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## MOTIF OF METAMORPHOSIS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

VAISHALI ANAND

MA English, University of Delhi, India

Email- [vaishalianand0505@gmail.com](mailto:vaishalianand0505@gmail.com)

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VAISHALI ANAND

### ABSTRACT

Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare is one of the notable romantic comedies written in the history of British literature. This prominent sixteenth century comedy with its multi-layered plot makes it brainstorming for readers to analyze the connections between the plots. It is seen as a "carnavalesque" because it has characteristics of a carnival or festival with the mirth and excitement it creates. Also the performance by the good company in the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta asserts this theme of carnivalesque. This paper in focuses on the motif of metamorphoses in this text analyzing the types of metamorphosis which occurs in the text.

Keywords- Carnavalesque, Midsummer Night's Dream, Metamorphoses, Motif, Ovid, Multi-plots

### Introduction

Midsummer Night's dream, a sixteenth century comedy by William Shakespeare thematises the idea of love, marriage and most pertinently motif of metamorphosis which is at its core. The text illustrated the events revolving around the wedding of Theseus (Duke of Athens) to Hippolyta (queen of Amazons). With this main plot the sub plot enriches its presentation. The sub plot of love sequences of four young Athenians. This romantic comedy is quoted as "carnavalesque" by the famous critics Harold Bloom and David Wiles. Famous Shakespearean critic David Young in "Something of Great Constancy" talks about two kinds of metamorphosis in Midsummer Night's Dream; first kind is alteration in physical characteristics that are visible physically and materially for example metamorphosis of Bottom's head into ass head and second kind is alteration of an innate

quality into another for example love transformed to hate and vice versa, nature transforming into art, tragedy turning into comedy.

### What is a motif?

A motif is a literary device. It is a recurring symbol which takes on a figurative meaning. It can account anything from an idea to a concept, from a character to an archetype, a color or statement or anything that occurs in the text frequently.

### Examples of metamorphoses in Midsummer Night's Dream

Bottom's transformation into an ass because of Puck's wicked prank is significant and the literal metamorphosis in the text which we witness. It is the only physical metamorphosis in the text. Peter Quince's words "Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art translated" reflect the metamorphosis as the word "translated" suggests

change which is basic element of metamorphosis. The lexemes like “translated”, “changed”, “transformed”, “altered”, “evolved” are semantics of word “metamorphoses”.

In symbolic or metaphoric context, there is metamorphosis in love and desire. This comedy proves that love cannot be complete in marriage, until lovers have gone through certain metamorphosis and become something other. When Oberon instructs Puck to put the magic “potion” in eyelids of Athenians and Titania, their love desires and affections get changed because of the effect of that magic potion. Lysander, who escaped with Hermia because of his profound love for her, suddenly his feelings altered because of magic potion and he started desiring Helena and said, “Not Hermia but Helena I love / who will not change a raven for a dove.” to which startled Hermiasaid that “What change is this, sweet love?”, the word “change” expresses metamorphosis. Potion metamorphosed even the vision of Lysander as Hermia who was perfect for him some moments before, is now a “dwarf”. Even Demetrius who was trying to escape from the chase of Helena, suddenly started loving her and calling her “divine” instead of “ugly” parasite. This love potion like cupid’s arrow not only effected mortals but also Titania, the queen of fairies i.e. She started loving the ass headed Bottom referring him as sweet instead of ugly and grotesque. This also ponders upon the blindness and illusion which love creates. Love potion in the play served as medium of metamorphosis. Perhaps, metamorphosis also means “evolution” and here throughout comedy love evolves from its childhood stage, became mature and ultimately takes form of marriage.

Furthermore, metamorphosis is also induced by the reference of Ovidian metamorphic tales. Reference of “Helen” and “Limander”, “shafalus” and “procus” in the enacted play of Pyramus and Thisbe by the Athenian merchants are the metamorphosed names of metamorphic tales by Ovid i.e. “Hero” and “Leander”, “Cephalous” and “Procris” respectively. The names are altered while their induction in the text and the alteration is another meaning of metamorphosis. So

linguistically, there is metamorphosis in names of character here.

Another metamorphosis is in the tale of Ovid’s “Metamorphosis” of Apollo and Daphne through the Helena’s utterances:

“Run when you will, story shall be changed

Apollo flies and Daphne holds the chase;

The Dove pursues the griffin; the wild hind

Makes speed to catch the tiger.”

In these lines, there is metamorphosis in tales as lustful god Apollo runs away from virginal nymph Daphne who pursues him. Dove chases after griffin, which is actually its predator. Gentle deer tries to hunt tiger. Thus there is metamorphosis or transformation in the traditional line that cowards always run away from the brave people. It’s almost a revolutionary metamorphosis in the conventional perception of coward-ness and bravery.

The legendary tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe by Ovid is also metamorphosed and the character playing Pyramus i.e. Bottom is left “translated” into an ass by Puck. The boundary between tragedy and comedy is disillusioned and tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe is enacted into a very comic way which does not arose catharsis rather left audience with jollity as violence in original one is deflected and transformed. Hence the love tragedy is “translated” in comic in the hands of Athenian craftsmen. There is metamorphosis in elements of genre of tragedy with inclusion of comic elements and comic ending into it. Also, there is another metamorphosis in the same context as men like Snug and Snout who enacted “lion” and “wall” respectively are reduced to mere roles, signifiers which disintegrate their original identities and metamorphosed them into mere roles. So there is metamorphoses of human individualistic identities into roles. As Michel Le Guern argues, “metamorphosis takes place only because there is no more metaphor...poetic illusion can be produces through figure’s destruction”.

#### **Conclusion**

To conclude, if we analyze metamorphoses in the larger context Midsummer Night’s Dream

started with tragic moments when Hermia's father Egeus warns her that she will be made either nun or will be punished death if she denies to marry Demetrius but with gradual process plot metamorphosed into a comic and happy ending with the change in plot line. Metamorphosis according to Ovid is "to speak of forms changed into new entities". In the context of Midsummer Night's Dream, change in love, desire, plays of Ovid, reflects metamorphosis along with literal one of Bottom's head changing into ass head. Even if a certain character pursues a role, so he leaves behind his originality to impersonate that role, this is also a kind of metamorphosis as visible in craftsmen acting in play Pyramus and Thisbe. Also where Pyramus and Thisbe fails in original story, our lovers off stage succeed in love. Even when everything is restored in the end, another magic charm metamorphosed each lived reality into mere dream asserting the title its significance, this also ponders upon motif of metamorphosis.

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**A Brief bio of Corresponding Author-** I am Vaishali Anand, a literary scholar and researcher post-graduated in MA English from Delhi University. Also I write poems and one of my poems "Paradoxical friends" got published in my college magazine Raka in 2017. I believe in affirmative thinking and the positive outlook. My desire is to create an emotional well-being nest for those connected to me as I am staunch believer of spreading happiness.

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