

Hermia's Loss of Paradise in *Midsummer Night's Dream*: Seeing the Other

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Received: 1/22/2022

Accepted: 4/18/2022

Published: 5/24/2022

Abstract

This article analyses the gap between the young (Hermia and Lysander) and old (Egeus and Theseus) generation in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* from Jung's (2012) perspective of *individuation*. Individuation is a process where one gains sense of singular identity separate from the influence of others in a society. This gap between the young and old generation has always been a bone of contention in every age. This article tries to highlight the reasons and solutions necessary to achieve harmony without breaking the bond of respect. Hermia in *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a young Athenian girl who falls in love with Lysander, whom her father Egeus dislikes. She cannot marry Lysander without the consent of her father. The gap between the old and new generations comes to the fore. Hermia loses her paradise because she wants to marry Lysander while her father is against this marriage. Thus, a conflict between the individual's interests starts. This conflict resolves through the process of individuation, where all characters reconcile their differences through a moment of self-discovery that leads to the cultivation of a character, rooted in individuality transcending mere social roles and the expectations of society. This article projects the value of human freedom against suppressing values based on a personal desire to dominate and rule. It also highlights the importance of self-certainty and its conscious integration based on the principle of mutual respect necessary for social dynamism.

Keywords: conflict, individuation, *midsummer night's dream*, self-discovery

Cite as: Alsharadgeh, S. Z. (2022). Hermia's Loss of Paradise in *Midsummer Night's Dream*: Seeing the Other. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies* 6 (2) 120-126. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol6no2.9>

Introduction

Midsummer Night's Dream is a romantic comedy with a reflective message for humanity. It highlights a perennial issue concerning human resistance against retrograde legacies. The play has a symbolic significance. It is a comedy meant to celebrate the nuptial of a nobleman Egeus. Beneath the surface meanings of words, it conveys a philosophical synthesis reminiscent of an enlightened society that believes in peaceful co-existence while at the same time furthering the cause of equality, fraternity, and liberty. This play represents the renaissance spirit. It projects human freedom against suppressing values based on a personal desire to dominate and rule (Calderwood, 1971).

Hermia in *Midsummer Night's Dream* is the daughter of Egeus, a powerful nobleman in Athens. She falls in love with a young man Lysander. Her father wants her to marry Demetrius, whom she does not like. Athenian law does not permit Hermia to marry against her father's will. If she challenges the law, she will either face death or abjure the company of men forever (Olson, 1957). The conflict starts when she decides to challenge Athenian law.

Significance of the study

As time moves on there is a constant evolution of the human psyche and development at a physical level as well. The young generation wants to have a say in their dealings with the world. This inclination on the part of the young generation is resisted by the old generation who wants to dominate and rule. Hermia and Lysander in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* represent the aspirations of a new generation, as compared to Egeus and Theseus, who represent the old generation. As time moves on, the gap between the young and the old generations also widens. This article highlights the importance of harmonizing and synthesizing this gap between the young and the old generations for peaceful co-existence. It also highlights the importance of individual liberty against rigid customs and traditions that make life worse than facilitate it.

Theoretical Framework

This article explores Hermia's loss of paradise in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* from Jung's (2012) concept of individuation. The relationship between Hermia and her father is carried unperturbed over time, but when she decides to marry Lysander, whom her father dislikes, this relationship is disturbed. All the characters need to individuate. It is a self-actualization process in which all the latent potentials become actualized and integrated into a character structure that transcends social and individual barriers to achieve harmony. The conflict between Hermia and her father resolve when they arrive at the moment of self-discovery and achieve consonance.

Textual analysis from the perspective of Carl Gustav Jung's individuation

Hermia's paradise is Athenian society, where she is satisfied as an obedient daughter of her parents. She cannot act according to her own will. She has to do what her parents and the Athenian society expect from her. She sticks to the persona of a good daughter. Before meeting Lysander, she is unconscious of her identity. Athens is everything to her. Everyone is happy in this paradise, so long as their actions are in harmony with Athenian law. Hermia is satisfied with her

life in Athens. At that time, she is willing to marry everybody be it Demetrius or anyone else. Hermia is not conscious that Athenian society is rigid, which does not allow the freedom of choice to its denizens. When she meets Lysander, this meeting the other (Lysander) makes her conscious of this problem—the rigidity of Athenian society. She is incomplete without her animus-- Lysander. Her meeting with Lysander is a moment that leads her to the path of self-discovery because before this meeting, Hermia is willing to marry according to her father's choice (Dent, 1964). When she falls in love, she wants to have her animus, which, in her situation, is Lysander. Her 'choice' is not in conformity with Athenian society. So, the spark of love enables Hermia to point out that Athenians are over conscious of their laws and traditions and that individual freedom for them is the deathblow of their values. They will strongly resist any change in their culture. Hermia has one choice, either sacrifice her freedom or revolt against the static rules of Athenian society. She prefers to have her will. This decision on her part turns Athens for her into hell: “Before the time I did Lysander, see/ Seemed, Athens as a paradise to me/ O, then what graces in her love do dwell/ That, he had turned heaven into hell” (Shakespeare, 1994, p.27). Why the paradise—Athens has been turned into hell? Hermia and Lysander reflect the contra-sexual images—anima and animus of each other. These images are the signals from the unconscious for them. Anima and animus complement each other, so it opens Hermia's eyes to the stagnant society of Athens, where the laws are rigid and offer nothing for the individual's free mental growth.

The same awareness is not there in the case of Demetrius' love for Helena. He has neglected his anima, which for him is Helena. His love for Hermia is not a conscious one. It is Egeus who encourages him to marry Hermia. Egeus says to Lysander: “Scornful Lysander, true, he hath my love; /And what is mine my, love shall render him. /And she is mine and all my right of her, /I do estate unto Demetrius” (1994, p. 24).

Demetrius' love for Hermia is not an inherent one, as they don't reflect the respective contra-sexual images of each other. Theseus is conscious of the "Ancient law of Athens" to the point of extremism, where he can do everything to gratify his lord (Athens) because the "bondsmen" feels pleasure in the service of the lord (Miller, 1979).

Hermia's journey towards self-realization began when she refused to marry Demetrius. She is reluctant to marry anyone else except the man of her own choice. Theseus warns Hermia to question her desire; otherwise, she will 'either face death or abjure forever, the society of men':

For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself,
To fit your fancies to your father's will:
Or else the law of Athens yields you up
(Which by no means we may extenuate)
To death or to a vow of single life (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 25).

Before this, she could not plead her case in the presence of elders—Theseus and Egeus. Now she is a changed person. She is a self-certain individual who cares for none of their threats and replies: “So will I grow, so live, so die my, lord/ Era I yield my virgin potent up/ Unto his lordship, whose

unwished yoke/ My soul consents not to give virginity" (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 23).

Lysander and Hermia fall in love with each other because she resembles the image of anima, which he kept suppressed. Before coming together, everything in Athens is all right. Their conscious attitude changes Hermia's outlook, not only toward Athens but also toward her father, Egeus. She is shedding the false persona of being an obedient daughter. Hermia says: "Oh hell! To choose love by another's eyes". Love is not something; others can choose for us. It is an inherent "imago" projected upon the individual that resembles best the ideal image lying in our unconscious (Jung, 1995).

This consciousness of Hermia about the stagnant society of Athens enables her to question the validity of "Athenian law." She cannot tolerate the imposition of others' will on her. Therefore, by resorting to individuality, she directly comes into conflict with Athenian society by rejecting the accepted norms and hence becomes the 'other' in the same culture. The people of Athens slavishly follow old static laws. They have "fixity" in their gaze by looking at the world and have pre-set notions formulated when their life frame was limited. They failed to realize the evolution of human consciousness within Athenian society (Kehler, 1997). Thus, the result is a collision between the old generation, Egeus and Theseus, and the new generation, Hermia and Lysander. The former is conscious only of Athens, while later is not only conscious of Athens but also of themselves. They have not overdeveloped their personas. Theseus and Egeus stick to their persona of being the protectors of Athenian static traditions. They are unable to realize that Hermia is in love with Lysander. They have failed to have this sense of realization because of the overdevelopment of their personas concerning Athens. They are stuck in a superiority complex and are slaves to social taboos. They overlook Hermia and Lysander's situation. Instead of accommodating them (Hermia and Lysander), they (Theseus and Egeus) threatened them with death or confinement if they fail to obey Athenian law. Both Egeus and Theseus stick to their overdeveloped personas. Egeus looks at the world through his fixed gaze as the father of Hermia, who is just a commodity at his disposal. Egeus has developed the persona of fatherhood to the extent that he fails to see his daughter as an independent being. According to Athenian law, her father is the sole master of her fate. She has to accept what her father orders. Egeus tells her about the prestige of the father in the following words:

To you, your father should be a god
 One that "composed your beauties": yea and one
 To whom you are but a form in wax
 By him "imprinted" and within his power,
 To leave the "figure or disfigure it." (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 22)

In the above passage, the words "god, composed your beauties, wax, imprinted, figure or disfigure it" represent Egeus almost as a demi-god who has not only created her but also made her and her life belong to him. She was a form in wax. It is her father who brought her to life. Whatever the tidings in her life are, it is because of her father. It suggests the fact that the Athenian daughter has no free will. She is a slave who will be at the beck and call of her master. The purpose is to serve her father simply because he has begotten her.

Similarly, Theseus stuck up in the persona of a warrior; courts Hippolyta with a sword. Lysander got Hermia's love after giving her so many presents. Egeus recounts the list of gifts presented to his daughter: This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child:/ With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits, / Knacks, trifles, nose-gays, sweetmeats (p. 22). Through various gifts, Lysander awakens in Hermia the feeling that she is an important lady in his life. Love is a journey to self-realization. It is achieved not through elimination but through respect for the personality of another partner. Love is acquired by giving presents and preserving the self-respect of the beloved, not by courting her with a sword. Similarly, Theseus fails to see that love is not like a battlefield. He woos Hippolyta in the following words: Hippolyta, I woo thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries (p. 21).

Theseus considers Hippolyta as a battlefield. In the war, an enemy is either annihilated or made prisoner. Sword represents the authority and power with which Theseus has courted Hippolyta that cannot be a pattern of love, but a relationship based on a forced union. Indeed, Theseus' courting has damaged Hippolyta's self-respect. Theseus and Egeus, to have this realization, need to integrate their personas into their conscious attitude to become themselves. For this, they have to see Hermia and Lysander make them aware of their lack and their rigid attitude to the world around them. Hermia and Lysander, in order; to avoid collision with Egeus and Theseus, are left with no choice but to flee from Athens. They want to go to the place where "the sharp Athenian law cannot pursue them," which is why the two lovers move to the woods, from the orderly and disciplined society of Athens, which symbolizes the conscious, to the fluid world of woods, which stands as a symbol of the unconscious (Marshall, 1982).

Theseus and Egeus strongly react to Hermia and Lysander's effort to question the validity of Athenian law. Because of this reaction, Hermia and Lysander have to leave Athens. Through the use of the word, "Ancient" Shakespeare wants to emphasize that the laws have made Athens "Ancient" because it is unable to keep pace with time, and the law should be changed otherwise: the young generation will blow it out.

Hermia and Lysander, to avoid direct conflict with Egeus and Theseus, run away to the woods: a symbol of the unconscious. There the communication between conscious and unconscious is restored (Miller, 1948). When traffic between conscious and unconscious restores, a magical transformation occurs in each character.

The Wood is a symbol of the unconscious, where the characters resolve their difference by becoming conscious of each other's weaknesses, openly accepting the coded messages of the unconscious, and rectifying their weakness accordingly (Calderwood, 1991). In the woods, they shed their false personas. This realization on the part of each character enables Hermia to gain her lost paradise. Everyone adjusts himself in this new paradise according to the demands of the situation.

Schedule 1. *Graphics view of three aspects of Athens*

Old Athens	Athens in conflict	Individuated Athens
Ancient paradise	Hell	New paradise
Unconsciousness	A Journey towards self-realization	Movement of self-discovery
Notion	Consciousness	Self-certainty
Oblivious of time	Make efforts to keep pace with time and space	Succeed in achieving harmony with time
Static	Dynamic	Quest

Schedule 1. represents the graphic view of three aspects of Athens: 1; Ancient Athens 2; Athens in conflict.3; Individuated Athens.

Ancient Athens is a paradise. People have integrated their persona into a false or forced unity because of the fear of the law. It is reminiscent of a contemporary, despotic state where there is, seemingly peace and people are happy. They blindly follow the law like robots, devoid of human feelings and emotions. Similarly, in ancient Athens, everything is static. There seems to be no flexibility in it. People are happy because they are oblivious to the dynamics of time. They have made their individuality subservient to Athens. Hermia, too, is happy but, when she meets Lysander, who resembles her ideal image of animus, she becomes conscious of the rigidity of Athenian society as it denies freedom of choice to the individual. Hermia gets the notion of the lack that exists in Athenian society. She revolts against the rigid laws, and this revolution turns Athens into conflict—hell. Athens turns into hell because it cannot accommodate individual liberty. To synthesize this contradiction between self-interest, Athens needs individuation to arrive at the notion of self-certainty. That is why action shifts to woods, symbolic of the unconscious where a flow between conscious and unconscious gets established (Lamb, 2000).

In the individuated Athens self-realization, is achieved by shedding false personas as the traffic between conscious and unconscious is established. Here, the character's notion of being transforms into a moment of self-discovery and then into self-certainty. The characters succeed in achieving harmony with time. This journey towards self-realization turns Athens into a new paradise.

Conclusion

This article has examined how individuation synthesizes resistance and dominance. It approaches *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from a different angle; the development of human consciousness through self-realization. Self-discovery results in self-certainty that evolve human consciousness, necessary for human civilization. Physical or exterior development or change is only possible when collective human consciousness has evolved. Human consciousness scrutinizes the external environment and, tries to adjust it according to its requirements and changing needs. Self-certainty enables an individual to shed false personas. *Midsummer Night's Dream* reflects this dilemma of existence. Athenian society is a paradise for all unless they have not developed their consciousness. They blindly follow the law of ancient times. Egeus and Theseus are the protectors of ancient Athens. They use force against anyone who comes into

conflict with the law. Hermia and Lysander, as self-certain individuals, challenge the static law that does not allow a daughter to marry her lover without the consent of her father.

In reality, Hermia's loss of paradise is not the loss of actual paradise. It is a victory over social obstacles that hamper the individual psychic growth and kill individual self-respect. Her character suggests that only conscious and self-certain individuals can challenge the brutal laws. She revolts, not only against unjust parental authority but also against ruthless law. She is the harbinger of hope for the regeneration of the human race.

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