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In *A Midsummer's Night Dream* by William Shakespeare, the supernatural and the real world collide together in a comedy about the difficulties of love. The rationality and realism of the play are represented through Athens and Theseus while the imaginative and romantic is represented by Oberon and the palace wood. The setting of Ancient Athens at the beginning of the play is rational and seen as classical. The pairing of King Theseus and Hippolyta is well known by Shakespeare because during the Restoration, they were also seen in Chaucer's "Knight Tale" and also in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. In contrast, the pairing of King Oberon and Queen Titania is also well known in ancient mythology.

Because ancient Athens can be grasped by the reader as a realistic setting, the pairing of Theseus and Hippolyta ground the many complications within the play. While Theseus is known as the judicator and loyal to his future wife, the quarrelsome Titania, and Oberon disrupts within the supernatural faerie wood. Many themes emerge in the comparison of these characters because they represent the realism and the fantastic, the orderly and the chaotic and the rational and the romantic. Since the play is a clear example of a Shakespearian comedy, the audience knows fully well the various complications—many, which, fall into the foolishness category

anyway—that the story will have an eventual and slapstick happy ending.

At the beginning of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the seasoned love of Hippolyta and Theseus grounds the chaos of the play as both characters are making wedding preparations. The couple's affections for each other seem genuine and grounded in comparison to other couples within the play. Considering that Shakespeare chose Hippolyta as the bride—humorous, considering the Amazons in Greek mythology slaughtered men—he means this to be the main power couple because of how Theseus claimed his bride. Within the following lines, Shakespeare describes how Theseus conquered the Amazons but expresses that their marriage will be different from his “wooing” of her:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon. But oh, methinks how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue (Shakespeare et al. 256).

Theseus's enthusiasm to marry Hippolyta illustrates his deep commitment to her and his deep desire to marry her. Likewise, Hippolyta wishes to marry Theseus as soon as they can manage. Unlike the youths or the fairies in the play, these two have no issues with arguments or commitments. Throughout the play, Theseus is illustrated as the voice of reason towards the supernatural. Unlike Oberon, he doesn't believe in magic and assumes the world is a logical place. He even likens lovers and poets at one point in the play to be lunatics. In comparison, Oberon encourages the romantic nature of those around him because he and Titania represent the disorder of the play. The union of Theseus and Hippolyta not only represents seasoned and experienced love but also their ability to hold their faults at bay. The rest of the young couples

within the play— such as Demetrius, Lysander, Helena, and Hermia—represent their nativity by being fickle in their decision-making, their inability to commit, and their headstrong desire that change on a magical whim because of the chaos Oberon and Puck cause. Moreover, gender roles also emerge in the theme of the play indicating the difficulty of love. While Hippolyta and Theseus make love look simple, Titania and Oberon have a quarrel about the changeling boy Titania wishes to have kept in her court. The role of gender division comes into play between the two because Titania mainly keeps females as her court advisors and Oberon males. While Hippolyta and Theseus stand together on their marriage, the voice of reason—Oberon—and the voice of feeling—Titania—remain divided. Their disloyalty to each other emerges in the following lines:

How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus? Glance at my credit with
Hippolyta, Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night
From Perigouna, whom he ravished?
And make him with fair Ægles break his faith,
With Ariadne and Antiopa? (Shakespeare et al. 261).

Their disloyalty to each other is illustrated here by Oberon speaking of Titania's unreasonable love and lust for King Theseus. Their mettle in human affairs as well influences Oberon's romantic notions and the faerie love for mischief.

The settings of Ancient Athens and the faerie wood are also significant to the theme of contrast within the play. While the judicious and rational occur within the urban metropolis of Athens, the supernatural and foolishness occur within the whimsical woods outside of the city. These two worlds of magic versus the real world combine the romanticism of Oberon with the rationalism of Theseus. By the end of the play, both settings end up united and the ending takes the place once again in Athens to ground the rest of the plotline.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William, et al. *The Riverside Shakespeare, 2nd Edition*. 2nd ed., Boston, MA,
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

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