

Similar themes but dissimilar fate

Literature



Parallel incidents that can be found in “ Pyramus and Thisbe” and Shakespeare’s “ A Midsummer Night’s Dream” demonstrate Shakespeare’s adaptation of the tragic myth. The mere mention of the myth in Act 5, confirms the playwright’s attempt to imitate the theme of the story. However, in contrast to the other, “ A Midsummer Night’s Dream” being a comedy, offers a happy ending, where lovers are united and blessed by fate. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe occurs as a play within “ A Midsummer Night’s Dream. ” It is presented in Theseus’s wedding, supposedly to satirize the love between Lysander and Hermia.

However, a twist occurs in the end, giving the play a happy ending, thus departing from the real context of the myth. Parallelism between the two can be recognized in the theme, characterization, and plot. Both use the theme of forbidden love and disobedience. The beginning of the play suggests a close thematic resemblance to the myth. Egeus, the father of Hermia, seeks Theseus’s judgment regarding his disobedient daughter. Hermia, the daughter, is arranged to marry Demetrius, but she loves another man named Lysander, who also occurs in the scene.

The lovers are very much in love but Egeus refuses to have them marry because of a promise he has given Demetrius. From this, we can see parallelism in the theme of forbidden love and disobedience of children to their parents. However, the presence of Demetrius is an addition, because in the myth, there is no mention of a third party. As such, Demetrius’s character is one element that suggests Shakespeare’s intention of dissuading from the old lovers’ myth. Like Pyramus and Thisbe, Lysander and Hermia are blinded by their love.

That night, they profess their love for one another. Like the lovers in the myth, they seem unable to live without each other. Therefore, they plan to elope to Lysander's aunt's house to get married in secrecy. In doing so, they need to trod a forest where they meet a different fate. Similarly, Pyramus and Thisbe, being forbidden to continue with their love, decide to elope the next night and see each other at a monument, where they meet a tragic ending. This event in the plot makes a good resemblance with that of the myth, where lovers decide to take full control of their fate.

However, just like the old myth goes, the lovers are doomed not to have everything going according to their plans. In Act 3 of the play, we see Shakespeare's intention to make a twisted ending with the decision Lysander makes. As Lysander and Hermia lose each other in the forest, we find another parallelism where Pyramus fails to see Thisbe in the designated place. According to the myth, Pyramus does not find Thisbe and thinks that she is slain by a lion. In thinking so, he kills himself, and when Thisbe sees him dying, she does the same.

Taking resemblance to the myth, Lysander is supposed to meet his death in the forest. This should happen in the hands of Demetrius who decides to take revenge over him for losing Hermia. However, the death of Lysander that the audience expects does not happen. Instead of dying like Pyramus, Lysander confesses his change of heart to Demetrius, "Content with Hermia! No; I do repent The tedious minutes I with her have spent. Not Hermia but Helena I love: Who will not change a raven for a dove? (Act 3, Scene 2)

He confesses that he has had a change of heart and does not love Hermia anymore. Instead, he loves Helena, the girl who loves Demetrius. Because of this twist, Lysander is saved from potential death. Similarities in characterization can be recognized in the two literary texts. In the myth, the characters are too overcome by love, as in the play. Specifically, we see Thisbe and Hermia with great similarity in their intentions. In her dialogue with Demetrius, Hermia shows characteristics of Thisbe of being passionate to her love and willing to die.

She pleads to Demetrius, “ For thou, I fear, hast given me cause to curse, If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep, Being o'er shoes in blood, plunge in the deep, And kill me too. ” (Act 3, Scene 3) This shows the discernment of Hermia to die instead of living without Lysander. Like Thisbe, Hermia feels there is no tomorrow if she will not be reunited with Lysander. More than the characterization, we see a similarity in the portrayal of women in the two plots. Both assign women martyr roles of being true to their lovers.

Not only do we see Hermia deeply in love with Lysander, but Helena with Demetrius as well. As such we see that the centuries that passed between the myth foretold and the writing of the play did not effect the way women are perceived in the society. As both literary texts contain, they are pictured as martyrs who await their lovers, willing to give up their life for the sake of the other. The theme, characterization, and some parts of the plot demonstrate similarities between the two works. This only shows that the theme of forbidden love among youths is very recurrent in literature.

Specifically, the theme of disobedience to one's parents reveal imitation of the myth. In addition, the characterization which suggests the theme of loyalty despite death as seen in Hermia clearly resembles that of myth. The readiness to die just to escape suffering, and follow a lover till death are also elements taken from "Pyramus and Thisbe." Overall, while the play shares similarities with the myth, Shakespeare's disposition to end his play in a more romantic way provides the characters with a different fate.