

# A Midsummer Night's Dream: Themes

## Love

The power of love is one of the main themes of "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Love is blind, love is complicated, love is challenging but love is also enduring and triumphant. Love can persist despite numerous challenges, obstacles, mistakes and complications. In the whole play, love appears with all its strength. It makes us all behave in odd ways, bringing lovers to fight in the most uncivilised way. It gives us strength, making us feel invincible against the world that does not understand us.

Love brings out the best and worst qualities but also the bravest ones (ex. Hermia risks her own life in her pursuit of love). Love can make us all look very ridiculous and this aspect is clearly underlined in the whole writing, allowing us to experience Shakespeare's finest comedy scenes. However, love is also depicted as a cruel power that makes us suffer when we fall in love with someone who does not love us back. The theme of love is very close to the theme of magic - falling in love can be perceived as being under a spell.

## ***In-depth analysis LOVE in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"***

*"A Midsummer Night's Dream," written in 1600, has been called one of William Shakespeare's greatest love plays. It has been interpreted as a romantic story in which love ultimately conquers all odds, but it's actually about the importance of power, sex, and fertility, not love. Shakespeare's concepts of love are represented by the powerless young lovers, the meddling fairies and their magical love, and forced love as opposed to chosen love.*

*These points undermine the argument that this play is a typical love story and fortify the case that Shakespeare intended to demonstrate the powers that triumph over love.*

### *Power vs. Love*

*The first concept presented of love is its powerlessness, represented by the "true" lovers. Lysander and Hermia are the only characters in the play who are really in love. Yet their love is forbidden, by Hermia's father and Duke Theseus. Hermia's father Egeus speaks of Lysander's love as witchcraft, saying of Lysander, "this man hath bewitched the bosom of my child" and "with feigning voice verses of feigning love ... stol'n the impression of her fantasy." These lines maintain that true love is an illusion, a false ideal.*

*Egeus goes on to say that Hermia belongs to him, proclaiming, "she is mine, and all my right of her / I do estate unto Demetrius." These lines demonstrate the lack of power that Hermia and*

*Lysander's love holds in the presence of familial law. Furthermore, Demetrius tells Lysander to "yield / Thy crazéd title to my certain right," which means that a father must give his daughter only to the worthiest suitor, regardless of love.*

*Finally, Hermia and Lysander's eventual wedlock is due to two things: fairy intervention and noble decree. The fairies enchant Demetrius to fall in love with Helena, freeing Theseus to allow Hermia and Lysander's union. With his words, "Egeus, I will overbear your will, / For in the temple, by and by, with us / These couples shall eternally be knit," the duke is proving that it is not love that is responsible for joining two people, but the will of those in power. Even for true lovers, it isn't love that conquers, but power in the form of royal decree.*

### *Weakness of Love*

*The second idea, the weakness of love, comes in the form of fairy magic. The four young lovers and an imbecilic actor are entangled in a love game, puppet-mastered by Oberon and Puck. The fairies' meddling causes both Lysander and Demetrius, who were fighting over Hermia, to fall for Helena. Lysander's confusion leads him to believe he hates Hermia; he asks her, "Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know / the hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?" That his love is so easily extinguished and turned to hatred shows that even a true lover's fire can be put out by the feeblest wind.*

*Furthermore, Titania, the powerful fairy goddess, is bewitched into falling in love with Bottom, who has been given a donkey's head by mischievous Puck. When Titania exclaims "What visions have I seen! / Methought I was enamored of an ass," we are meant to see that love will cloud our judgment and make even the normally level-headed person do foolish things. Ultimately, Shakespeare makes the point that love cannot be trusted to withstand any length of time and that lovers are made into fools.*

*Finally, Shakespeare provides two examples of choosing powerful unions over amorous ones. First, there is the tale of Theseus and Hippolyta. Theseus says to Hippolyta, "I wooed thee with my sword / And won thy love doing thee injuries." Thus, the first relationship that we see is the result of Theseus claiming Hippolyta after defeating her in battle. Rather than courting and loving her, Theseus conquered and enslaved her. He creates the union for solidarity and strength between the two kingdoms.*

### *Fairy Love*

*Next is the example of Oberon and Titania, whose separation from each other results in the world becoming barren. Titania exclaims, "The spring, the summer / The childing autumn, angry winter, change / Their wonted liveries, and the mazéd world / By their increase, now knows not which is which." These lines make it clear that these two must be joined in consideration not of love but of the fertility and health of the world.*

*The subplots in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" demonstrate Shakespeare's dissatisfaction with the idea of love as a supreme power and his belief that power and fertility are the prime factors in deciding a union. The images of greenery and nature throughout the story, as when Puck*

*speaks of Titania and Oberon meeting neither "in grove or green, / By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen" further suggest the importance that Shakespeare places on fertility. Also, the fairy presence within Athens at the end of the play, as sung by Oberon, suggests that lust is the enduring power and without it, love cannot last: "Now, until the break of day / Through this house each fairy stray / To the best bride-bed will we / Which by us shall blessed be."*

*Ultimately, Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" suggests that believing only in love, creating bonds based on a fleeting notion rather than on lasting principles such as fertility (offspring) and power (security), is to be "enamored of an ass."*

[Burgess, Adam. "Shakespearean Love Concepts in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'." ThoughtCo. Apr. 5, 2023, \[thoughtco.com/love-in-a-midsummer-nights-dream-3955485\]\(https://www.thoughtco.com/love-in-a-midsummer-nights-dream-3955485\).](https://www.thoughtco.com/love-in-a-midsummer-nights-dream-3955485)

## **Magic - Dreams and Imagination**

The supernatural has a strong role in the play. Characters are tricked into believing that they were dreaming while experiencing the reality of some very bizarre events. The focus on dreaming is a very important leitmotiv. It allows the supernatural element to take over on the narrative. Several events and scenes do not make a rational sense but become essential to the plot. Characters - and consequently the audience, start experiencing a "dream-like" experience. Also, Shakespeare underlines the importance of appearance and reality in the plot playing with what is conscious and what is unconscious but also with what is real and what appears to be real. Characters - as human beings - fail to see situations as they really are and pretend to see what they would like to see instead. They also try to appear as someone they are not, hiding their true selves in front of the others. The use of magic has an impact on the whole story line. The author relies on the magic element during the whole play. Fairies represent magic, loves is affected by magic, dreams and magic are alike.

## **Order and Disorder**

Chaos is a predominant theme in "A Midsummer Nights Dream". It generates misunderstandings and at the same time contributes to creating funny moments and, sometimes, to resolve conflicts. The plot is set in Athens, known for its order and adherence to laws but the whole development of the action does not follow any rational order. The forest

symbolises disorder while adding to the supernatural dimensions of the plot. In the forest, there are no social norms, there is no order. Forests and dreams are alike: wild, magical, and mysterious.

*“Forests are places of transformation, where the boundary between human life and that of animals, plants or trees are likely to become confused, or even obliterated.”*  
Anne Barton

## “**mischief\***

*noun*

**behaviour, especially a child's, that is slightly bad but is not intended to cause serious harm or damage”**

- Mischief happens in the forest, where the fairies operate. In the British folklore fairies are mischief makers.
- The main creator of mischief in the play is Puck, the trickster fair
- Fairies play tricks on humans and create chaos but can also be very organised in the way they use mischief to execute their wishes or plans

\*Cambridge Dictionary

In-depth analysis of “FAIRIES” in British culture / folklore  
<https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-Origins-of-Fairies/>







## TRANSFORMATIONS

THEY DERIVE  
FROM MAGIC

THEY GENERATE  
CHAOS BUT ALSO  
HELP TO RESTORE  
ORDER

THEY ALLOW  
COMEDY TO HAPPEN  
AND HELP THE PLOT  
DEVELOPMENT

THERE ARE PHYSICAL  
TRANSFORMATIONS  
AND INTERNAL  
TRANSFORMATIONS

TRANSFORMATIONS BRING  
TO UNREASON AND  
FOOLISHNESS

## *Suggestions*

BBC resources | “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zxgcwmn>

Shakespeare <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z726yrd>

