unwilling consent that her sisters should be brought to see her.

So, calling Zephyr, she told him her husband's commands, and he, promptly obedient, soon brought them across the mountain down to their sister's valley. They embraced her and she returned their caresses.

"Come," said Psyche, "come with me into my house and refresh yourselves with whatever your sister has to offer." Then taking their hands she led them into her golden palace, and committed them to the care of her numerous train of attendant voices, to refresh them in her baths and at her table, and to show

them all her treasures. The view of these celestial delights made them jealous. Their young sister was living in a splendor so much exceeding their own.

They asked her numberless questions, among others what sort of a person her husband was. Psyche replied that he was a beautiful youth, who generally spent the daytime in hunting on the mountains. Not satisfied with this reply, the sisters soon made her confess that she had never seen him. Then they began to fill her heart with dark suspicions.

“Call to mind,” they said, “the Pythian oracle that said that you were destined to marry a dreadful monster. The inhabitants of this valley say that your husband is a terrible and monstrous serpent, who nourishes you for a while with dainties that he may by and by devour you. Take our advice. Get a lamp and a sharp knife and hide them so that your husband won’t discover them. And when he is sound asleep, slip out of bed, bring out your lamp, and see for yourself whether what they say is true or not. If it is, don’t hesitate to cut off the monster’s head and free yourself.”

Psyche resisted these persuasions as well as she could, but they did not fail to have their effect on her mind, and when her sisters were gone, their words and her own curiosity were too strong for her to resist. So she prepared her lamp and a sharp knife, and hid them out of sight of her husband. When he had fallen into his first sleep, she silently rose and uncovering her lamp beheld not a hideous monster, but the most beautiful and charming of the gods, with his golden ringlets wandering over his snowy neck and crimson cheek, with two dewy wings on his shoulders, whiter than snow, and with shining feathers like the tender blossoms of spring. As she leaned the lamp over to have a nearer view of his face a drop of burning oil fell on the shoulder of the god, startled with which he opened his eyes and fixed them full on her. Then, without saying one word, he spread his white wings and flew out of the window. In vain Psyche tried to follow him, and fell from the window to the ground. Beholding her as she lay in the dust, Cupid stopped his flight for an instant and said, “O foolish Psyche, is this the way you repay my love? After having disobeyed my mother’s commands and made you my wife, will you think me a monster and cut off my head? But go. Return to your sisters, whose advice you seem to prefer to mine. I punish you no more than to leave you forever. Love cannot live with suspicion.” Having said this, he fled away, leaving poor Psyche face down on the ground, filling the place with her sad weeping.

When she had recovered some degree of composure, she looked around her, but the palace and gardens had vanished, and she found herself in the open field not far from the city where her sisters dwelt. She went there and told them the whole story of her misfortunes. They pretended to grieve, but inwardly rejoiced. “For now,” they said, “he will perhaps choose one of us.” With this idea, without saying a word of her intentions, each of them rose early the next morning and went up the mountains, and having reached the top,

called on Zephyr to receive her and bear her to his lord, then leaping up, and not being sustained by Zephyr, fell down the precipice and was dashed to pieces.

Meanwhile Psyche wandered day and night, without food or rest, in search of her husband. Casting her eyes on a lofty mountain having on its brow a magnificent temple, she sighed and said to herself, "Perhaps my love, my lord, lives there," and directed her steps thither.

She had no sooner entered than she saw heaps of corn, some in loose ears and some in sheaves, with mingled ears of barley. Scattered about, lay sickles and rakes, and all the instruments of harvest, without order, as if thrown carelessly out of the weary reapers' hands in the sultry hours of the day.

The pious Psyche put order to the confusion by separating and sorting everything to its proper place and kind, believing that she should not neglect any of the gods, but try by her piety to engage them all in her behalf. It was the holy Ceres' temple. Finding her so religiously employed, the goddess said, "O Psyche, you are truly worthy of our pity. I cannot protect you from the frowns of Venus, but I can teach you how best to allay her displeasure. Go, then, and voluntarily surrender yourself to your lady and sovereign, and try by modesty and submission to win her forgiveness, and perhaps her favor will restore you the husband you have lost."

Psyche obeyed the commands of Ceres and went to the temple of Venus, trying to be strong and thinking about what she should say and about how she could best appease the angry goddess, feeling that the issue was doubtful and perhaps fatal.

Venus received her with an angry countenance. "Most undutiful and faithless of servants," said she, "do you at last remember that you really have a mistress? Or have you rather come to see your sick husband, still recovering from the wound you, his loving wife, gave him? You are so ill-favored and disagreeable that the only way you can earn your lover must be by hard labor. I will test your housewifery." Then she ordered Psyche to be led to the storehouse of her temple, where there was laid up a great quantity of wheat, barley, millet, vetches, beans, and lentils prepared for food for her pigeons, and said, "Take and separate all these grains, putting all of the same kind in a parcel by themselves, and see that you get it done before evening." Then Venus departed and left her to her task.

But Psyche, in a perfect consternation at the enormous work, sat stupid and silent, without moving a finger to the inextricable heap.

While she sat despairing, Cupid stirred up the little ant, a native of the fields, to take compassion on her. The leader of the ant hill, followed by whole hosts of his six-legged subjects, approached the heap, and with the utmost diligence, taking grain by grain, they separated the pile, sorting each kind to its parcel. When it was all done, they vanished out of sight in a moment.

At the approach of twilight, Venus returned from the banquet of the gods, breathing odors and crowned with roses. Seeing the task done, she exclaimed, "This is no work of yours, wicked one, but his, whom to your own and his misfortune you have enticed." Having said this, she threw her a piece of black bread for her supper and went away.

Next morning Venus ordered Psyche to be called and said to her, "Look there at the grove over which stretches along the margin of the water. There you will find sheep feeding without a shepherd, with golden-shining fleeces on their backs. Go, fetch me a sample of that precious wool gathered from every one of their fleeces."

Psyche obediently went to the riverside, ready to do her best what she was asked. But the river god inspired the reeds with harmonious murmurs, which seemed to say, "O maiden, severely tried, do not tempt the dangerous flood, nor venture among the formidable rams on the other side. As long as they are under the influence of the rising sun, they burn with a cruel rage to destroy mortals with their sharp horns or rude teeth. But when the noontide sun has driven the cattle to the shade, and the serene spirit of the flood has lulled them to rest, you may then safely cross, and you will find the woolly gold sticking to the bushes and the trunks of the trees."

Thus the compassionate river god gave Psyche instructions how to do her task. She did what she was told, and soon returned to Venus with her arms full of the golden fleece. But she did not win the approval of her implacable mistress, who said, "I know very well it is by none of your own doings that you have succeeded in this task, and I am not satisfied yet that you have any capacity to make yourself useful. But I have another task for you. Here, take this box and go your way to the infernal shades, and give this box to Proserpine and say, 'My mistress Venus begs you to send her a little of your beauty, for in tending her sick son she has lost some of her own.' Do not be too long on your errand. I must paint myself with it to appear at the circle of the gods and goddesses this evening."

As she had to go with her own feet directly down to Erebus, Psyche now believed that her destruction was near. Therefore, to make no delay of her fate, she went to the top of a high tower to throw herself down, in order to descend the shortest way to the shades below. But a voice from the tower said to her, "Poor unlucky girl, why do you want to put an end to your days in so dreadful a manner? And what cowardice makes you sink under this last danger—you, who have been so miraculously supported in all your former dangers?" Then the voice told her how by a certain cave she might reach the realms of Pluto, and how to avoid all the dangers of the road, to pass by Cerberus, the three-headed dog, and prevail on Charon, the ferryman, to take her across the black river and bring her back again. But the voice added, "When Proserpine has given you the box filled with her beauty, make sure that, above all things, you do not open or look into it."

Encouraged by this advice, Psyche obeyed it, and travelled safely to the kingdom of Pluto. She was admitted to the palace of Proserpine. She did not accept the delicate seat or delicious banquet that was offered her, but was content with coarse bread for her food. She delivered her message from Venus and presently the box was given to her, shut and filled with the precious commodity. She then returned the way she came, and soon was glad to come out once more into the light of day.

So far, she had gotten through her dangerous task successfully, but a longing desire seized her to look into the box. She said, "Shall I, the carrier of this divine beauty, not take the least bit to put on my cheeks to appear to make myself more attractive in the eyes of my beloved husband!" She then carefully opened the box, but found nothing there of any beauty at all. Instead, she found an infernal and truly Stygian sleep, which being set free from its prison, took hold of her, and she fell down in the middle of the road, a sleepy corpse without sense or motion.

But now, recovered from his wound and no longer able to bear the absence of his beloved Psyche, Cupid slipped through the smallest crack of the window of his chamber, which happened to be left open, and flew to the spot where Psyche lay. He gathered up the sleep from her body, closed it again in the box, and waked Psyche with a light touch of one of his arrows. "Again," said he, "you have almost perished by the same curiosity. But now perform the task exactly as my mother ordered you to, and I will take care of the rest."

Then Cupid, as swift as lightning penetrated the heights of heaven. He then presented himself before Jupiter with his supplication. Jupiter lent a favoring ear, and pleaded the cause of the lovers so earnestly with Venus that he won her consent. On this he sent Mercury to bring Psyche up to the heavenly assembly, and when she arrived, handing her a cup of ambrosia, he said, "Drink this, Psyche, and be immortal; nor shall Cupid ever break away from the knot in which he is tied, but these nuptials shall be perpetual."

Thus Psyche became at last united to Cupid, and in due time they had a daughter born to them whose name was Pleasure.

## Cupid and Psyche

### Questions for Class Discussion

1. Why is Cupid sent out by his mother Venus on a mission to punish Psyche? What is the punishment?
2. Explain why Psyche is lonely.
3. What is Psyche's fate according to the oracle of Apollo? In what way is the oracle misleading? In what way is it accurate?
4. Describe the mountain top in which she is destined to meet her future husband.

5. Write down in your own words what Cupid says to Psyche when she discovers his true physical appearance.
6. What is the fate of Psyche's sisters who try to be transported by Zephyr to the mountaintop where Cupid lived?
7. What does Venus say to Psyche when, obeying Ceres' words, she seeks out Venus to win back her favor?
8. Briefly explain the three tasks that Venus gives to Psyche.
9. What is Psyche's fatal mistake in performing the third task?
10. Who rescues Psyche from death, and how specifically is the rescue accomplished?

#### Question for Class Discussion (Oral, not Written)

As stated before, an allegory is a story in which the characters, setting, and events have a figurative meaning. In some allegories the literal level of the story merely serves as a prop for the figurative level. In these allegories, the narrative focuses on the figurative level to the extent that the literal level has little meaning or sense for the reader outside a knowledge of the figurative.

Many of the myths have been interpreted allegorically, such as the story of Cupid and Psyche. *Psyche* is an English transliteration of the Greek word *ψυχή*, which means "soul" or "mind." Cupid is the Roman name for the Greek god Eros, the god of romantic love as well as passion. He was the son of Ares, the god of war, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love; thus he makes his victims fall in love with warfare using a bow and arrow. He is also pictured as blindfolded, insinuating perhaps that there does not seem to be rhyme or reason for people to fall in love. It may be obvious to you already that Psyche represents the soul, and that Cupid represents man's physical nature. Can you explain the events that occur in the myth of Cupid and Psyche allegorically?

#### **Literary Terms: Myths, Fairy Tales, Folktales, and Legends**

Although many of the classical myths read today are found in anthologies, the actual sources of the myths are varied. The myths were passed down orally from generation to generation until they were finally written down by such poets as Homer and Hesiod. It is from the writings of these great classical poets and writers that we know the stories of Apollo, Icarus, Odysseus, and the war between the gods and the Titans. One valuable reference book on the subject of myth is the poet Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*. This two-volume work not only tells the myths and their variations, but also tells their source. The source of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (not included in Graves' work, as it is Roman in source) is a mythological story that was written down by the Roman poet Ovid. The story is part of a series of myths contained in a work titled *The Metamorphosis* in which Ovid attempts to explain how things came to be. The



source of *Cupid and Psyche* is found in a work by Apuleius (born ca. 125) titled the *Golden Ass*.

Myths, fairy tales, folktales, and legends are often confused. The most realistic of these genres is the legend. Legends, like that of William Tell or Robin Hood, are often about a larger-than-life hero that defeats some villain. They are fantasy, to be sure, and often contain unrealistic incidents, yet they definitely have more down-to-earth characters and plots, and, unlike fairy tales, do not often involve magic. However, like the folktales of Hans Christian Andersen and the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, mythological stories are stories of the imagination. They involve people, places and events that evolve not solely from human experience, but from the mind.

There are several distinctive features of myths that one does not find in fairy tales and folktales. Myths originally had a religious purpose— although not exclusively. And while fairy tales and folktales deal with human events, albeit fantastical human events, the myths often deal with the gods and goddesses. In the myth of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” for example, we read of the appearance of the goddess of dawn, Aurora. In the myth of Cupid and Psyche, the deities Venus, Cupid, and Ceres make their appearance.

One other trait of myth is its keen insight into the mind of man. Freud, in fact, believed that many myths, like dreams, were wish fulfillments. The story of Orpheus, for example, is a very revealing tale of the psychology of loss. In the myth, Orpheus loses his wife. With his lyre, the musician travels down to Hades, and there he plays his sad, beautiful music. Enchanted by his song, the King of the Underworld allows Orpheus to take his wife back once more to the land of the living, but under one condition—he cannot look back at her, for once he does that, she must return to the Underworld. And so, his wife follows him, but only as a dark shadow that he cannot see. As they travel, curiosity and longing get the better of Orpheus, who peers backward only to see his wife retreat back to the silent world of Hades. In a poetic way, the myth of Orpheus reveals the psychology of grieving. Those who grieve a loss wish that their beloved could once more return to the land of the living. But only in the imagination is such a thing possible. In song or poetry the memories of the loved one are conjured up and it appears for a moment that the loved one has returned. But not for long. The loved one really is only a shadow of the mind and flees instantly when viewed in the cold, hard perspective of reality.

There are other characteristics of myth. “Pyramus and Thisbe” illustrates how myths also explain how things came to be. How did the mulberry tree berry get its rich red hue? Ovid explains it. The red hue came from the blood of a man who took his life in love for a woman. In the myth of Atlas, we have an explanation of how mountains came to be, and in the myth of the many-eyed guard Argus, we have an explanation of how peacocks got eyes on their feathers.

Not all of the myths, however, appear as pure fantasy and fabrications of the mind, and this leads our discussion of myth to yet another aspect: they often contain a grain of historical truth. Some scholars believe, for example, that behind the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is the story of the political dominance of the people of Crete over Athens years before the birth of Socrates and the Peloponnesian War.

### **Pyramus and Thisbe**

Pyramus was the handsomest youth and Thisbe the fairest maiden in all Babylonia. Their parents lived in adjoining houses; their proximity brought the young people together and their acquaintance ripened into love. They would gladly have married, but their parents forbade it. One thing, however, they could not forbid—that love should glow with equal ardor in the hearts of both. They talked to each other by signs and glances, and the fire burned more intensely for being covered up. In the wall that parted the two houses there was a crack caused by some fault in the structure. No one had noticed it before, but the lovers discovered it. (What will love not discover!) The crack allowed them to communicate, and tender messages used to pass backward and forward through the gap. As they stood, Pyramus on this side, Thisbe on that, their breaths would mingle. “Cruel wall,” they said, “why do you keep two lovers apart? But we won’t be ungrateful. We owe you, we confess, the privilege of sending loving words to willing ears.” Such words they uttered on opposite sides of the wall. And when night came and they had to say farewell, they pressed their lips on the wall, she on her side, he on his, as they could come no nearer.

Next morning, when Aurora had put out the stars, and the sun had melted the frost from the grass, they met at their usual spot. Then, after lamenting their hard fate, they agreed, that next night, when all was still, they would slip away from **watchful eyes**, leave their houses and walk out into the fields; and to insure a meeting, go to a well-known building standing without the city’s bounds, called the Tomb of Ninus, and that the one who came first should await the other at the foot of a certain tree. It was a white mulberry tree, and stood near a cool spring. All was agreed on, and they waited impatiently for the sun to go down beneath the waters and night to rise up from them. With her head covered with a veil, Thisbe cautiously left, unobserved by the family. She made her way to the monument and sat down under the tree. As she sat alone in the dim light of the evening she noticed a lioness coming near the fountain to quench her thirst, her jaws reeking with her recent slaughter. Thisbe fled at the sight and found refuge in the hollow of a rock. As she fled, she dropped her veil. After drinking at the spring, the lioness turned to retreat to the woods, and seeing the veil on the ground, tossed and rent it with her bloody mouth.

Having been delayed, Pyramus now approached the meeting place. He saw the footsteps of the lion in the sand, and the color fled from his cheeks. He then found the veil all torn and bloody. "O unfortunate girl," he said, "I have been the cause of your death! You are more worthy of life than I am, but have fallen the first victim. I will follow. I am at fault. I tempted you to this dangerous place, and was not here to guard you. Come out, you lions, from the rocks and tear this guilty body with your teeth." He took up the veil, carried it with him to the appointed tree, and covered it with kisses and tears.

"My blood will also stain your texture," he said. He then drew his sword and plunged it into his heart. The blood spurted from the wound, and tinged the white mulberries of the tree all red. It sank into the earth and reached the roots so that the red color mounted through the trunk to the fruit.

By this time Thisbe, still trembling with fear, yet wishing not to disappoint her lover, stepped cautiously out, looking anxiously for the youth, eager to tell him the danger she had escaped. When she came to the spot and saw the changed color of the mulberries, she doubted whether it was the same place. While she hesitated, she saw the form of one struggling in the agonies of death. She started back. A shudder ran through her frame as a ripple on the face of the still water when a sudden breeze sweeps over it. But as soon as she recognized her lover, she screamed and beat her breast, embracing the lifeless body, pouring tears into its wounds, and imprinting kisses on the cold lips. "O Pyramus," she cried, "what has done this? Answer me, Pyramus. It is your own Thisbe that speaks. Hear me, dearest, and lift that drooping head!" At the name of Thisbe, Pyramus opened his eyes, then closed them again. She saw her veil stained with blood and the scabbard empty of its sword. "Your own hand has slain you, and for my sake," she said. "I too can be brave for once, and my love is as strong as yours. I will follow you in death, for I have been the cause. And death which alone could part us shall not prevent me from joining you. And you, unhappy parents of us both, do not deny us our united request. As love and death have joined us, let one tomb contain us. And you, tree, retain the marks of slaughter. Let your berries still serve for memorials of our blood." So saying, she plunged the sword into her breast. Her parents ratified her wish, as did the gods. The two bodies were buried in one tomb, and the tree ever after brought forth purple berries, as it does to this day.

## Pyramus and Thisbe

### Multiple Choice Reading Questions

1. What is suggested by the statement made in the first paragraph of the story, "What will love not discover"?
  - a) Love makes people do strange things.
  - b) People will do anything for love.

- c) Love is an unsolved mystery that requires unravelling.
  - d) There are no bounds to the extent of a woman's love.
  - e) Young people are foolish in their love.
2. Which of the following literary device is used in the narration of the wall and Aurora (dawn)? (See "Literary terms: Figures of Speech," below)
- a) apostrophe and personification
  - b) hyperbole
  - c) metonymy
  - d) understatement
  - e) wordplay
3. What figure of speech is "watchful eyes" (printed in bold, mentioned in the second paragraph) an example of and what does it refer to? (See "Literary terms: Figures of Speech," below)
- a) It is an example of a metaphor and represents the young lovers.
  - b) It is an example of a metaphor and represents the daylight.
  - c) It is an example of metonymy and represents the townspeople.
  - d) It is an example of synecdoche and represents the young lovers.
  - e) It is an example of synecdoche and represents the parents.
4. What in essence is the cause of Pyramus's death?
- a) jealousy
  - b) resentment
  - c) a misapprehension
  - d) anger
  - e) unrequited love
5. Why does Thisbe end her life?
- a) despair
  - b) resentment
  - c) a misapprehension
  - d) religious feeling
  - e) unrequited love

#### Questions for Class Discussion

1. Explain why Pyramus and Thisbe cannot love each other.
2. What ironically keeps the two young people apart and yet brings them together?
3. Why does Thisbe flee from their meeting place and what does she leave behind?

4. What does Pyramus find when he arrives at the meeting place and how does he react to his discovery?
5. According to the myth, how do the berries from the mulberry tree turn red?

### Literary Terms: Figures of Speech

When someone uses a figure of speech, or figurative language, he is not meaning exactly what he says. For example, saying “John’s stronger than an ox” would mean not that John is a beast of burden, but that he has much physical strength. This figure of speech, which involves exaggeration, is called *hyperbole*. Saying something like, “I told you a million times not to touch my things on the desk” would be another example of hyperbole.

Another figure of speech is *apostrophe*, which involves a speaker talking to an inanimate object or to somebody that cannot hear or answer. One of the most famous example of apostrophe can be found in John Donne’s sonnet “Death, Be Not Proud.” The speaker in the poem tells death,

*. . . be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so,  
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures bee,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee doe go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better then thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, wee wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.*

The most famous use of apostrophe in the Bible perhaps is Paul’s conclusion to his letter to the Corinthians in which he writes, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?” In this example of apostrophe, as in Donne’s, the speaker is talking to the personification of an idea, namely death. Personification involves giving human characteristics to nonhuman things, as in the prophet Isaiah’s utterance, “For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Other figures of speech that are important to know are understatement, metonymy, and synecdoche. *Understatement* involves not expressing the full of extent of what is being referred to, often with a humorous effect. If a student receives a report card littered with “F’s” and says to his parents, “I guess I

didn't do too well," his statement would be classified as an understatement. *Metonymy* involves referring to something indirectly by its association, such as in the statement, "The crown made a decree" for "The king made a decree." Like metonymy, *synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which something is called by another thing; however, in synecdoche, that thing is a part of a whole, such as calling a car "a set of wheels." Wheels are only a part of a car, yet in the statement, the whole car is meant. Synecdoche works the other way around as well. It also involves referring to the whole when the part is meant, as in the statement, "The town went out to the show." In this instance, all the people of the town is stated but not meant.