

Brief summary and thematic analysis of "a midsummer night's dream



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" Lord, what fools these mortals be! " This line, uttered by the fairy king's servant and trickster Robin Goodfellow, is very telling of how ridiculous the central four characters in William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream are in their thoughts and actions. The true motivation behind their actions, though, is not found in witty quips by knavish fairies, but rather in the symbolic nature of the play's setting. The varied settings in the play, from Duke Theseus's regal estate to Fairy Queen Titania's forest bower, serve to set the mood of every scene, and to accentuate the characters actions throughout the play.

By observing the rich yet subtle backdrops of A Midsummer Night's Dream, it is possible to glean greater understanding of what drives the characters to act as they do. The play opens at Theseus' grand country estate, where he and his Amazon-warrior-turned-lover Hippolyta are preparing for their wedding. Even as they are making these preparations, though, Theseus tells Hippolyta that the wait until marriage is too long, saying " But, O, methinks how slow this old moon wanes! She lingers my desires like to a stepdame or a dowager long withering out a young man's revenue. " His mention of the moon is possibly a nod to the disorder of the fairy world, of which the moon and other natural forces are a large part.

However, he must of course wait until his wedding day for all his dreams to come true, since he is living in the world of the orderly and proper, symbolized here by his lavish estate. Later, after Theseus lays out his ultimatum to Hermia, daughter of Egeus and the woman central to the plot, regarding her planned marriage to Demetrius, the man Egeus has chosen as her husband, she and Lysander, her lover, plan to meet in the forest outside

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the city walls, as part of their plan to elope to Lysander's aunt's house. This again shows the contrast between the uptight, orderly manner of the Athenian city and the freedom, disorder, and alluring opportunity of the forest surrounding it. The forest, and more specifically the fairy world aspect of it, are a perfect metaphor for the entropy, lawlessness, and general freedom of the natural world found outside the city of Athens. The true disorder of the fairy world is physically manifested when the argument between Oberon and Titania causes local weather patterns to shift, killing sheep in flash floods and wreaking havoc on the human world – and all of this because Oberon wants a changeling child that Titania has been raising, who is himself an oddity that contributes to the disorderly image of the forest.

When the four lovers end up in the forest, the fairies can't stop themselves from getting involved, and Oberon along with Robin quickly concoct a plan to “ help” the lovers, and at the same time obtain the changeling boy from Titania. However, in his meddling with the lovers, Robin causes more problems, leading to a massive argument between the four. This argument, punctuated by mud-slinging insults such as “ You juggler, you cakerblossom,” shows how the disorderly setting, as well as the mischievous actions of the fairies, have affected the four lovers to the point where they are screaming at each other with blood-lust in their eyes, actions which are far departed from their calm, mannerly behavior at Theseus's estate. The “ love-in-idleness” flower which is central to both the mismatched lovers and Titania's sudden infatuation with the ass-headed Bottom, can be seen as a metaphor for how the disorder and craziness that run rampant in the forest

affect the perception and thoughts of the characters, as the juice of the flower causes them to fall madly in love with the next living thing they see.

This would not happen in the formal, rule-bound society within the walls of Athens; therefore, the flower serves to further the notion of the forest being a polar opposite to Theseus' dukedom. Despite their propensity for disorder, the scheming Oberon and Robin do make an effort to set things straight - after Oberon gets the changeling child from the still-madly-in-love Titania. Their application of the antidote to the "love-in-idleness" flower is symbolic of a shift from disorder to order once again, as is the return of the lovers to Theseus' estate just in time for a triple-marriage ceremony. Once everyone is back in the confines of the city walls, order returns to the character's actions - this is seen in their inability to justify or substantiate their supposed dream, which they cannot see being possible now that they are thinking with normal reasoning. However, there are two events that in particular show that disorder is never truly gone - first, Theseus' refusal to follow both the demands of Egeus and the Athenian law regarding Hermia's marriage, and second, Robin's final soliloquy, which encourages the audience to believe that the whole play was just an irrational dream driven by the streak of disorder inside all of us.

It is on that thought, then, that I wish to concentrate. Shakespeare shows that both extremes - complete order, as represented by Theseus' estate and the greater city of Athens, and complete disorder, as represented by the wild forest and the world of the fairies, both have problems in pure form. When Egeus demands that Theseus uphold the absolute, complete, and unyielding order of ancient Athenian law, while not bothering to think of his daughter's

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true feelings, Shakespeare shows that by-the-book proper behavior and law is often ridiculously unreasonable. Conversely, when the raw disorder of the fairy world is channeled in anger, as seen in the argument between Oberon and Titania, other problems arise - namely, the changing local weather patterns.

It is only through finding a balance between order and disorder, then, that one can reach a truly happy ending.