



CAPES  
CONCOURS EXTERNE ET CAFEP

**Section : LANGUES VIVANTES ETRANGERES : ANGLAIS**

**COMMENTAIRE DIRIGE**

Durée : 5 heures

## Commentaire dirigé. Proposition n°1

**Comment on the following text. You will be expected to bring out its main themes with specific reference to literary form.**

### **- Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

*Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, and Philostrate, with others*

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour  
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in  
Another moon—but O, methinks, how slow  
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires  
Like to a stepdame or a dowager 5  
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;  
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;  
And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
New bent in heaven, shall behold the night 10  
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate,  
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments.  
Awake the pert<sup>1</sup> and nimble spirit of mirth.  
Turn melancholy forth to funerals—  
The pale companion is not for our pomp. 15

*[Exit PHILOSTRATE]*

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,  
And won thy love doing thee injuries.  
But I will wed thee in another key—  
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

*Enter Egeus and his daughter Hermia, and Lysander and Demetrius*

EGEUS

Happy be Theseus, our renownèd Duke. 20

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus. What's the news with thee?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I, with complaint  
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.—  
Stand forth, Demetrius.—My noble lord,  
This man hath my consent to marry her.— 25  
Stand forth, Lysander.—And, my gracious Duke,  
This hath bewitched the bosom of my child.  
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,  
And interchanged love tokens with my child.  
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung 30  
With feigning voice verses of feigning love,  
And stol'n the impression of her fantasy  
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds<sup>2</sup>, conceits,  
Knacks<sup>3</sup>, trifles, nose-gays<sup>4</sup>, sweetmeats—messengers

1 lively, brisk (Most notes taken from Peter Holland's Oxford Shakespeare edition of the play)

2 showy toys or ornaments

3 trinkets

4 bunches of flowers

Of strong prevailment <sup>5</sup> in unhardened youth.	35
With cunning hast thou filched <sup>6</sup> my daughter's heart,	
Turned her obedience, which is due to me,	
To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,	
Be it so she will not here, before your grace	
Consent to marry with Demetrius,	40
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:	
As she is mine, I may dispose of her—	
Which shall be either to this gentleman	
Or to her death, according to our law	45
Immediately provided in that case.	
THESEUS	
What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid.	
To you your father should be as a god,	
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one	
To whom you are but as a form in wax,	
By him imprinted, and within his power	50
To leave the figure or disfigure it.	
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.	
HERMIA	
So is Lysander.	
THESEUS                    In himself he is;	
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,	
The other must be held the worthier.	55
HERMIA	
I would my father looked but with my eyes.	
THESEUS	
Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.	
HERMIA	
I do entreat your grace to pardon me.	
I know not by what power I am made bold,	
Nor how it may concern my modesty	60
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts,	
But I beseech your grace that I may know	
The worst that may befall me in this case	
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.	
THESEUS	
Either to die the death, or to abjure	65
For ever the society of men.	
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires;	
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,	
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,	
You can endure the livery of a nun,	70
For aye <sup>7</sup> to be in shady cloister mewèd <sup>8</sup> ,	
To live a barren sister all your life,	
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.	
Thrice blessèd they that master so their blood	
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;	75
But earthlier happy is the rose distilled	
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,	
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.	
HERMIA	
So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,	
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up	80
Unto his lordship, whose unwishèd yoke	

5 power to gain influence or dominance

6 stolen

7 for ever

8 caged

My soul consents not to give sovereignty.	
THESEUS	
Take time to pause, and by the next new moon—	
The sealing day betwixt my love and me	
For everlasting bond of fellowship—	85
Upon that day either prepare to die	
For disobedience to your father's will,	
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,	
Or on Diana's altar to protest <sup>9</sup>	
For aye austerity and single life.	90
DEMETRIUS	
Relent, sweet Hermia; and, Lysander, yield	
Thy crazèd title to my certain right.	
LYSANDER	
You have her father's love, Demetrius;	
Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry him.	
EGEUS	
Scornful Lysander, true, he hath my love;	95
And what is mine my love shall render him,	
And she is mine, and all my right of her	
I do estate unto Demetrius.	
LYSANDER [to Theseus]	
I am, my lord, as well derived as he,	
As well possessed. My love is more than his,	100
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked,	
If not with vantage, as Demetrius';	
And—which is more than all these boasts can be—	
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.	
Why should not I then prosecute my right?	105
Demetrius—I'll avouch it to his head—	
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,	
And won her soul, and she, sweet lady, dotes,	
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,	
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.	110
THESEUS	
I must confess that I have heard so much,	
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;	
But, being over-full of self-affairs,	
My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come,	
And come, Egeus. You shall go with me.	115
I have some private schooling for you both.	
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself	
To fit your fancies to your father's will,	
Or else the law of Athens yields you up—	
Which by no means we may extenuate—	120
To death or to a vow of single life.	
Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love?	
Demetrius and Egeus, go along.	
I must employ you in some business	
Against <sup>10</sup> our nuptial, and confer with you	125
Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.	
EGEUS	
With duty and desire we follow you.	

*Exeunt all but Lysander and Hermia*

**William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/6), 1.1.1-127**

---

9 vow

10 in preparation for

## ANNEXE 1 - THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY<sup>11</sup>

**Theseus**, Duke of Athens  
**Hippolyta**, Queen of the Amazons  
**Egeus**, father of Hermia  
**Hermia**, daughter of Egeus, in love with Lysander  
**Lysander**, in love with Hermia  
**Demetrius**, suitor to Hermia  
**Helena**, in love with Demetrius  
**Philostrate**, one of Theseus' lords  
Other lords attending Theseus

**Peter Quince**, a carpenter  
**Nick Bottom**, a weaver  
**Francis Flute**, a bellows-mender  
**Tom Snout**, a tinker  
**Snug**, a joiner  
**Robin Starveling**, a tailor

**Oberon**, King of Fairies  
**Titania**, Queen of Fairies<sup>12</sup>  
**Robin Goodfellow**, a puck  
**Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, Mustardseed**, fairies of Titania's  
Two other fairies of Titania's  
Other fairies attending Oberon

## ANNEXE 2 - AMAZONS

Amazons appeared throughout the range of Elizabethan writing, embodying a range of characteristics threatening men: female sexual desire, self-mutilation, the rejection and subjugation of men, disobedience to male dominance through their effective self-governance, uncontrolled female will, female strength and success in the male skills of war. Their traditional dress, armed with axes and shields, wearing buskins and with one breast exposed or amputated, specified their intrusiveness from a distant land into accepted conventions of male control. Even the location of their country was significant; it was usually placed close to Scythia, a byword for barbarism.

**Peter Holland, Introduction to the Oxford Shakespeare edition of the play, p. 50.**

## ANNEXE 3 - COURTSHIP

Alongside the sources in Chaucer and romance [...], the lovers need to be set against the courtship world of Elizabethan England. For the only crucial difference between the processes that confront the lovers in the play and those that would have confronted almost all the young people in the audience at the Globe lies in the vehemence and absolute nature of Egeus' interdiction. The initiative with establishing a couple, the definition of a relationship leading towards marriage, lay with young people in all but the very highest reaches of early modern English society. They were subject to the advice and consent of parents and kin, their 'friends', but the consent was rarely withheld, provided there was no financial or class impediment [...]. Lysander's anger and surprise at Egeus' actions would match comfortably with Elizabethan conventional behaviour.

**Peter Holland, Introduction to the Oxford Shakespeare edition of the play, p. 60-61.**

## ANNEXE 4 - Richard Brathwait, *The English Gentlewoman* (1631)

Silence in a Woman is a moving Rhetoricke, winning most, when in words it wooeth least. [...] [In women] bashfull silence is an ornament [...]. It suites not with her honour, for a young woman to be prolocutor. But especially, when either men are in presence, or ancient Matrons, to whom shee owes a civill reverence, it will become her to tip her tongue with silence.

---

<sup>11</sup> Peter Holland, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (1994)

<sup>12</sup> a malicious or mischievous demon or spirit

## Commentaire dirigé. Proposition n°2

**Comment on the following text, paying special attention to Burke's attitude to democracy in the context of the French Revolution.**

These gentlemen of the Old Jewry, in all their reasonings on the Revolution of 1688, have a Revolution which happened in England about forty years before, and the late French Revolution, so much before their eyes, and in their hearts, that they are constantly confounding all the three together. It is necessary that we should separate what they confound. We must recall their erring fancies to the *acts* of the Revolution which we revere, for the discovery of its true *principles*. If the *principles* of the Revolution of 1688 are anywhere to be found, it is in the statute called the *Declaration of Right*. In that most wise, sober, and considerate declaration, drawn up by great lawyers and great statesmen, and not by warm and inexperienced enthusiasts, not one word is said, nor one suggestion made, of a general right 'to choose our own *governors*; to cashier them for misconduct; and to *form* a government for *ourselves*.'

This Declaration of Right (the act of the 1st of William and Mary, sess. 2, ch. 2) is the cornerstone of our constitution, as reinforced, explained, improved, and in its fundamental principles for ever settled. It is called 'An Act for declaring the rights and liberties of the subject, and for *settling* the *succession* of the crown.' You will observe, that these rights and this succession are declared in one body, and bound indissolubly together.

A few years after this period, a second opportunity offered for asserting a right of election to the crown. On the prospect of a total failure of issue from King William, and from the Princess, afterwards Queen Anne, the consideration of the settlement of the crown, and of a further security for the liberties of the people, again came before the legislature. Did they this second time make any provision for legalizing the crown on the spurious revolution principles of the Old Jewry? No. They followed the principles which prevailed in the Declaration of Right; indicating with more precision the persons who were to inherit in the Protestant line. This act also incorporated, by the same policy, our liberties, and an hereditary succession in the same act. Instead of a right to choose our own governors, they declared that the succession in that line (the Protestant line drawn from James the First) was absolutely necessary 'for the peace, quiet, and security of the realm,' and that it was equally urgent on them 'to maintain a *certainty in the succession* thereof, to which the subjects may safely have recourse for their protection.' Both these acts, in which are heard the unerring, unambiguous oracles of revolution policy, instead of countenancing the delusive, gipsy predictions of a 'right to choose our governors,' prove to a demonstration how totally adverse the wisdom of the nation was from turning a case of necessity into a rule of law.

Unquestionably there was at the Revolution, in the person of King William, a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession; but it is against all genuine principles of jurisprudence to draw a principle from a law made in a special case, and regarding an individual person. *Privilegium non transit in exemplum*. If ever there was a time favourable for establishing the principle, that a king of popular choice was the only legal king, without all doubt it was at the Revolution. Its not being done at that time is a proof that the nation was of opinion it ought not to be done at any time. There is no person so completely ignorant of our history as not to know, that the majority in parliament of both parties were so little disposed to anything resembling that principle, that at first they were determined to place the vacant crown, not on the head of the Prince of Orange, but on that of his wife Mary, daughter of King James, the eldest born of the issue of that king, which they acknowledged as undoubtedly his. It would be to repeat a very trite story, to recall to your memory all those circumstances which demonstrated that their accepting King William was not properly a *choice*; but to all those who did not wish, in effect, to recall King James, or to deluge their country in blood, and again to bring their religion, laws, and liberties into the peril they had just escaped, it was an act of *necessity*, in the strictest moral sense in

which necessity can be taken.

(...)

The two houses, in the act of King William, did not thank God that they had found a fair opportunity to assert a right to choose their own governors, much less to make an election the *only lawful* title to the crown. Their having been in a condition to avoid the very appearance of it, as much as possible, was by them considered as a providential escape. They threw a politic, well-wrought veil over every circumstance tending to weaken the rights, which in the meliorated order of succession they meant to perpetuate; or which might furnish a precedent for any future departure from what they had then settled for ever. Accordingly, that they might not relax the nerves of their monarchy, and that they might preserve a close conformity to the practice of their ancestors, as it appeared in the declaratory statutes of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, in the next clause they vest, by recognition, in their Majesties, *all* the legal prerogatives of the crown, declaring, 'that in them they are most *fully*, rightfully, and *entirely* invested, incorporated, united, and annexed.' In the clause which follows, for preventing questions, by reason of any pretended titles to the crown, they declare (observing also in this the traditionary language, along with the traditionary policy of the nation, and repeating as from a rubric the language of the preceding acts of Elizabeth and James), that on the preserving 'a *certainty* in the SUCCESSION thereof, the unity, peace, and tranquillity of this nation doth, under God, wholly depend.'

They knew that a doubtful title of succession would but too much resemble an election; and that an election would be utterly destructive of the 'unity, peace, and tranquillity of this nation,' which they thought to be considerations of some moment. To provide for these objects, and therefore to exclude for ever the Old Jewry doctrine of 'a right to choose our own Governors,' they follow with a clause containing a most solemn pledge, taken from the preceding act of Queen Elizabeth, as solemn a pledge as ever was or can be given in favour of an hereditary succession, and as solemn a renunciation as could be made of the principles by this society imputed to them. 'The Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons, do, in the name of all the people aforesaid, most humbly and faithfully submit *themselves, their heirs and posterities for ever*; and do faithfully promise that they will stand to, maintain, and defend their said Majesties, and also the limitation of the crown, herein specified and contained, to the utmost of their powers,' etc., etc.

So far is it from being true, that we acquired a right by the Revolution to elect our king's, that if we had possessed it before, the English nation did at that time most solemnly renounce and abdicate it, for themselves, and for all their posterity for ever. (...)

Edmund Burke, *Considerations on the Revolution in France* (1790)

## Annexes

### 1. Glossary

**Old Jewry.** A street in the City of London, deriving its name from the presence of a Jewish ghetto in the neighbourhood in the 11th to 13th centuries. There was a Presbyterian chapel in Old Jewry in 1796, where Richard Price preached.

**Declaration of Right[s].** The Bill of Rights or Declaration of Rights is an act passed by the Parliament of England in December 1689. It was a re-statement in statutory form of the Declaration of Rights, presented by the Convention Parliament to William and Mary in the previous February, inviting them to become joint sovereigns of England. It enumerates certain rights to which citizens and permanent residents of a constitutional monarchy were thought to be entitled in the late 17th century, asserting in particular subjects' right to petition the monarch, as well as to bear arms in defense. It also sets out—or, in the view of its drafters, restates—certain constitutional requirements of the Crown to seek the consent of the people, as represented in parliament.

### 2. Chronology

**1642-51: English civil wars,** a series of armed conflicts and political machinations between Parliamentarians and Royalists.

The wars led to the trial and execution in 1649 of King Charles I, the exile of his son, Charles II, and the replacement of English monarchy, first with the Commonwealth of England (1649-53), and then with a Protectorate (1653-59), under Oliver Cromwell's personal rule. Constitutionally, the wars set the precedent that an English monarch cannot govern without Parliament's consent, although this concept was established only with the Glorious Revolution later in the century.

**1688: Glorious Revolution.** Overthrow in 1688 of King James II of England and VII of Scotland by a union of Parliamentarians with an invading army led by the Dutch stadtholder William III of Orange-Nassau, who as a result ascended the English throne as William III of England.

### 3. People

**Anne** (1665-1714). Became Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland on 8 March 1702, succeeding her brother-in-law, William. Her Roman Catholic father, James II, was forcibly deposed in the Revolution of 1688; her brother-in-law and her sister then became joint monarchs as William III and II and Mary II. Popular histories usually refer to their joint reigns as those of "William and Mary". After Mary's death in 1694, William continued as sole monarch until his own death in 1702.

**Burke**, Edmund (1729-97). Irish statesman, author, orator, political theorist and philosopher who,

after relocating to Great Britain, served for many years in the British House of Commons as a member of the Whig party. He is mainly remembered for his opposition to the French Revolution. This led to him becoming the leading figure within the conservative faction of the Whig party, which he dubbed the "Old Whigs", in opposition to the pro-French-Revolution "New Whigs" led by Charles James Fox.

In January 1790 Burke read Dr. Richard Price's sermon of 4 November 1789 to the Revolution Society, called *A Discourse On the Love of our Country*. The Revolution Society had been founded to commemorate the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In this sermon Price claimed that the principles of the Glorious Revolution included "the right to choose our own governors, to cashier them for misconduct, and to frame a government for ourselves". The *Reflections on the Revolution in France* were Burke's reply. The book was an immediate best-seller, going through ten printings and selling approximately 17,500 copies by the end of 1790. The French translation ran to ten printings by June 1791.

**James VI and I (1566-1625).** Ruled in Scotland as James VI from 24 July 1567, when he was only one year old. On 24 March 1603, as James I, he succeeded the last Tudor monarch of England and Ireland, Elizabeth I (1533-1603), who died without issue. He then ruled England, Scotland and Ireland until his death.

**William III (1650-1702).** Born a member of the House of Orange-Nassau, William won the English, Scottish and Irish crowns following the Glorious Revolution, in which his uncle and father-in-law, James II, was deposed.