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ENG1D1-02

June 8, 2010

Moon dreaming on a Midsummer Night

Humans have always admired the moon in all its phases during the night.  Our fascination with the moon is ancient and has always intrigued human beings. Its presence is responsible for the tides and has been instrumental in measuring time. The ebb and flow of birth and fertility, life's most memorable moments, has always been affiliated with the moon. The moon is a symbol that appears in many of the scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even the title evokes thoughts of the moon through Shakespeare’s use of night in the title. Shakespeare uses the motif of the moon as a witness to important events that go on during the night since it is present in all the phases of romance.

The moon in its ever-changing state will bear witness to an upcoming marriage. Theseus, the Duke of Athens, lusts after Queen Hippolyta and cannot wait to consummate their union. He refers to the moon in his anticipation of marriage. Hippolyta responds that the moon will witness their union: "Four nights will quickly dream away the time;/And then the moon, like to a silver bow/ New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night/ Of our solemnities" (1.1.8-11). This is an example of the moon being present when there is a life altering situation. It is describing what the moon will look like and at what phase the moon will be during their nuptials-a crescent moon. It is almost as though it is smiling down upon them, condoning their decision. This is an example of the moon witnessing a night of love and lust.

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Another scene in the play where the moon is present during an important event is when Theseus, the Duke, is speaking to Hermia, who is one of the protagonists in the play:

Take time to pause; and by the next new moon…

Upon that day either prepare to die

For disobedience to your father’s will,

Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,

Or on Diana’s alter to protest

For aye austerity and single life. (1.1.85-92)

Hermia must choose the suitor, Demetrius, over her true love Lysander. Her father Egeus is opposed to Hermia's love for Lysander and would rather have her put to death by the Duke, Theseus, than have her united with Lysander. Theseus rules that if she refuses to wed Demetrius she will be put to death or take a vow of single life forever. The new moon is a lunar phase when the moon is in darkness. This is symbolic of the mood in this excerpt, as it will be a dark moment for Hermia as she has no real choice. The moon is present in its phase of darkness during this time of strife and fear.

The moon is mentioned during the scene when Oberon, the King of Fairies is disclosing to Puck, his impish sprite, the story of Cupid firing an arrow and creating the Western flower called love-in-idleness. When poured on sleeping eyelids, the juice from this flower, will make the person

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madly in love with the first living creature they set eyes on. This mockery of love came to be when the moon and earth were cold, symbolizing a place of hatred.

Flying between the cold moon and the earth,

Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took

At a fair Vestal, throned by the West,

And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,

As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.

But I might see young Cupid’s fiery shaft

Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat’ry moon, (2.1.159-165)

  When the arrow was released from Cupid's bow the moon became fluid with molten love. The coldness melted away leaving a place of love and happiness. The moon in this scene is once again witness to an important event and powerfully alters its state to create a world of love from a world of strife.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is metamorphically laced with references to the moon. The moon’s relevance in the story is as a witness being present during important events. The moon is present when there are episodes of love and present in times of hard decision and strife. The moon is like a beacon we can trust to be there when we are experiencing all the different phases of life,

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from birth to adolescence, relationships, marriage and finally death. The moon’s changing phases are like the changes one experiences on their journey through life. The moon is a complex celestial body intertwined with the earth and its inhabitants. Always present during the night, always watchful.