
An Anatomy of Human Mind in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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Abstract

The play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) shows the artistic experimentation of an anatomy of human mind. Shakespeare explores the function of human mind which the paper attempts to discuss. It seems that the different aspects of personality is projected through the characters responses toward the situation. It will throw light into the repressed desires of conscious mind which is fulfilled in the dreams of the characters using Freudian analysis of a dream. The objective of the paper is to show the function of unconscious mind and will use the lens of psychoanalytic perspective to examine a proper analysis of the play and the representation of the characters as a whole.

Keywords: Psychology , dream , unconscious, conscious, mind.

Introduction

William Shakespeare(1564-1616) was an influential dramatists, playwright and a poet of the Elizabethan era. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*(1595) is a play which deals with the tropes of love, mistaken identity, loss of individual identity, feminism and others. The play delineates the realm of the characters unconscious mind or personalities projected through their actions. The woods symbolizes the unconscious world where it interpolates with the supernatural elements. Critically, Theseus symbolizes the realm of conscious world of the outer reality. Shakespeare uses a mythical source of Cupid's arrow that touches the flower pansy and the potion of it becomes a symbolical references to desire and affection. He uses it to delve deeper into the insights of the characters desire.

The play depicts the realm of unconscious mind. It is presented symbolically in the play where the woods or the forest becomes the representation of the unconscious mind. It can be observed in the play

critically where the characters visit the forest at midnight. Hermia and Lysander decide to meet in the forest at midnight as well as the “mechanicals” or a group of actors meet during the midnight. It is clearly noted in a sense that the characters visit the forest during the midnight and the function of unconscious mind happens at midnight or in a state of a dream.

According to Freud, dreams are the consequences of unfulfilled desires and Shakespeare shows these aspects of repressed desires that fulfill in the unconscious activity. The conscious desire of Hermia to be with Lysander is repressed externally which she is able to fulfill it only in the forest as the couple meets in the forest. Helena’s desire to get back the love from Demetrius is repressed consciously which she only fulfills it in the forest when Demetrius falls in love with Helena and got into a fight with Lysander. The another aspect that Shakespeare is able to showcase is the desire of Oberon to see Titania falling in love with someone which he could make fun of. His desire is fulfilled in the forest when Titania under the influence of Cupid’s potion falls in love with the Bottom’s head which Puck transforms it into an ass. These observations throw light that the forest serves as a realm of unconscious mind or a state of an individual’s dream to fulfill the unfulfilled desires that is repressed consciously.

In addition to this, Carl Jung gave the idea of “collective unconscious” where he describes about “anima” and “animus” as one of its basic important archetypes in “collective unconscious”. According to him, an “anima” is a feminine attribute in men whereas an “animus” is a masculine attribute in women. The play delineates these aspects of archetypes in the play especially in the character of Hermia and Theseus. Hermia’s refusal to accept Egeus’s wishes show that there are a manifestation or possession of “animus” in her character. The masculine component of resistivity and refusal to be submissive is shown by Hermia reflecting Jung’s “collective unconscious” of “animus”. The character of Theseus in the play shows the feminine attribute of sensitivity and caring. These “animas” in Theseus’s character also show Jung’s “collective unconscious” theory which he tries to highlight as a reflection in the person’s behaviour, thought and action. Hermia and Theseus behaviour and thought show these aspects of Jung’s “anima” and “animus” archetypes in the play.

However, Shakespeare delineates the aspects of characters personality in the play. It was Sigmund Freud who gave the principles of id, ego and

superego that exists in human mind. The personality of id is a pleasure principle or wishes of an individual that is reflected in the character of Helena. It is observed in the character of Helena whose inner desires to crave love and attention from Demetrius is exposed in her soliloquy. She states that she will expose to Demetrius about Hermia and Lysander's plan on meeting in the woods because she wants to make Demetrius fall in love with her again. From the perspective of Freudian theory, Helena expresses her desires and wish fulfilling satisfaction to achieve love from Demetrius which is a reflection of id personality.

In addition to this, the play also project the personality of superego in the character of Hermia. The superego is a morality principle based on the individual's conscience towards the situation. It is highlighted in the play where Hermia and Lysander were tired of walking and lost their way in the woods decide to take a rest and goes to sleep. Hermia's response toward the situation in keeping up her modesty and laying apart from Lysander is a clear reflection of superego. The Freudian theory of superego can be imposed over the situation as the working of the moral conscience in response toward the situation shows the morally upright personality or the element of superego in Hermia. It also reveals the character of Hermia that she is a morally strong character.

However, Shakespeare uses a jester in the play which reflects the "progeny of common humanity" (Johnson,133). It can be noted that Shakespeare understood the psychology of the common characters which are presented to bring about a comic relief but is placed in a manner to expose truth which characters normally neglect their words for their act of entertainment purpose. The Fairy of Titania failed to listen to his words spoken about Oberon's jealousy towards her and her Indian changeling boy which Oberon wanted to acquire it for himself and disgusted over her care. The implementation of representing Puck or the jester give an implication toward Shakespeare's ability to understand human nature and he exploits these characters to bring comic relief and reality in the play.

It is interesting to note that Freud has explained the function of a nightmare which the play depicts. Hermia has a nightmare after sleeping in the forest next to Lysander. From Freudian lens, nightmares are dreams where the sexual desire is transformed into the feeling of an anxiety. In the play, Hermia balances her sexual desire to sleep with Lysander where the superego becomes active in her consciousness but the nightmare in her dream from a Freudian perspective could denote the repressed sexual

desire which is transformed into an anxiety which awakes her sleep. It becomes more clearer to Freud's statement of dreams as the royal road to the unconscious mind because the dream shows the function of the unconscious mind and its activity.

Critically, the existence of the conscious mind is symbolically presented in the play. Theseus is symbolically depicted as a realm of conscious mind. The forceful horn ordered to the train to awaken the slumbers from the deep sleep is agitated by Theseus. The sound of a "horn" can be interpreted as a blow of waking up a deep slumbers to bring them forth to the reality from the realm of an unconscious world.

Furthermore, Shakespeare also explores the inability to recall memories from a dream. The play depicts the situation when the characters namely Demetrius and Hermia were unable to comprehend their state of position with their unclear perception of a dream and reality. The state of confusion and vagueness is suggestive of the inability to perceive the events and situation happened in a dream which seems to be "turned into clouds". According to Freud, dream images are non-recurrent and are dimmer than conscious thoughts and feelings which makes it susceptible to forget the incidents happened in the dreams. In the play, since the characters' desires are always repressed externally and does not occur consciously the dream images become "clouds" or dim to them as Freud suggests that an individual remembers the incidents which they encounter many significant times but fail to remember those incidents that happen only at once. Their wishes and desires only happen at once and hence it becomes unclear for the characters to remember their dreams.

Therefore, in conclusion Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) shows the anatomy of human mind. He deconstructed the entire functioning of human mind and explores various aspects of human consciousness and unconsciousness. Johnson's criticism on Shakespeare also throws light upon his psychoanalytical writing style through his implementation of characters such as jesters or clowns in the play. He also projected the functioning of the dream and the working of the unconscious mind. Hence, we can say that the play exhibits the experiment of human psyche and psychology which Shakespeare intends to show artistically in the play.

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