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## The Power of the Imagination

KELLEY SYTSMA

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about love, but more than that it is a meditation on the quality of the imagination that makes love possible. Throughout the play, the real world and the fairy world are intermingled, causing the audience to question the possibility of each. The play asks the audience to get past reason and logic and entertain the idea that there are fairies who can enchant people. The boundaries between the states of dream and waking become blurred as the

play progresses. The same power of imagination that allows us to watch a play and forget for a little while that it's acting is the same quality that allows us to love.

In Act 3 scene 1, while the mechanicals are practicing their play in the wood, Puck casts a spell on Bottom, giving him the head of an ass. All of Bottom's friends run away in fear, leaving Bottom all alone in the wood with Titania asleep nearby. Bottom sings loudly to prove to his friends, and to himself, that he is not afraid, and in doing so, he awakens Titania. Puck has also enchanted Titania. Puck puts Oberon's special potion on Titania's eyes, so she falls in love with Bottom as soon as she sees him. (Titania's love is a trick of the eyes both literally and figuratively).

It strikes the reader as odd that a fairy queen could fall in love with someone as simple as Bottom, especially when he has the head of an ass. It is the enchantment of the imagination that allows her to do so. Language accents this contrast between the worlds of the two characters. Bottom always speaks in prose; Titania, almost always in

iambic pentameter. This difference reinforces Bottom's simplicity and place in the "real" world and gives Titania's speech a lyrical, magical quality that reinforces her place in the fantastical world of the fairies. This vast difference between the worlds of the two characters makes love even more improbable.

In addition to its poetic form, the content of Titania's language remains romantic and loaded with flattery throughout. She begs Bottom to sing again, and when he says something clever she praises him for being smart as well as handsome (even though he looks like an ass):

I pray thee, gentle mortal sing again:  
 Mine ear is much enamored of thy note;  
 So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;  
 And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me  
 On the first view to swear, I love thee.  
 (III.i, 138-142)

The content of Bottom's speech remains practical and grounded in reality throughout. He speaks of neighbors and of getting out of the wood. When Titania tells him she loves him, he politely tells her she shouldn't:

Methinks, mistress, you should have little  
 Reason for that. And yet to say the truth, reason  
 And love keep little company nowadays;  
 The more the pity, that some honest neighbors will  
 Not make them friends. Nay, I can gleek upon  
 Occasion. (III.i, 143-148)

These lines are also important because they express the idea that love and reason do not always coexist. Reason is definitely not a defining part of love, and love almost always exists without reason. Lysander speaks of love as a delicate, fragile thing capable of causing great pain:

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,  
 War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,  
 Making it momentary as a sound,

Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  
That in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth...(I.i.,  
141-146).

Certainly, if love were based solely on reason, nobody would risk the anguish that might result. If people were to love, based on reason, love would not be possible; nobody is completely loveable. When two people come together, there will always be differences between them, often significant differences as with Titania and Bottom.

*Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about the proximity of opposites—pain and pleasure, love and violence, reality and magic. Throughout the play, the world of reality and the world of magic coexist, but only with a minimal level of interaction. The contact is restricted to observation and trickery. In the love scene between Titania and Bottom, the two worlds finally come together. Bottom awakens from his experience quite changed. Love often consists of this same proximity of opposites.

For this reason we need to look on love with rose colored glasses, a trick of the eye. By looking on love through the eyes of imagination, love becomes possible. Titania and Bottom's relationship seems unlikely, but so is all love. We need to allow our eyes to be enchanted to love, to dream, and to enjoy art. This enchantment comes with trust. We must allow ourselves to entertain possibilities. We must be open and willing to suspend judgement. When we do this, we open ourselves to love, to dreams and to the enjoyment of art.