



## **A PLAY- WITHIN -A -PLAY IN A *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*: A STUDY ON EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Pleasure, in the Renaissance drama is represented namely as an Aesthetic pleasure. In a drama the actors defamiliarize themselves for enhancing the Aesthetic pleasure; and thus, the concept of “alienation effect” serves the purpose. Hence, in the theatre house audience doesn't behold the real identities of the actors but the characters of the drama appear to them. Emotionally they get involved with the characters and the incidents of the drama. In Epic Theatre Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), a German theatre practitioner, playwright and poet wished to block the emotional attachment of the audience. According to Brecht theatre should appeal not to the audience's emotions and feelings but to his reason and logic. In A Midsummer Night's Dream (1605) Shakespeare has included another play entitled ‘The Most Lamentable Comedy, And Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe’. In ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ the manner of presentation is to some extent different from the so called dramas. The title itself denotes the same. The popular concept of ‘defamiliarization’ is missing here. Thus, there remains no scope of emotional attachment with the actors on the stage as they disclose their real identities. Undoubtedly, the audience in the play A Midsummer Night's Dream enjoys a great deal, but the performance fails to provide any Aesthetic pleasure. It must be said that a lesson they learn regarding the fact of love, separation and death. In the present paper an attempt has been made to show how the said play alienates itself from the traditional flow of dramatic art, and at the same time the paper highlights how the people from gallery succeed blocking their emotional attachment with the actors on the stage.*

**Keywords** *Aesthetic, Alienation effect, Defamiliarization, Emotional*

### **INTRODUCTION**

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The play within a play is the theatre reflecting on itself, on its own paradoxical seeming. The focus will thus be on the stage. As a result, the ambiguous duality of the theatre becomes that of an illusory inner play defining the greater illusion of which it is a part while affording a glimpse at reality in the person of its creator, the conscious author. This is the method whereby Professor Nelson will be able to catch a number of playwrights, as it were, “in the act”. (Nelson, 257-61)

Play-within-a-play is simply a play enjoyed and entertained by the audience who belongs to the main play. Occasionally the dramatist used a play-within-a-play for the dramatic purpose - as it is seen in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet: The Prince of Denmark* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In these said dramas a purpose remains hidden when the meta-dramas are performed on the stage.

Shakespeare's play, as we see them today, performed on the stage or in movie adaptations, are at a far remove from the conditions in which they were first performed. However to gain an understanding of many of the conventions and conditions of the Shakespearean stage it is only necessary to read two of his plays: *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In both of these you have extended discussions and dramatizations of the art and nature of the theatre, playing companies, the conventions of drama and even the composition of the audience and its contribution to drama in the times. (Kurian, 112-3)

The play within a play, as a device in theatre or a sub genre in dramatic literature designs a strategy for planning play texts. It is an internal dramatic performance where the players appear as actors to play another role.

Its most salient feature is that it doubles an aesthetic experience which already presents a dual reality: the actor, who appears on stage both in his/her own physical presence and in the part he/she portrays, assumes and plays yet another role, thus adding a third identity which itself is constructed in the context of a third level of time, space, characterization and action. (Fischer and Greiner, xi)

As a literary form drama is structured within a certain framework of time, space, characterization and action. It serves aesthetic pleasure creating the certain of illusion produced by the actors. The concept of drama or play varies from writer to writer. Nelson has pointed out thus:

The premise of illusion having been stated centrally in the definition of theatre, the greater number of the playwrights considered will, “suppose a view of the play as simply play”. Whether as “mirror” (Shakespeare), “magic” (Corneille), “mask” (Moliere), “Game” (Marivaux), “Lie” (Sartre) or “Maze” (Anouilh) each of these stage productions will be viewed as a

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means whereby reality is manipulated so as to provide for the spectator the aesthetic detachment of intellectual enjoyment. As in the case of the Shakespeare comedies (1594-1600) considered by the author. The delight one feels in them is much intellectual as emotional: puzzles are solved, riddles unraveled wits outwitted by superior wit” (Nelson, 758)

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* “Pyramus and Thisbey” as a masque, is organized by the Athenia artisans for amusement on the very day of wedding ceremony of Theseus and Hippolyta. It's a lamentable love story where the two lovers love each other genuinely and they two die because of their extreme passion for love. When the lover Pyramus recognizes the blood stained piece of Thisbey's attire, he dies suspecting the fact that the lion has killed his beloved Thisbey. One death follows another as Thisbey finds her lover dead and she also dies. The dramatist Shakespeare has artistically included that cruel and tragic love story in a very comic manner in the comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The masque or the play within a play provides a lesson that extreme passion for love cannot bear with separation and hence, it invites fatal doom or death. The father, Egeus in the drama *A Midsummer Night's Dream* earlier stands against his daughter's choice of love. Now the story of Pyramus and Thisbey makes all the audience in the play convince of the fact that separation in love causes death. On that nuptial ceremony all the lovers of the play get married according to their choice. Comic manner of presentation actually breaks the certain norms of a dramatic art that causes Aesthetic pleasure. The present paper is going to explore how the dramatic presentation of the masque blocks the emotional effect of the audience.

World of art or the world of representation lifts the people of gallery from the real world to a fictional world where imagination dominates. Drama as an art form possesses the same power to move the people emotionally. That thing is possible only because of the artistic device of Defamiliarization, and the lacuna between appearance and reality. The most familiar person hides his real identity and appearance, when he appears on the stage. Hence, the actor gets involved too much with the character whose role he plays. Thus, the actors attempt to create a fictional world in order to provide Aesthetic pleasure as well as an effective theatre house. The audience from the gallery also enables to escape from the reality and entertains very much. Moral and didactic dramas are different from those dramas. These dramas intend to preach and teach moral lesson. Hence, the rational thinking is much more important than the fictional and imaginary world.

The masque “Pyramus and Thisbe” is intended to perform for amusement. The purpose is served as all these Athenia artisans present the most Lamentable and cruel death of two lovers in a very comic manner. First of all, all these actors are workers and they lack knowledge and learning that's why sometimes they don't know the meaning of the words they utter and in consequence of it they replace the original words of the dialog. Obviously, it provides laughter and amusement. Another issue that fails to create a fictional world in the play within a play named “Pyramus and Thisbe”, is relevant in the present context or thesis statement, as that particular reason blocks the emotional response of the audience. What is it? How does it block the emotional response? How does it create “an alienation effect”? The present paper will answer all these raised questions.



Apparently the Athenia artisans enrich with moral lesson. Still the actors block the emotional response of the audience. This is simply because they don't want to make them fear or to make them emotionally motivated. When they rehearse the play before the final performance the actors determine to disclose the real identities of the actors who play the roles of the characters on the stage. Even it is disclosed lion on the stage is not a real lion rather a person. Quince, Bottom, Snug, Flute, Snout and Starveling are the actors of the meta-theatre. Bottom, the weaver thinks of those actions that will not be tolerated by the ladies in the audience. During rehearsal Bottom opined:

BOTTOM

There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and  
Thisby that will never please. First, Pyramus must  
Draw a sword to kill himself; which the ladies  
Cannot abide, How answer you that? (Shakespeare, III. i. 8-10)

Keeping the fear in mind he plans a device to get rid of the fear of the ladies in the audience. A prologue must be there before the play begins on the stage. In prologue the speaker will help the audience to recognize where they are and what they are (imaginatively) seeing.

BOTTOM

Not a whit: I have a device to make all well.  
Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to  
Say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that  
Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the more  
Better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not  
Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them  
Out of fear; (Shakespeare, III. i. 15-20)

All these information at the very early of the play will free the audience from fear. At the same time something else will also be removed. This is simply the lacuna between appearance and reality and the gap between the fictional world and the real world. The effect of Defamiliarization will be missing here. The audience will fail to be emotionally moved, even when a death scene is seen. Bottom again thinks of the lion on the stage that may cause fear. Hence, he modifies the role of the lion and during rehearsal he says:

BOTTOM

Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must  
Be seen through the lion's neck: and he himself  
Must speak through, saying thus, or to the same  
Defect,--'Ladies,'--or 'Fair-ladies--I would wish  
You,'--or 'I would request you,'--or 'I would  
Entreat you,--not to fear, not to tremble: my life  
For yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it  
Were pity of my life: no I am no such thing; I am a  
Man as other men are;' and there indeed let him name

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His name, and tell them plainly he is  
Snug the joiner. (Shakespeare, III. i. 34-43)

Whatever Bottom intends to do is simply a process of disclosing real identities of the actors on the stage with a purpose of getting rid of fear of the ladies in the audience. The more the actors open their identities before the audience the more they fail to provide Aesthetic pleasure and emotional attachment with the audience. Thus, they block the emotional response. On the very night of the stage performance the Athenia artisans enter with a trumpeter before them - Bottom as Pyramus, Flute as Thisbe, Snout as Wall, Starveling as Moonshine and Snug as lion. In the prologue Quince makes the audience familiar with the actors:

Enter Pyramus and Thisbe, Wall, Moonshine, and Lion  
Prologue

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;  
But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.  
This man is Pyramus, if you would know;  
This beauteous lady Thisby is certain.  
This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present  
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder;  
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content  
To whisper; At the which let no man wonder.  
This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,  
Presenteth Moonshine; for, if you will know,  
By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn  
To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo;  
This grisly beast, which Lion hight by name,  
The trusty Thisby, coming first by night,  
Did scare away, or rather did affright;  
And, as she fled, her mantle she did fall,  
Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain,  
Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,  
And finds his trusty Thisby's mantle slain;  
Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,  
(Shakespeare, V. i. 126-45)

The play starts with a brief introduction and recognition. The main action opens with the actor Snout who plays the role of a wall. With his appearance as a wall on the stage he makes the audience convince of the fact that this is not a real wall, rather this is a person who is Snout himself. Right from the very beginning the audience fails to build a fictional and imaginary world in their mind. Snout says:

Wall  
In this same interlude it doth befall  
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;  
And such a wall, as I would have you think,

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That had in it a crannied hole or chink,  
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisby,  
Did whisper often very secretly;  
This loam, this rough-cast and this stone doth show  
That I am that same wall; (Shakespeare, V. i. 154-61)

Thus, Snout not only destroys the gap between fictional world and the real world but also he blocks the emotional response of the audience. It is true that the people of the gallery enjoy a lot. This is simply an amusement and entertainment. It fails to arrest the emotions and feelings of the spectator. Hence, when lion appears on the stage, instead of being afraid of the horrible beast the audience comments it as “a very gentle beast, and of a good conscience” (Shakespeare, V. i. 221). The lion utters:

Lion  
You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear  
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,  
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,  
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.  
Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am  
A lion-fell, nor else no lion's dam;  
For, if I should as lion come in strife  
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life. (Shakespeare, V. i. 218-25)

That very tragic scene where the lion and the lady Thisbe are present on the stage does not provide any sympathy for the lady run after by the lion. It becomes possible as the lion introduces itself as a human being i. e. Snug. Therefore, the audience does not think of any harm for the lady Thisbe. The purpose is served when the audience is not moved emotionally after the tragic end of the two lives. Popular critic Harold Bloom considers Shakespearean art in a triumphant manner, as it is found in his words:

It is a peculiarity of Shakespearean triumphalism,'  
Harold Bloom remarks, 'that the most original  
Literary work in Western literature, perhaps in the  
World's literature, has now become so familiar that  
We seem to have read it before, even when we  
Encounter it for the first time. *Hamlet* [...] remains both  
As familiar, and as original, as his play [...] we hardly can  
Think about ourselves without thinking about Hamlet,  
Whether or not we are aware that we are recalling him' (Bloom, 404-05)

According to Brecht epic theatre is capable of exposing human nature and so it has an educational value. He wishes to encourage the audience to ponder, with critical detachment, whatever is presented before them. "Epic Theatre turns the spectator into an observer, but arouses his capacity for action, forces him to take decisions...the spectator stands outside, studies."(Brecht, 37)



The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are inescapable – That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh. The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art; nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (Bertolt, 71)

“I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh” ; (Bertolt, 71) this very fact is relevant in the play within a play in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Here the very tragic death of two lovers appears to be a comic scene. Hence, the feeling of catharsis remains absent even at the end of the tragedy. Actors design the plot and action in such a manner so that the audience never feels afraid of any fearful scene. Thus, they remain aloof from the emotional attachment with the actors performed on the stage. The spectators of “Pyramus and Thisbe” in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seem to be observers who stand outside and study with critical detachment. It must be said that a lesson they learn regarding the fact of love, separation and death. The present paper succeeds as it shows how the People from gallery succeed blocking their emotional attachment with the actors on the stage.

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