



LOVE, MADNESS AND POETIC OVERTONES IN *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

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ABSTRACT

In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Theseus interconnects lunatic, lover and poet haphazardly. Each is distinctive in his perception of actuality, with the poet so much engrossed in his imagination that he can almost formulate his own universe from his fantasies. Theseus links together the poet, the madman, and the lover. They "[a]re of imagination all compact". The lunatic's fantasy is strained with images of ordeal; the lover is tricked by a twist in vista; the poet is assessed by his eye, which rolls in a "fine frenzy" and permits his mind to exemplify and give a figure to "the forms of things unknown". As the play demonstrates, and explicitly satirizes, the imagination in love often operates in defiance of "discretion", particularly in making beauty observable by no one but the maker. The poetic prowess, different from that of a Quince or Bottom, is in concordance with circumspection, and its arts are constituent of universal perceptiveness, both as exquisite and as meaningful. In love, the ludicrous consequence from the ascendance of imagination over reason, and the lover is unconscious of his being ludicrous.

Keywords: - love, madness, and poetry.

INTRODUCTION

In his seminal essay "Titania and the Ass's Head" Jan Kott points out that, "not only is Ariel an abstract Puck with a sad and thoughtful face; the philosophical theme of the dream will be repeated in *The Tempest*, doubtless a more mature play" (124). But the answers that Shakespeare highlights in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seem more unequivocal and absolute: "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact" (5.1. 7-8). Kott finds the insaneness lasted throughout the June night. The lovers are shamefaced of that night and do not crave to discuss about it, just as one does not need to converse of lousy dreams. But that night emancipated them from themselves. They were their actual selves in



their dreams: "...And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye, / Steal me awhile from mine own company" (3.2. 435-436).

The wood in Shakespeare's comedies always symbolises nature. The escape to the Forest of Arden is elude from the savage world in which the way, "to the crown leads through murder, brother robs brother of his inheritance, and a father asks for his daughter's death if she chooses a husband against his will" (124). But it not only the wood that happens to be nature, our inherent traits are also nature and the lovers are as insane as the world: "Lovers and madmen have such seething brains / Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends" (5.1.4-6), for them the world is insane and the love is insane, "in this universal madness of Nature and History, brief are the moments of happiness" (125). The play affirms: "...swift as a shadow, short as any dream, / Brief as the lightening in the collided night..." (1.1.144-5).

Stopford A. Brooke says that the first speech of Theseus and Hippolyta is symbolised by imaginative warmth which elsewhere does not seem in their words. The lovers too have their rhyme. A distinct note replete it, the note of vernal, unfledged love, in its pleasure and its fuss, full of fast-altering envisions none of them profound or incisive. Even in the fury of dream their thoughts dwell only on the surface of things. Brooke indicates: "Passions touch on the four lovers is slight, clasp them on their shoulder, but does not close round their heart. Nature, who, when love is profound, disappears from the lover's eyes, is used by these lovers to illustrate and enhance their love" (31). In this play poetry flows through three separate realms, and works in all with ease. But its charms of creation are most exquisite most of an unfamiliar, unversed beauty, in the universe where Oberon commands Puck how once in the moon-light he: "sat upon a promontory / And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back" (2.1.149-151).

Laurie E. Maguire writes that economical fact, not love, was the impulse behind Bassanio's initial coming to Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, but other protagonists show little logic of any type in love: "Reason and love keep little company together now-a-days" says Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Reason and love are not always contrary and nowhere is this more vivid than in the starting of the play. It is always daughter who loves against to her parents' desires. For instance, Hermia's father evokes Athenian law, which permits her one of two options: death or life as a nun. In *Othello*, Desdemona marries against her father's will and cut off emotionally by him (1.3.189-98), as is Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* for marrying a Gentil (3.1), and the same thing occurs in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Anne Page's parents patch to marry her by force to the prosperous husband of their choice: "in all these situations Shakespeare supports the daughter, for reasons he presents at length in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (60).



In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia deplors that her father does not see things from her perspective and point of view: "I would my father look'd but with my eyes; Theseus reproves Hermia, "Rather your eyes must with his judgment look" (1.1.56-57). In Shakespeare's plays daughter's impulsive love must yield to parental judgment. Love's frenzy is further exemplified in the Helena plot. Before he transfigured his attraction to Hermia, Demetrius, we are told, pursued Helena, "and she, sweet lady, dotes / Devoutly does, dotes in idolatry / Upon this spotted and inconstant man" (1.1.18-110). Maguire states: "Shakespeare's word for a love that is irrationally pursued is "doting"; and loving someone who doesn't love back is obviously irrational" (61). The condition is even mazier for, "if Demetrius and Lysander are equally attractive, so are Hermia and Helena" (60). The flummoxed Helena acknowledges: "Through Athens I am thought as fair as she / But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so; / He will not know what all but he do know" (1.1.227-229). Again Maguire writes: "The revealing sequence of verbs—"think", "know"—highlights the dichotomy between love(thought/ imagination) and reason (knowledge) which the play examines" (61).

Demetrius's transmittance of love to Hermia is as irrational as Helena's relentless affection for Demetrius. Helena concludes, as Bottom does later, that reason and love keep little company together: "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind; / And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind / Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste" (1.1.234-242). Theseus makes the same statement in Act 4.1., where he links the lunatic with the lover and the poet (5.1.1-17). The exquisite Helen referred to here is, of course, "Helen of Troy, in the early modern period was a metonymic shorthand; it could only mean one Helen" (61). A man in love, Theseus asserts, will assume his beloved to be as charming as Helen of Troy even if has loved one is a dark-complexioned Egyptian. Here, Theseus associates the "common denominator of the lunatic, lover, and poet as imagination" (61-62). Whereas madman's assumption makes him to discover, the lover's vision sees charm where others do not.

Marjorie Garber writes that Theseus denigrates the poet, discounts and damns art, because it is striking and coercive passage of poetry—but what does it say, that the dream cannot be reliable and trustworthy. That poets are unbalanced and unhinged. That art is hallucination. The lovers and the lunatics—that is the traits of this play, impaired by midsummer madness—"are given to unrealistic fantasies that "apprehends/ More than cool reason ever comprehends" (222). Garber in her another book, *Dream in Shakespeare from Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (2013) indicates that words like "fantasies" and "fables" are explicitly slighting, "as indeed is "fairy", fiction and the world of the supernatural, because not "true", become suspect and of little value" (85). She describes that fantasy itself is equivalent with lunacy and with incoherent—traits which, in this play of "midsummer madness" have demonstrated huge powers and the prowess to bring about self-awareness through transfigured fantasy. The triplet of lunatic, lover, and poet is meant, "to demean the roles of poet and lover and comes oddly from a Theseus who has won Hippolyta by the sword" (86).



Theseus, like Bottom before him, talks truer than he comprehends and delineates the very inventive and farfetched unities toward which all of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been striving. The prototype of the poet's transmuting power to create "shapes" and of the "forms of things unknown" pursues intimately the processes of dream as we have noticed them; the "airy nothing" which is the natural stuff of poetic sight is apparently intimated to the evaporable "nothing" of other plays. Theseus himself purports his phrases in a scathing and ostensive sense as a defence of understanding. He would division experience into the right and wrong, the vision and the actuality, much as did Christopher Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew*: "or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?" But the transmogrifying impact of the fantasy realm upon the Athenian have been to educate them and to debar scepticism in order to populate two universe at once: "It seems to me / That yet we sleep, we dream" says Demetrius (4.1.194-195), as the lovers pursue Theseus out of the forest and particularly, a moment later, "Why then we are awake. Let's follow him, / And by the way let us recount our dreams" (199-200).

This last whim to recollect is a similitude of the ballad highlighted by Bottom, an inventive transmogrification turning experience and perceptivity into a balanced verbal shape. Like the "winter tale" and *The Winter Tale*, an emblematical artefact within the play itself as a typical artefact, the visions in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have earned a significant self-referent purpose as allegories of the airy experience. In Hippolyta's discerning words, the lovers observe now with "minds transfigured" (5.1.24)—"the ultimate turning inward of the world of dream" (87). At the end, Puck alone remains upon the stage, the "shadows" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have become indefatigably redolent, "no more yielding but a dream", in a dramatic universe where visions are a trustworthy germ of dream and elevated penetration, systematically literal than the actuality they find to construe and transmute.

But Northrope Frye hints that Theseus takes a very logical and commonsense idea of the lover's tale, but he makes it terse that the realm of the poet as well as the lover and the madman. In the everyday world, "we apprehend with our senses and comprehend with our reason" (201). What the poet imagines are modes or feelings, like ecstasy, and what he uses for precision in some story or character to account for the emotion: "Such tricks hath strong imagination / That if it would but apprehend some joy, / It comprehends some bringer of that joy" (5.1.18-20). Frye suggests that Theseus is here applying the word "imagination" in its common Elizabethan mode, which we express by the word "imaginary", something alleged to be that is not" (201).

Harold Bloom points out that in Act 5 Hippolyta broods on the curiousness of the story told by the four young lovers, and Theseus contradicts his agnosticism to her marvel. He can be described "highly unimaginative" (169). He indicates that when Shakespeare composes these



lines, “the lover, all as frantic, /Sees Helen’s beauty in brow of Egypt” (5.1.10-11), the lover sees Helen’s charm in an itinerant girl’s brow, and here, Shakespeare anticipates Antony looking Helen’s exquisiteness in Cleopatra, in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Vision to Shakespeare’s contemporaries, was “fantasy”, a powerful but suspect faculty of the mind” (169). Bloom finds in Theseus more a Baconian than a Shakespearean, but Hippolyta breaks away from Theseus’s bigotry: “But all the story of the night told over, / And all their minds transfigured so together /More witnesseth than fancy’s images, / And grows to something of great constancy;” (5.1.23-26). For Theseus, poetry is a cult, and the poet a prankster and for Hippolyta, the lovers are metaphor, for the Shakespearean spectator.

Scholars rightly have developed their understanding of Shakespeare’s “story of the night” beyond the dream, terrific as the play is: “No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted their fathers” is Bottom’s concluding vibrancy in the play, and surpasses Theseus’s condescending discernment: “The best in this kind are but shadows”, Theseus describes of all plays and plays—“and while we might accept this from Macbeth, we cannot accept it from the dull Duke of Athens” (170). At the end of the play, Puck only appears to harmonize with Theseus when tells that, “We shadows” are “but a dream”, since the vision is this outstanding play itself. The poet who assumed Bottom was about to attain an extraordinary dream of world.

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