

Love Lost - Female Submission in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream

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Love Lost - Female Submission in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream

After first seeing a performance of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, I would have called it a love story. After reading it several times, I am less sure what it is. I will take a closer look at the behavior and context of the characters to understand how a comedy with three marriages and as many as seven lovers almost concludes without a portrayal of love that satisfies me. The pairings I consider are: Theseus and Hippolyta, [Hermia](#) and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Helena and Hermia, Titania and Oberon, Titania and Bottom, and Pyramus and Thisby.

Theseus and Hippolyta's relationship is the most dignified in the play. They show a desire to get along and they are comfortable sharing experiences and feelings important to them (1.1.1-11; 4.1.111-126). Theseus tenderly dominates Hippolyta: "Come, my Hippolyta. What cheer, my love?" (1.1.122; 4.1.185). Hippolyta however never reciprocates his use of terms of endearment such as "my love" and "fair queen." In addition, the mythical context of their relationship is foreboding. We are reminded that Theseus is able to marry

Hippolyta because he kidnapped her (1.1.16-1.1.19). The mythical Hippolyta later either dies in childbirth, or fighting against the Amazons by Theseus's side, or Theseus leaves her for another woman, Phaedra, and the story gets more sordid after that.[1] Theseus's reputation as ravisher of women is addressed in the script (2.1.74-80). And the Amazon method of perpetuating their tribe is not romantic.[2]

Our perception of Lysander and Hermia's love develops in the following events: Hermia chooses to become a nun rather than submit to marrying the man her father has chosen for her; Lysander comforts Hermia and shares his plan to elope; They lose their way in the woods and negotiate sleeping arrangements; Lysander deserts Hermia to pursue Helena and to kill his rival, Demetrius.

While the initial event establishes a traditional love-story scenario, departures from a Cinderella and Prince Charming characterization occur: Hermia responds disrespectfully to the Duke (1.1.53) and Lysander makes a scornful remark to Demetrius and Egeus (1.1.93-94).

When Lysander comforts Hermia and they plan to elope, they show they are well-versed in the nature of mythical love (1.1.132-155). That they have this level of awareness contrasts painfully or comically with their later lack of self-possession. The exuberance of their rhetoric contrasts with the gravity of their situation, and I cannot conceive of these lines being performed in a way that could evoke deep feeling.

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