

Phases in the play

Literature, William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a journey through the three phases of a Shakespearean festive comedy. The audience is taken from unhappiness to confusion to finally reunion. Anything is possible in this story and the reader must engage in verisimilitude in order to fully enjoy this story. Verisimilitude is a willing suspension of disbelief. For instance, within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, fairies interact with humans at the same level. The first phase of a Shakespearean festive comedy emits feelings of unhappiness and frustration. This can be caused by anything from separation of loved ones to unrequited love to cruel people being in control. At the end of the first phase, a feeling of escape comes over the characters and audience. It is time to get out of the cloud of unhappiness that has set over the land and sit back and have some fun. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the opening act shows many signs of frustration and leaves the characters all feeling upset, edgy, and impatient. Helena experiences unrequited love from Demetrius, Titania won't grant Oberon's request and Theseus is growing ever impatient as he must wait to enjoy his soon to be bride until their marriage in a couple of days. The transition that takes place begins after Helena chases Demetrius into the forest. While in the forest, Puck gets a hold of the young lovers and the journey enters into the second phase. The second mood that comes over a Shakespearean festive comedy is confusion in a comedic way. This is the point where readers have to have verisimilitude. Anything goes and anything is possible including disguises, odd love triangles, or pranks. In the end of the confusion real lessons are learned and there comes a point where enough is enough. Things are taken too far and it stops being funny. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* love potions

are responsible for phase two. Puck, the King fairy's personal assistant, tries to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena, but instead sprinkles the love potion on the wrong man's eyes making "some true love turn'd, and not a false turn'd true". He potions Lysander who is actually in love with Hermia, but not after the potion. He also potions Oberon's wife at his request since they are mad at each other, and makes her fall in love with a man who Puck turned into a donkey. At first, the whole scenario is quite funny as the audience watches Helena get more and more confused all the while that Titania is cuddling Bottom's furry, large ears. However, tension quickly mounts and the reader experiences an overwhelming feeling of enough, just as "a surfeit of the sweetest things the deepest loathing to the stomach brings". It becomes too much of a good thing and the play needs to progress into the third phase that will fix all the madness. This point mainly is reached when Helena and Hermia go at each other's throats. The final phase of a Shakespearean festive comedy is one of relief and reckoning. There is a creation of a new and better world when the play is finished. Things taking place in the third phase include reunions, a sense of healing, love fulfilled, or cruel people either having a change of heart or leaving. This is the best phase because the world is happier and everything is set right. This happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Puck corrects his mistake with the potion and puts the true love between Hermia and Lysander back together. He also creates love between Helena and Demetrius. Also, at Oberon's request, he takes the potion off Titania who is thrilled to see her Oberon again. Puck then turns the donkey back into a man. The last piece of the puzzle is Theseus who gets married during this phase and is finally able to

enjoy his wedding night. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* exemplifies the three phases of a comedy and plays with two other themes within the play. The first theme being the illusion of dream versus reality where the audience finds themselves questioning what was real and what was a dream. The potion state of the young lovers exhibit part of the dream experience. The second theme, as stated by David Devington is, " This play within a play focuses our attention on the familiarly Shakespearean metaphor of art as illusion and of the world itself as a stage on which men and women are merely players". The play within a play he is referring to is the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* by the rude mechanicals. Shakespeare weaves themes, language, and plays within plays all through *A Midsummer Night's Dream* tying up the whole package and leaving the audience with feelings of joy, awe, and happiness in the new and better world he has created.