

LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 4

SUBJECT: Literature-in-English
TOPIC: 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' Cont'd
CLASS: SS3
WEEK: 4

Themes

1. Love's Difficulty

In the story, love is portrayed as a complex and often chaotic force, leading to irrational decisions and challenging relationships. Magic, in the form of love potions and mischievous fairies, further complicates matters. The play features love triangles, conflicts between parental objections and romantic desires, and even discord among powerful beings like Oberon and Titania. Despite the challenges, the play ultimately suggests that love has the potential to unite people and create harmony.

2. Magic

The fairies' magic, which brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, is another element central to the fantastic atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Although the misuse of magic causes chaos, as when Puck mistakenly applies the love potion to Lysander's eyelids, magic ultimately resolves the play's tensions by restoring love to balance among the quartet of Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom's head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laboriousness and gracelessness of the craftsmen's attempt to stage their play.

3. Dreams

As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; they are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the prevalence of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout (1.i.7–8). The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which these characters 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, unable to fathom the magical happenings that have affected him as anything but the result of slumber.

Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in how events occur without explanation, time loses its normal sense of flow, and the impossible occurs as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate

this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, 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 crucial to the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama..

4. Jealousy

The theme of jealousy operates in both the human and fairy realms in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Jealousy plays out most obviously among the quartet of Athenian lovers, who find themselves in an increasingly tangled knot of misaligned desire. Helena begins the play feeling jealous of Hermia, who has managed to snag not one but two suitors. Helena loves Demetrius, who in turn feels jealous of his rival for Hermia's affections, Lysander. When misplaced fairy mischief leads Lysander into an amorous pursuit of Helena, the event drives Hermia into her own jealous rage. Jealousy also extends into the fairy realm, where it has caused a rift between the fairy king and queen. As we learn in Act II, King Oberon and Queen Titania both have eyes for their counterparts in the human realm, Theseus and Hippolyta. Titania accuses Oberon of stealing away with "the bouncing Amazon" (II.i.). Oberon accuses Titania of hypocrisy, since she also loves another: "How canst thou thus for shame, Titania, / Glance at my credit with Hippolyta, / Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?" (II.i.). This jealous rift incites Oberon to command Puck to fetch the magic flower that eventually causes so much chaos and confusion for the Athenian lovers.

5. Mischief

In *Midsummer*, mischief is primarily associated with the forest and the fairies who reside there. Accordingly, the fairies of traditional British folklore are master mischief makers. The trickster fairy Puck (also known as Robin Goodfellow) is the play's chief creator of mischief. Puck's reputation as a troublemaker precedes him, as suggested in the first scene of Act II, where an unnamed fairy recognizes Puck and rhapsodizes about all the tricks Puck has played on unsuspecting humans. Although in the play Puck only retrieves and uses the magical flower at Oberon's request, his mistakes in implementing Oberon's plan have the most chaotic effects. Puck also makes mischief of his own accord, as when he transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. Puck is also the only character who explicitly talks about his love of mischief. When in Act III he declares that "those things do best please me / That befall preposterously" (III.ii.), he effectively announces a personal philosophy of mischief and an appreciation for turning things on their head.

Characters and their roles

1. Theseus

- a) Theseus is the Duke of Athens, representing the authority and order in the play.
- b) He is set to marry Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons, and his upcoming wedding serves as the backdrop for much of the play's events.
- c) He is the symbol of the aristocracy and power, and he appears as a rational and authoritative figure in the play. In contrast to the more whimsical and magical events that occur in the forest.

2. Hippolyta

- a) Hippolyta is the Queen of the Amazons and she represents conquered love.
- b) She was initially captured by Theseus and her upcoming marriage symbolizes the resolution of conflicts and the triumph of love over conflict and war.
- c) Hippolyta's character evolves from a captured queen to a willing bride, reflecting the theme of transformation in the play.

3. Hermia

- a) Hermia is a young woman in love with Lysander, but her father, Egeus, wants her to marry Demetrius.
- b) She is a central character in the play, representing true love and the defiance of societal expectations.
- c) Her determination to marry Lysander rather than obey her father's wishes drives much of the romantic and comedic conflict in the story.

4. Lysander

- a) Lysander is Hermia's true love and a key character in the romantic entanglement of the play.
- b) He is willing to go to great lengths, even fleeing into the forest, to be with Hermia and pursue their love.
- c) His character embodies the theme of passionate and determined love.

5. Demetrius

- a) Demetrius is the man Egeus, Hermia's father, wishes his daughter should marry.
- b) In the play, he is initially in love with Hermia but his affections later shift to Helena due to a magical love potion.
- c) He represents the fickle nature of love and how it can be influenced and redirected.
- d) Demetrius undergoes a transformation from a pursuer of Hermia to a lover of Helena because of Puck's magic.

6. Helena

- a) Helena is Hermia's friend and initially in love with Demetrius, despite his rejection of her.
- b) She represents requited love and the feeling of being unwanted.
- c) Helena's character highlights the complexities of love and how it can lead to jealousy and insecurities, as she becomes entangled in the romantic confusion in the forest.

Techniques used in the play

- 1. Pun and wordplay
- 2. Metaphor and imagery
- 3. Irony
- 4. Comic relief
- 5. Symbolism
- 6. Repetition
- 7. Soliloquy and asides
- 8. foreshadowing