

Psychology of love chasing reality english literature essay

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (Shakespeare, III. ii. 117) Yes, love is one thing that tends to excite and stimulate us mortals to that extent that we often find ourselves being fools for love. Thousands of studies have been conducted in the area of love and intimate relationships but none have been able to provide a foolproof formula for distinguishing true love from fickle love. This failure might lead one to believe that perhaps love is not something that can be understood by science. Still yet, there are different types of love and our inability to understand the type of love we feel at a point in time may be the primary reason behind the confusion and chaos that often accompanies the pursuit of love. From a personal standpoint, love is often an image or idea we have built up in our minds whether from life experiences or exposure to media and stories and we chase this idea until we end up disappointed that it does not match our expectations. In an article from Psychology Today, Dr. Ellen McGrath points out that " when we hit real love we become upset and disappointed because there are many things that do not fit the cultural ideal" (McGrath). Indeed, finding true love is truly difficult and often appears impossible just as Lysander testifies to in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that, " the course of true love never did run smooth" (I. i. 134). This Shakespearean story is but one of an innumerable number of stories told and/or written over the course of history that attempts to depict and explore the old-age issue of love. In this classic, the dichotomous concepts of true love and fickle love are embodied by certain characters and some dynamic relationships that exhibit these two concepts, both independently and interdependently, are played out. In the end, it is clear that the bumpy course which true love seems to almost

always take is one rigged with counterfeits and illusions of what we perceive love to entail. In avoiding a visceral approach to the truth of this assertion, exploring the unconscious of the major characters in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through psychoanalytic criticism is imperative because it could provide the key to understanding the forces that make true love so difficult to recognize at first glance. In that regard, pursuing love is, more often than not, pursuing a mirage or an idea that is a far-cry from reality and this notion can be demonstrated through an analytic breakdown of each relationship of the 'love rectangle' in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. First and foremost, a proper breakdown of the relationships in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* necessitates differentiating true love from fickle love and defining what parameters constitute each. Defining true love is no easy feat as a multitude of pundits, philosophers, authors, and even scientists over the years have attempted to do so and their relative success is one that is up for debate. Notwithstanding, reading Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* consistently illuminates the theme and primary lesson that true love endures all things. On the one hand, Helena's love for Demetrius is the perfect embodiment of this theme. Despite his harsh treatment of her, she remains steadfast in her love for him and is not swayed even as Demetrius fails to reciprocate the love she constantly shows him. Being aware of this, Helena tries to explain that her feelings for Demetrius are blind when she says: Things base and vile, holding no quantity, Love can transpose to form and dignity. Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind (I. i. 232-235). This love which I dare call true love is described by Yana Dubinsky,

Psy. D, a clinical psychologist and director of clinical training at Primary Care Psychology Associates, as " an act of will and judgment, intention and promise" (qtd. in Tartakovsky). Surely, Helena's successful ability to execute her plans to win back Demetrius' affections is undoubtedly an exercise in will, judgment, intention and promise. Furthermore, Saint Paul describes true love in the bible when he says, " love [true love] bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things; endures all things" (English Standard Version, 1 Corinthians 13. 7). Helena's love endured all things including magical interference from Robin Goodfellow whose love potion confuses things by making Lysander fall in love with Helena. Her love helped her bear Demetrius' betrayal and harsh treatments especially considering that he made promises to always be with her and love her and only stopped doing so when he met Hermia. Her love helped her believe that she could win Demetrius back. It gave her the courage to keep trying and even when all odds were against her, her love gave her hope. Helena's love for Demetrius is true love in the context of this text and it shall act as a point of reference in establishing my arguments looking forward. On the other hand, Demetrius' sinusoidal on-again, off-again love for Helena is the perfect embodiment of fickle love which I like to call immature love because it is like a teenager who cannot make up his or her mind about something. Some pundits like Mari Ruti, a professor of Critical Theory at the University of Toronto, even go so far as to proclaim that " it's in the basic nature of love to be fickle and capricious." But then, this assertion becomes difficult to reconcile with when one considers Helena's steadfast love for Demetrius. In his book *The Mental Highway*, Dr. Thomas Parker Boyd, founder of the

Society of the Healing Christ, proposes (regarding love's fickle appearance) that " its fickleness is not in love, nor in the lover, but in the objective that has failed to fill the ideal." What this proclaims is that fickle love is not really love because true love by nature cannot be fickle. Shakespeare highlights that sometimes forces beyond our control may drive fickle love. This is demonstrated when the love potion Robin Goodfellow rubs on Lysander's eyelids forces him to fall in love with Helena. Both Hermia and Helena are thrown off balance by these sudden turn of events as even Demetrius is forced to love Helena by the same potion. Fickle love is unreal, messy and chaotic. In explaining how we love, Dr. Boyd explains that we are always in love unconsciously but not with a man or woman but with an ideal and we feel love when someone we meet, more or less, fills that ideal. For Demetrius, Helena filled that ideal for a while until he met Hermia who filled that ideal even better. In essence, fickle love is one driven completely by selfish desire; that kind of love that says " if I cannot have her, no one can." This is clearly exhibited by Demetrius as he is willing to let King Theseus sentence Hermia to death if she does not obey her father's wishes to marry Demetrius. With this in mind, I shall break down each relationship in A Midsummer Night's Dream employing both Freudian and Jungian principles. Both sets of principles stress the importance of dreams as a tool for tapping into the unconscious. With Freud's approach, I shall expose how personality types affect the outcome of love. This is an important aspect because The love quaternion that I intend to analyze involves four of the main characters in Demetrius, Lysander, Helena and Hermia. To begin, I shall explore Hermia's love for Lysander. Hermia's father, Egeus, mirrors the typical father

archetype. He is stern and controlling. He is such an important authority figure in Hermia's life that he has enough power to not only affect who she loves but also who she marries. Hermia seems to be in that rebellious stage because she refuses to consent to her father's demands to marry Demetrius; defying not just him but the customs and traditions of Athenian society at the time. This is the stage that Freud describes as children having a rage towards their father because they now realize that their claim to exclusive attention from their mother is being obstructed by their father (Richter, p. 1016). Her stubbornness is further revealed later when she refuses to believe that Helena is not trying to steal Lysander's love from her. Consequently, her show of love for Lysander may just be a power play. On the unconscious level, she wants her independence from her father; on the conscious level, she resents her father's interfering with her personal life. The unification of these two makes her mirror the archetype of the self. When her consciousness and her unconsciousness come full circle, it manifests into her rebellious love for Lysander. In this sense, it becomes valid to question if what she feels for Lysander is indeed true love or a mere consequence of her unconscious desire of an ideal image of being with a man confirming her independence. This exposes the possibility of her love being a mirage or idea as opposed to reality. Likewise, Lysander's love for Hermia is not at all unquestionable. He tries to play the hero archetype by rescuing Hermia from having to marry Demetrius. He even sees himself in this light as her champion and knight in shining armor. At some point, fate decides to make him love Helena instead of Hermia and his pursuit of Helena is an exact replica of his pursuit of Hermia as he uses the same words and

the same promises to Helena that he made to Hermia. Even though his love for Helena only materialized because of the potion and not because of his own true desires, this negates the uniqueness of his love for Hermia. In a way, Shakespeare shows that he could just as easily love Helena just as much as he loves Hermia and his love is not entirely in his control.

Tentatively, a Freudian approach could see Lysander's unconscious as being conflicted in his desire for Helena. Perhaps, he was unconsciously getting cold feet about the wedding because it was rushed out of necessity. It was rushed not because he and Hermia could not wait to marry each other but to prevent Hermia from marrying Demetrius. After all, he did forget the way to his aunt's place. It can be argued that his unconscious was suppressing his memory as a defense mechanism. In Freudian terms, his ego was winning the battle against the id. All things considered, Lysander seems to emulate the archetype of the lover. He does stand steadfast by Hermia's side and displaying a certain level of boldness by facing off against Theseus the king, Egeus (Hermia's father), and Demetrius (her violent suitor). Even in the face of death when it was apparent that Demetrius might try to kill him, he does not waver. Furthermore, Lysander's love for Helena (although very fleeting) further represents fickle love. It can be argued that while the potion Robin Good fellow rubs onto Lysander's eye lids compelled him to fall in love with Helena, it does not account for his sudden "hatred" of Hermia. Oberon, the fairy king, made no mention of hatred when he described the effects of the potion. As a result, it becomes a mystery as to how he then proclaims to hate Hermia. His love is too enshrouded in unresolved questions that I cannot wholeheartedly rule out the possibility that it is not true love but a

mirage perpetrated by his unconscious mind. Seeing as no one is actively aware of unconscious, he could actually believe that he truly loves Hermia and at the same time, it is possible that it is not really the case. As for Demetrius' love for Hermia, it is the most questionable love of the bunch. As an archetype, Demetrius mirrors the trickster. He is a true trouble-maker as he tries to foil the love Hermia and Lysander have for each other. From a Freudian perspective, his fickleness could be the result of some deep unresolved issues in his unconscious. Perhaps, he possesses a fear of commitment and his fickleness is a defense mechanism to protect him from being vulnerable in that regard. Perhaps still, it could be that some traumatic childhood experiences could prevent him from ever truly loving someone heart and soul purely of his own volition. He does seem to hail from a noble and fairly wealthy upbringing which would explain his spoilt behavior in the manner in which he chases Hermia. He would selfishly rather see her dead than be married to someone else. His behavior seems to show a dominance of his id over his ego and superego and that explains his fickleness. He is controlled to a greater extent by his desires than his conscience and intellect. This makes him the agent of chaos in this story. The shadow archetype is made manifest by his character as the darker side of his psyche is exposed time and again including his tendency for violence (and murder), and his harsh treatment of Helena. He falls just short of being the villain even though there appears to be no villain in this play. However, Oberon, the fairy king, is able to put a stop to his interference by rubbing the love potion on his eye lids to ensure he reciprocates Helena's love. In this way, Oberon becomes the archetype of the wise old man. He even further displays his

wisdom in manipulating Titania into giving him the young Indian prince to be his knight. He recognizes the imbalance caused by Demetrius' pursuit of Hermia's affections and proceeds to set things straight. He sees Demetrius' love for Hermia as what it truly is: fake, fickle and unworthy of a fairytale ending. Demetrius seems to want Hermia like a spoilt child trying to get a new shiny toy. He lied to Helena constantly and deceived her and when he ran into Hermia, he begins telling Hermia the same lies he told Helena to gain her affection. From another perspective, Demetrius is punished for his treatment of Helena because in the end, he is the only one who does not end up with a lover purely out of his own volition. His loss of free will regarding whom he ends up with is his penance for his behavior. Conversely, Helena's love for Demetrius is so pure and true. At one point she describes her love to Demetrius: And even for that do I love you the more. I am your spaniel. And, Demetrius, The more you beat me, I will fawn on you. Use me but as your spaniel—spurn me, strike me, Neglect me, lose me. Only give me leave, Unworthy as I am, to follow you. What worser place can I beg in your love—And yet a place of high respect with me—Than to be used as you use your dog? (II. i. 187-195) Her innocence and purity of heart makes her the perfect archetype of the maiden. Her dreams and magical steadfastness still prevail over all obstacles. Additionally, Helena mirrors the archetype of the heroine and to a lesser degree, the lover. For me, she is the champion of true love and embodies all the virtues that true love should entail. She displayed her inner strength to persevere and the power to overcome obstacles. She also displayed acts of bravery throughout the play; most notably, her pursuit of Demetrius into the forest. Even when it seemed as though she was getting

lost, she pressed on. She also exhibited bravery when Hermia threatened to attack her. She stood her ground and did not retaliate when she thought she was being mocked first by Lysander, then by both Lysander and Demetrius and then by the whole group. Her steadfastness ends up benefitting not just her but the entire group including the Athenian king to an extent because order was restored once Demetrius was forced to reciprocate her love for him. From a Freudian perspective, she is a model of the triumph of the superego over the id. From this point of view, she would make a good match for Demetrius and vice versa because they both exhibit opposing extreme personalities. Whereas Demetrius' id seems to be more domineering over his superego, Helena's superego seems more domineering than her id in the same manner. It is reasonable to believe that they would complement each other very well by helping each other find that middle ground and establish a sense of moderateness. Still, it can be argued that Helena merely suffers from low self-esteem. She complains about everyone always taunting her when she mistakenly confuses Lysander's advances as attempts to mock her. Perhaps her low self-esteem is a direct consequence of persistent emotional abuse and battery. Demetrius surely dished his fair share of abuse towards her in this regard. She is probably only holding on desperately to his love because she does not believe that she can get anyone better. But then again, she did acknowledge that she was as beautiful as Hermia when she said, "through Athens I am thought as fair as she" (Shakespeare, I. i. 27). She must have some level of confidence in herself to make such a statement. In addition, there are few other notable archetypes and themes that play out throughout the play. For example, King Oberon of the fairies

mirrors the archetype of the Judge. He created a balance while exhibiting compassion in administering justice. He exhibited compassion for Helena as he sought to make right Demetrius' mistreatment of Helena. By making Demetrius fall in love with Helena " again," he ensured that some level of justice was administered and he ensured that Demetrius took responsibility for his actions. Titania personified the archetype of the mother throughout the period she was in love with Bottom. She comforted him by allowing him sleep in her arms. She made sure he had food to eat. She showed him unconditional love enough as his head had, at this point, been turned into that of an ass. She also showed this in her taking care of the young and handsome Indian prince. She was so protective of the young prince that she was willing to risk her husband's wrath. Robin Goodfellow embodies the archetype the companion. He is the only character whose loyalty is not motivated by romantic love. Furthermore, the abundance of contrasts throughout the play creates syzygies by presenting two sides to certain important issues. For example, the love web in which Demetrius, Hermia, Lysander and Helena are entangled in is contrasted with the play lead by Peter Quince and the other lowly laborers involving another love web but in a much less sober setting. Also contrasted is how Helena and Hermia each react and handle themselves when Demetrius and Lysander were both in love with one of them and hated the other. It is revealed that their insecurities precipitate. Helena becomes insecure that she finds it hard to believe that both men truly loved her when they proclaimed so. Hermia became insecure about her height as she speculates the chances that Helena used her height advantage to steal Lysander's love for her. This only

scratches the surface of the gender roles that are at play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Utilizing tools from other schools of literary criticism like Feminist Criticism highlights that neither Hermia nor Helena went back and forth on who they loved and who they did not. They showed a great level of consistency in this regard, highlighting an important distinction of how men love and how women love. All in all, love is more of a dream than reality. The entire story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with all its twists and turns, was so messy that it seemed more like a dream even to the characters in the play. Love is dreamy. It is a fantasy that rarely ever comes to full fruition. Dreams have long been considered an invaluable avenue into the world of the unconscious so much that Freud employed a great portion of his psychoanalytic principles in the interpretation of dreams. Jung talked about the collective unconscious and the varying archetypes which ever so often manifest in our dreams by taking various shapes. Analyzing these archetypes reveal which love relationships are real (true love) and which ones are mere counterfeits (fickle love). Of all the relationships portrayed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, none is a perfect embodiment of undeniable true love. However, Helena's love for Demetrius is the one that undoubtedly comes closest to true love because it is the only one that left no substantial lingering doubts after psychoanalytically exploring the unconscious minds of the characters. Helena showed that true love is one controlled and driven by the superego. It is mature and ideal. On the other hand, Demetrius showed that fickle love is driven by the id and is made manifest when the id is the most dominating. This further shows that pursuing love is indeed, more often than not, pursuing a mirage or an idea that is a far-cry from reality. Dr. Boyd

alleges that we are born with this mirage (image) as part of our unconscious and being unconsciously in love from the moment of our birth, we only begin to become consciously in love when we meet a counterpart that resembles this mirage or mental image or idea. In the end, true love, just as the cliché goes, is that which stands the test of time. Just as Lysander exclaimed, it always faces various obstacles be it differences in age or class (I. i. 135, I. i. 137). Until the love we pursue has been put to the test, it is safe to say we are merely pursuing a mirage or idea that we have built up in our minds. It is after we have faced obstacles that it becomes clear whether or not this love is indeed a reality or just a midsummer night's dream.

Work Cited

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