Women And Shakespeare Essay, Research Paper

A Critical Analysis of ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream? William Shakespeare, born in 1594, is one of the greatest writers in literature. He dies in 1616 after completing many sonnets and plays. One of which is ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream.? They say that this play is the most purely romantic of Shakespeare?s comedies. The themes of the play are dreams and reality, love and magic. This extraordinary play is a play-with-in-a-play, which master writers only write successfully. Shakespeare proves here to be a master writer. Critics find it a task to explain the intricateness of the play, audiences find it very pleasing to read and watch. ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream? is a comedy combining elements of love, fairies, magic, and dreams. This play is a comedy about five couples who suffer through love?s strange games and the evil behind the devious tricks. This play begins as Theseus, the Duke, is preparing to marry Hippolyta. He woos her with his sword. Hermia is in love with Lysander. Egeus, Hermia?s father, forbids the relationship with Lysander and orders her to marry Demetrius. Demetrius loves Hermia, but she does not love him. On the other hand, Helena is in love with Demetrius. To settle the confusion, Theseus decides that Hermia must marry Demetrius or become a nun. In retaliation to her father?s command, Hermia and Lysander run away together. Amidst all the problems in the human world, Titania and Oberon, the fairy queen and king, continually argue about their various relationships that they have taken part in. (Scott 336) Titania leaves Oberon as a result of the arguments. Oberon is hurt and wants revenge on Titania. So he tells Puck, Oberon?s servant, to put a magic flower juice on her eyelids while she is sleeping. This potion causes the victim to desperately in love with the first creature that they see. Oberon?s plan is carried out, but the potion is also placed on Lysander?s eyes. Lysander awakes to see Helena, who is aimlessly walking through the woods, and instantly falls in love with her. She thinks that he is making fun of her being in love with Demetrius, so she leaves and Lysander follows. This leaves Hermia to wake up alone. Puck now has journeyed to the area where several actors are rehearsing. He uses his magic to turn one of them into a donkey, in hopes that Titania will awake to see it. Just as planned, she awakes and falls in love with the donkey. Oberon and Puck overhear Demetrius and Hermia arguing about their relationships and realize that they had made a mistake. In hopes of solving the problem, Puck places magic juice on Demetrius while he is sleeping. He awakes to Helena, who now has two men in love with her. Hermia is devastated because Lysander does not love her anymore. Helena and Hermia argue because Helena thinks that Hermia is in on the men?s ?joke.? All four argue and leave. Puck persuades them to sleep all together and more of the antidote is placed on the eyes of Lysander. Titania also receives another dose of the potion, and awakes to her husband Oberon. A triple wedding is planned and everyone is happy. (thinkquest.com 1-3) Throughout the play there are many references to the gender and sex roles of the characters. As described in the critical essay by Shirley Nelson Garner, the dominating male power and strange sex roles of the characters is fluent throughout the play. The ordering of the fairy, human, and natural worlds is a movement toward satisfying men?s psychological needs; but it also disrupts women?s bonds with each other. The argument between Titania and Oberon arises from Titania?s focus of attention toward a stolen Indian boy. Oberon uses his authority to force Titania to give up the boy, and he is shocked when she disobeys him and leaves. Her attachment to the boy is erotic, because she treats him similar to Bottom after she falls in love with him by a spell. The underlying reason for Oberon?s complaint of Titania and the boy?s relationship is that he secretly wants the boy for himself. Oberon takes action because his power is threatened by Titania?s love for the boy. He needs her too, so he wins the boy for himself to make her feel inferior. In other words, Titania gave up something that she loved to make her husband happy. This is seen in everyday life, women give up their wants to make their men happy. Titania?s sacrifice for Oberon cost her to lose both her Indian boy and his mother, her women lover. When men don?t make women happy, they turn to their friends for what they need, whatever it may be. (Scott 370-373) Male domination not only exists between husband and wife, but also between father and daughter. Theseus will not allow Hermia to marry Lysander. Theseus wants her to marry Demetrius. Egeus, a ruler, will force Hermia to become a nun unless she marries Demetrius. In retaliation to his demands, Lysander and Hermia run away together. Hermia is scolded by Egeus for being in love with the man she chooses. This suggests that men cause women to feel forced and obligated to do as they say. (Scott 373) Another example of male domination is the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. Theseus? first wife was frail and yielding, and he divorced her. Hippolyta has been a warrior, and Theseus? victory over her makes her unable to resist. By conquering the female warrior and marrying her, he fulfills his need for the exclusive love of a woman while satisfying his homoerotic desires. Close bonding fulfills this homoerotic desire with a male companion, such as Demetrius and Egeus. (Scott 373-373) Male jealousy and need for dominance ruins women?s relationships with friends and also turns to brutality. Hermia and Helena were once intimate friends, but Helena is suspicious of Hermia?s involvement in the men?s ?joke.? Bonds between women are just as important as men?s bonds with each other, but jealousy leads to the end of women?s happiness. When Helena pursues Demetrius, his male brutality is revealed when he rejects her for another woman, insults her, and threatens to rape her. Also, when the men fall in love with her, she feels like the ?butt of a joke.? This stirs female insecurity and pain, again caused by previous abuse from men. The submissive nature of women enables Hermia and Helena to bear their lover?s abuse. (Scott 374-376) The reconciliation between Titania and Oberon, at the end of the play, brings blessing to the human world. This suggests that the happiness of the world depend on the amount of love between couples. The problems caused suggest the heterosexual bonding is best. Just as women have insecurities, men feel that if women joined together there will be no need for men, possibly excluding them or preferring the friendship and love between women to a man-woman relationship. This fear is partially based on reality, but also by projection. Since men have stronger bonds with each other, they exclude women from participation in tings in which they care about; they assume that woman, if granted the opportunity would do the same. Men?s main belief is that separating and conquering women is the only way to keep their power. (Scott 376) The essay written by George A. Bernard shows the fantasy and reality issues in the play. The fantasy world and real world exist apart from each other, never meeting at any point. The inhabitants of the fairy world are unreal in the sense that they lack feelings and intelligence. The dream world, beyond mortal?s comprehension, strongly influences the entire realm of ordinary life. By nature of their humanity, Oberon?s power causes vulnerability in the human world. This fairy kingdom is essentially a dream, which appears whenever reason goes to sleep, and during this time Oberon controls all things. Such illusions and dreams, created by Oberon, can be dangerous if they block out human?s perception of reality. As the play proves, these dreams perform an important function in life. (Scott 381) Fairies, part of the fantasy world, live in the kingdom in the vague, dream-like East. In this area, legends, myths, and impossible stories originate. This placed is more commonly called ?the dream world.? The East exists both during and after sleep. The fairies bring the stories to you from the East. The fairies never think and love, which explains all of the deceit and odd events that go on during the play. This is acceptable in their world, because all the laws that govern the world of reality have no existence in the dream world. The lover?s fall between these two worlds and are affected by both. The fairies make fools of the lovers, because humans are no accustomed to the fairy?s realm. In the real world, Hermia is sensible and Lysander is reasonable. They want to be together even against Egeus? commands, which is reasonable thinking. As soon as the two are alone, imagination takes control of them and they are blinded as to the misfortunes that are bound to cross the course of true love. This causes them to run away. (Scott 382-385) Mark van Doren explains the language and poetry in ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream? as an immense expanse of Shakespeare?s extraordinary poetic imagination. This imagination is vast enough to house fairy realms and the world of reality, including all the peculiar manifestations of either place. Also the ability to describe the separate and often quite dissimilar regions of the play?s universe by drawing on the rich resources of poetry. The words moon and water dominate the poetry of the play. (McIntosh 3) ??four happy days bring in another moon: but, O, me thinks, how slow. This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires? (McIntosh 1-3). As a result of their enormous allusive potential, these images engender am entire network of interlocking symbols that greatly enrich the text. The moon, water, and wet flowers conspire to extend the world of the play until it is as large as all imaginable life. The moon and water also explain the play?s mystery and naturality. The lover?s fall in and out of love like dolls, and like dolls they will go to sleep as soon as they are laid down. (McIntosh 3-4) Since the world is very large, there is plenty of room for mortals and fairies. Both are at home and sometimes seem to have exchanged functions with one another. Also, both mortals and fairies move freely in their own ?worlds.? In this world, the moon governs. (McIntosh 4) The choice of ballad emphasizes the enormous difference between the intellectual and cultural assumptions of Bottom, the author and the audience. Meanwhile the definite movement from spiritual transformation to dream is referred to as art. This mirrors the informing structure design of the play as a whole. The art form now becomes a way containing and triumphing over unbearable reality. ?Consider, then, we come but in despite. We do not come, as minding to content you, Our true intent is all for your delight, we are not here.? (McIntosh 5) ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream? is a play concerned with dreaming. Shakespeare reverses the categories of reality and illusion, sleeping and waking, art and nature, to touch upon the central theme of dreams. Dreams are truer than reality because it has a transforming power. Dreams are a part if the fertile, unbounded world of imagination. The Athenian lover?s flee to the wood and fall asleep, entering a charmed of dream. After their eyes were anointed, the world of supernatural at once takes over the stage, controlling their lives in a way they cannot guess at. The dreams come true, but are made to appear ?fruitless.? Without knowing the dimension of dream in our lives, there can be no real self-knowledge. (Garber 59-62) Delusion is the prelude to illusion. Lysander should produce this speech at a point when his actions are completely supernaturally or subconsciously controlled without the slightest hint of either reason or will. Reason has no place in the dream state, and when characters attempt to employ it, they frustrate their own ends. (Garber 62-63) The memory of the dream itself is vague, because as the mind tries to rationalize what has been dreamed it only distorts the image. The instinct of the mind sets boundaries, while the process of dream blurs and obliterates those boundaries. (Dutton 51) The pattern of the play is controlled and ordered by a series of vital contrasts: the conflict of the sleeping and waking states, the interchange of reality and illusion, reason and imagination, and the disparate spheres of the influence of Theseus and Oberon. All is related to the portrayal of the dream state. (Garber 65-72) In this dramatic world where dreams are a reliable source of vision and insight, consistently truer than reality, they seek to interpret and transform. (thinkquest.com 1) The imagery establishes the dream world in ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream.? The night creates a mysterious mood. At night, the fairy realm takes control. These fairies are brainless and deceitful, which leads to controversy between the mortals. The two worlds, united by moonlight, are active during their respectable times of the day. In the play, the fairy world is dominant, because there is only one scene containing daylight. The sounding of the horns while the sun rises announces the return of mortal sanity. The setting is imagery itself. The forest, with flowers, water, and the rest of nature seems to be away from the human world. This is a necessary setting for the dream world. (Draper 3173) The main theme in the play is dreams. As discussed before, dreams are truer than reality because they are part of the unbounded world imagination. (Magill 26) The fairies control the dreams; therefore they control your state of mind. Also a love-madness theme weaves together unrelated portions of the play. Shakespeare creates unity by flooding the play with moonlight. (Kenneth 29) Irony is a large element in the play. Many of the situations are ironic. Instead of attracting and falling in love with a gentlewoman, Theseus won Hippolyta with his sword. Also, Helena?s affection for Demetrius seems to make him hate her, but the hatred eventually turns to love. Helena constantly pursues Demetrius, just as deer chase tigers in the dream forest. Demetrius? cruel treatment ironically compels her to love him more. The fairy world has greater impact than the real world. This is ironic because the fairies have no intelligence or emotions like mortals. (Dutton 32-34) ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream? is said to be the most romantic of Shakespeare?s comedies. The fantasy world and erotic nature of the play draws interest to the play. This interest leads to the making of several different movies, and countless number of theater performances. The viewing of the play adds to its dramatic nature, allowing first hand contrast between how we felt and how someone else felt about the text. (Dutton 147-150) Shakespeare?s masterpiece, ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream,? parallels with ?Romeo and Juliet.? The similarity in characters and the plot suggest that ?Romeo and Juliet? was written before ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream.? This play is a natural reaction of Shakespeare?s mind to Romeo because of his attitude toward love and life. (Draper 3152) The similarities between the beginning of the Dream and the main situation of Romeo and Juliet are obvious. The forbidden love, deceit, and pain are all elements in the comparison. This suggests that Shakespeare borrowed and condensed material from ?Romeo and Juliet.? The two fathers, Capulet and Egeus, give the same orders to their daughters. Capulet: ?An you be mine, I?ll give you to my friend. An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets.? Egeus: ?As she is mine, I many dispose her: Which shall be either to this gentleman or to her death.? (Magill 72-75) Egeus is less brutal, but just as threatening as Capulet. Lysander and Hermia?s artificial complaint of love, the first in a series of hindrances in the course of true love. This is evidently a recollection of ?Romeo and Juliet.? Mercutio?s description of Queen Mab seems to have clearly been borrowed from ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream.? It has exquisite delicacy and daintiness of the Dream, but is not an integral part of ?Romeo and Juliet.? One element shared between the two plays directly is the moon. In ?Romeo and Juliet,? the moon brings the two star-crossed lovers together at night. The Moon unites the mortal and spiritual worlds in ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream.? The two catastrophes are almost identical, making it strange that he wrote a serious play directly after the comedy. (Magill 74-76) Many people, due to its ?magical? plot, read ?A Midsummer Night?s Dream.? Shakespeare wonderfully combines mystery, love, disaster, and comedy into one play. This play is the most romantic and intricate plays written by Shakespeare. Many people, past and present, find it to be popular due the interesting elements and storylines in the play.