

## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM – AS A ROMANTIC COMEDY

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### ABSTRACT

*The thirty-seven Shakespearean plays consist of the greatest, the most varied and the perfect work ever done by any man in literature. Any work, however, beautiful, seems monotonous after Shakespeare. He was free from every theory. He accepted all of life, rejected nothing. He united the real and the ideal. He appealed to the most varied men to a rude worker as well as to a wit. Shakespeare's drama is a great river of life and beauty. All who thirst for art or truth, comic or serious, ecstasy or satire, light or shade, can stoop to drink from its waters, and in their changing moods they will find a drop to quench their thirst.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Shakespearean comedy is basically a romantic comedy. Love pervades the entire Shakespearean comedy. The whole plot revolves around love. Several types of love are depicted in one single story making it veritably a rainbow world of love. All journeys end in lovers meeting and all love culminates in marriage. Love and marriage are two cardinal points which constituted the beginning and the end of a Shakespearean comedy. Vivacity, cheerfulness and sprightliness; music, mirth and merri-making permeate the Shakespearean comedy. Wit and humour are equitably interspersed scintillating the comedy with appropriate fun frolic.

A comedy may be classical or romantic. A classical comedy is realistic. It does not allow a mixture of the light and the serious. It strictly follows the three Unities of Time, Place and Action. While the Shakespearean comedy is romantic, it freely mixes the light and the serious. It does not care for the unities Time, Place and Action. Its aim is not corrective or

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satiric but innocent and good-natured laughter. Follies are exposed and ridiculed, but the laughter is gentle and sympathetic. We laugh with people and not at them. It is rightly says, "The Shakespearean comedy is not satire, it is poetic. It is not conservative: it is creative. The way of it is that of imagination rather than that of pure reason. It is an artist's vision, not a critic's exposition." It is a rainbow world of love in idleness.

"*A Midsummer Night's Dream*" is the most important romantic comedy of Shakespeare's youthful period. It has plenty of songs, dances and beautiful scenes. It has also the qualities of a masque or opera. The first and the last acts deal with the realities of the waking day, and the remanding three acts depict the fanciful life of a dream. It is the moonlight that plays a very important part in this play.

Shakespeare's Age was the age of love-poetry. Prominence of love was manifest in every walk of life. Naturally therefore, the Shakespearean comedy was a story of love ending in marriage. The entire atmosphere of a Shakespearean comedy is surcharged with love. The two concepts of love : 'who ever loved that loved not at first sight' and ' The course of true love never did run smooth' are harmoniously and artistically blended together. Besides love between the hero and the heroine there are several other kinds of love also depicted in his comedies.

Romantic love is the theme of this play. All the four stories represent love from different points of view. Hermia and Lysander love each other but Hermia's father wants her to marry Demetrius. Demetrius loved Helena, but now he loves Hermia. Hermia elopes with Lysander to the forest. Demetrius follows Hermia, while Helena follows Demetrius. The situation becomes more complex when Puck makes a great mistake with the love-juice. As a result, both Lysander and Demetrius love Helena. They become rivals in love. Helena feels insulted and humiliated. Thus we find that the path of true love never runs smooth. At last, the problem is solved by the magic of love juice. Shakespeare laughs at the follies and frivolities of romantic love through the Interlude of Pyramus and Thisbe and the fairy story of Oberon and Queen Titania. This is burlesque presentation of romantic love. The story of Tehseus and Hippolyta presents sober love, which is based on the consciousness of duties and responsibilities of life. Thus the irrational nature of romantic love has been set in contrast to sober love which is based on reason and commonsense. Shakespeare gives his comic view of life through three words – lover, lunatic and poet. When a man is led away by his fancy or emotion like a lover. He sees Helen's beauty in an ugly gypsy, or like a lunatic, he imagines things which do not exist: or like a poet, he mistakes the world of his imagination as a real. One only a man with sanity, collie reason and commonsense can control his fancy and emotion. Only such a man can make his lif happy and successful.

The Oberon – Titania episode provides another romantic element in the play. Oberon, king of the Fairies, and his queen, Titania, come from the East to prepare for the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. They have a quarrel over an Indian boy. He decides to punish his wife. He asks Puck to bring a magic flower and apply its juice to her eyes. After getting up, she will fall in love with the person whom she first sees. He also asks Puck to apply it to the eyes of Demetrius so that he will get Helena. But by mistake he applies it to the eyes of both Demetrius and Lysander. He also transforms by putting the head of an ass on his shoulders. Then Lysander and Demetrius love Helena and Titania loves Bottom. But at the end Oberon removes the magic spell of the flower ‘love-in-idleness’ and everything ends well.

The Comic under plot of Bottom and his friends also adds to the romantic effect of this play. Puck transforms him into an ass. Titania falls in love with him. She kisses his large ears and lulls him to sleep in her arms. Oberon feels pity for her. He removes the magic spell from her eyes. When she recovers her sense, she begins to hate him. Then Bottom also restores his natural form and goes back to Athens. Then he performs the play of “Pyramus and Thisbe” which is full of fun and humour. It is also a parody of the central theme of this play.

The title also suggests the romantic atmosphere of this play. The title consists of two parts – A Midsummer Night and Dream. The action of the play belongs to the end of April and first of May. It was to be performed on 24<sup>th</sup> June, which marks the birth of St. John. That way the words, A Midsummer Night are quite proper and suggest pomp, show, joy and merry making of the day. Then the magic spell of the love juice on Lysander. Demetruin, Titania and Bottom creates an atmosphere of dream. The three acts of this play are full of vagueness, unreality, inconsistencies, extravagancies and impossible situations, which are possible only in a dream.

The elements of masque also add to the romantic atmosphere of this play. Song, music, dance and beautiful scenes are important features of a masque. There are six songs in this play: ‘Over hill, over dale’, ‘Weaving spiders, come not here’, ‘Now until the break of day’ etc. They enrich and strengthen the emotional appeal. Oberon’s plot advances. Bottom’s song reveals his character and awakens Titania. It is a world of imagination, which is full of pleasant surprises and accidents. The characters are flexible. They are themselves. They have commonsense, wit, imagination and deep emotions.

The element of universality is present in this comedy. Shakespeare was not of an age but for all time. His men and women are true to the eternal facts of human life, and not merely superficial studies of contemporary society. As in his comedies he maintains a balance between truth and beauty. Neither extreme delight nor grim sadness, neither joy nor sorrow; neither laughter nor tears could blur his vision. With the all-pervasive sympathy and

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boundless love for humanity he filled his comedies with the pictures of life in its sunniest aspects so much so that even after about four hundred years of their production they are enjoyed all over the world with great enthusiasm.

The lovers in this play are beyond the control of reason and are ruled by passion. They are rebels against the authority of parents, against friendship and against their own vows. Thus “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” is a strange and beautiful web woven delicately by a youthful poet’s fancy.

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