

Midsummer night's dream

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Midsummer Night's Dream was written by William Shakespeare in the mid 1590s and probably before Romeo and Juliet. It is a hilarious comedy and the plot conveys the creative genius of the great playwright. It is indeed a 'comedy of errors' where the mistakes of a well-meaning immortal being have the most unexpected and extremely captivating and enchanting effects. The characters are inspired from many sources such as Greek mythology, English country folklore and rich and diverse texts. However the plot, unlike many other Shakespearean plays which are inspired from older plays, is very original. The comedy is entirely Shakespearean and the signature style of the Bard is evident.

The plot is made more interesting and the comedy is made more pronounced by the many literary devices and symbols used by Shakespeare. The most interesting of these is the effect created by the existence of another play within the play. One set of characters in Midsummer Night's Dream - a band of Athenian craftsmen, is rehearsing a play they wish to perform at the wedding of the Theseus (the Duke of Athens) to Hippolyta, his beloved. The play that these craftsmen wish to perform is the most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe. This paper attempts to explore the way this inner play mirrors the actions of Midsummer Night's Dream.

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe has been taken from tragic poetry by Ovid. Pyramus and Thisbe were young lovers whose liaison was not acceptable to their parents as they belonged to feuding families. They spoke to each other through a hole in the wall that separated them. One night, a lion happens to attack Thisbe. While she manages to escape, the lion tatters her mantle to shreds. Pyramus sees her tattered mantle and thinks that his lover is dead.

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In anguish, he commits suicide without waiting to verify his troubled assumptions. Later, when Thisbe finds his corpse, she also commits suicide.

The concept of the 'double suicide' and the extreme tragedy that it creates has been used in *Midsummer Night's Dream* to create an altogether different and an almost contrasting effect. Shakespeare has used the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe in a most unconventional manner so that it has the most interesting consequences upon the analysis of the play *Midsummer Night's Dream*. We examine these consequences in the following parts of the paper.

The most important effect that the concept of 'play within a play' creates is that it highlights the outer plot of the unfortunate events in the life of the young Athenian lovers. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is a very tragic tale and would bring tears to the eyes of most audience. But the unintentionally hilarious portrayal of this tragic story by a group of inexperienced craftsmen, ill-suited as actors, makes a tragedy seem funny.

Similarly, the untoward incidents that happen to the four lovers are horrible and almost terrifying if seen out of context of the play. But by sheer genius of the playwright and antics of certain characters like Puck and Bottom, the tale is converted into something the audience can laugh at. Thus the inner plot (i. e. the performance of the tragic play in a comic manner) mirrors the outer plot (i. e. the almost tragic incidents in the forest presented in a funny manner).

The Athenian craftsmen have decided to enact the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe for the Duke's wedding. This fact heightens the comedy in a very endearing way. The craftsmen are not suited to the enactment of such a refined play. They are poor actors; they have bumbling speech; they have such ludicrous concerns about the performance that they create a very funny prologue for their play.

They are concerned that the lion might frighten the ladies in the audience; the suicide of Pyramus might not be taken well and are also concerned about how they will create the effect of moonlight and the wall that separates the lovers. To take care of these concerns, they insert an explanation in the prologue of the play insisting that the lion is not real and the actor playing Pyramus is not indeed dead. It creates an uproarious effect. However, they mean well, a fact acknowledged even by the Duke at the end of their performance.

Another effect of the inner plot is that it underlines the creative brilliance of Shakespeare. He uses the inner plot perfectly to mirror the outer plot, even as we find that the inner plot does not have any effect on the outer plot. The parallel inner plot just creates a comical side track even as unwittingly it mirrors the main plot. The play about Pyramus and Thisbe is performed on stage after all the issues and problems have been successfully resolved the main play is nearing a happy ending. The performance thus has no impact on the actual plot of the play. But the funny performance heightens the feeling of well-being created by the resolution of all the problems that the main characters encountered.

Midsummer Night's Dream is a brilliant comedy. The effect of the inner plot contributes a lot to the play. This complex literary device used by Shakespeare creates a riotous effect. Perhaps the brilliance of the play is accorded more luster due to this clever 'play within a play' ploy used by the playwright. The analysis of this device makes the play even more endearing as each reading reveals more subtle ways in which the inner plot mirrors the out one. That is why, perhaps, this play remains one of the most famous of Shakespearean comedies.

REFERANCES

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- (2) Jonathan Bate, "Shakespeare and Ovid", Oxford University Press, 1994