

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Author: The author of this play is William Shakespeare.

Characters:

Theseus: Duke of Athens

Egeus: father of Hermia

Lysander and Demetrius: young men in love with Hermia

Hippolyta: queen of the Amazons

Hermia: daughter of Egeus, in love with Lysander

Elena: in love with Demetrius

Oberon: king of fairies and elves

Titania: queen of fairy and elves

Puck: a mischievous sprite

INTRODUCTION:

The composition date of A Midsummer Night's Dream is difficult to establish. This play marked the return of Shakespeare to the theatrical activity, which had been closed from the summer of 1592 up to the first months of 1594 because of the plague. We believe that A Midsummer Night's Dream was written between 1593 and 1596 and probably represented during the marriage celebrations of the English aristocracy.

PLOT

The book begins with the wedding of Theseus, Duke of Athens, with Ippolita, Queen of the Amazons.

For the occasion, Egeus, arrives with his daughter, Hermia, and two men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus hopes that Hermia will marry Demetrius, who is already in love with her, but

Hermia loves Lysander. The father threatens to punish his daughter with the most severe punishment provided by law if he does not respect his will and grants her time until marriage to decide his fate. Hermia and Lysander decide to escape from Athens the following night, to get married at Lysander 's uncle's house. They communicate the plan to Helena, a friend of Hermia, who had been engaged to Demetrius and still loves him. Hoping to regain his love, Helena reveals the secret to Demetrius. Demetrius secretly follows the couple in the wood and he is followed by Helena.

Also, two groups of characters are found in the wood. The first is composed by fairies, including Oberon and Titania, (king and queen of the fairies) arrived from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a group of Athenian artisans who try to perform a play in front of the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania disagree on the fate of an Indian prince who has been entrusted to Titania. Oberon sends Puck (a sprite) to take a magic flower, whose juice can be applied to the eyes of a sleeping person to make him/her fall in love with the first person he/she will see when wakes up and to use it onto Titania's eyelids. He also orders to put this potion on the eyes of Demetrius. In the woods Puck meets Lysander and Hermia and, believing that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke to him, puts the potion on his eyes. When he wakes up, he sees Helena first, and falls madly in love with her, abandoning Hermia. At this point, Helena believes they are making fun of her. Hermia challenges Helena in a fight, and the same Demetrius and Lysander; but Puck confuses them mimicking their voices and making them lose in the forest.

When Titania wakes up, the first person that she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, who has a donkey face due a Puck's joke. Titania, under the influence of the enchantment of the magic flower, falls in love with him.

At the end of the night, things come back to normal (Demetrius loves Helena, Lysander loves Hermia and Titania loves Oberon).

And in the morning Theseus and Hippolyta find lovers sleeping in the forest. They ask some questions to them and decide to bring them back to Athens to get married.

After the group wedding, the couples enjoy the comedy, performed by Bottom and his companions (a comic and funny version of the story between Pyramus and Thisbe). When the performance is over the young people retire and the fairies come to bless couples.

Only Puck remains, standing to ask for forgiveness:

**« *If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended.
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear. »***

THEMES

LOVE'S DIFFICULTIES

"The course of true love never did run smooth, "

says Lysander, articulating one of the most important themes of a Midsummer Night's Dream. The most of the conflicts in the drama stems from the problems of romance, and although the play involves a number of romantic elements, it is not really a love story.

THE MAGIC

Shakespeare uses magic to integrate the power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a supernatural world.

Although magic creates chaos, in the end it will solve all the problems.

THE DREAM

Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the dominance of a dream-like setting

***"Four days will quickly steep themselves in night,
Four nights will quickly dream away the time"***

The theme of dreaming occurs mainly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which they are involved:

***"I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what
dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream,"***

Bottom says

Shakespeare is also interested in the special dimension of dreams, in how events occur without explanation and time loses its normal sense of flow; he tries to recreate this dreamlike atmosphere in the play through the participation of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of a dream to the audience, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is important to the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it helps render the play more a fantastical experience than a heavy drama.

THE CONTRAST

The contrast is the basic building block of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Every character and every scene presented in the play has its contrast, for example:

- Helena is tall, Hermia is short;
- Puck plays pranks, Bottom is the victim of pranks.

Furthermore, the three main groups of characters are designed to powerfully contrast one another:

- the fairies are graceful and magical, while the craftsmen are clumsy and earthy; -the craftsmen are merry, while the lovers are serious.

The biggest contrast is between the beautiful Titania and the donkey's face of Bottom.

SYMBOLS

THESEUS AND HIPPOLYTA

Shakespeare uses Theseus and Hippolyta, to represent order and stability, in contrast to the uncertainty, instability and darkness of most of the play. While an important element of the dream realm is that one has no control over one's environment, Theseus and Hippolytus always have full control over them.

THE LOVE POTION

The love potion is a symbol of the irrational and unpredictable nature of love, which can lead to bizarre behavior and it cannot be countered.

THE CRAFTSMEN'S PLAY

The play within the play of the artisans is a sort of symbol for a Midsummer Night's Dream: a tragic story that involves powerful emotions made exhilarating by its comic presentation performed within the main story.

Text analysis by

Chiappa Alessio

Luca Piercecchi

Michele Pieroni

Brian Pescaglino

Gianluca Tomei

Presentation by

Sara Canini

Roberto Ferretti

Beatrice Lana

Silvia Piagentini

Gabriele Tortelli

4B ITT FERRARI

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