

## Shakespearean Comedy

Shakespeare wrote many plays during his lifetime. Some of his plays have similar comedic characteristics and then other plays are the exact opposite of comedy. Shakespeare wrote tragedies, romance, history, comedy and problem plays all with great success. During the performance of these plays there was no scenery so great time was taken when developing the characters and the plot so the plays would be entertaining. A Midsummers Night's Dream and Much Ado About Nothing are just two of the comedies Shakespeare wrote. These two plays have many things in common where as Measure for Measure is a problem play with a totally different tone. Comparing and contrasting these three plays will help us to understand what Shakespeare thought comedy was in the 1600's and to see if our views on comedy are the same today.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a festive comedy. The play takes place in June and this is a bewitched time. In the spring the custom is to celebrate the return of fertility to the earth. During this time the young people spend the night in the woods to celebrate. Shakespeare uses the greenworld pattern in this play. The play begins in the city, moves out to the country and then back to the city. Being in the country makes things better because there is tranquility, freedom and people can become uncivilized versus when they are in the city and have to follow customs and laws and behave rationally.

Comedies contain blocking figures and in this play it is Egeus. If he was not in the way, Hermia could marry Lysander. Since he is causing problems in his daughters life by trying to make her marry Demetrius, this begins the journey into the woods. Egeus threatened Hermia with death if she were to marry Lysander so she thinks the only way they can be together is to run away.

One strange element is why Egeus was so set on Hermia marrying Demetrius. Lysander came from as good a family as Demetrius. Both were well possessed with property and money so Egeus's power is made to seem senseless.

The play moves into the woods which is haunted by fairies who are there to bless the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta.

The quarreling between Oberon and Titania over the changeling boy leads to the king wanting to embarrass Titania with the love juice by making her fall in love with a monster. The first person she sees is Bottom and she falls violently in love with him.

Oberon is making a spectacle of Titania and Bottom. It is ridiculous that she is in love with him because he is from such a lower class than her, he is human and she is a fairy, and he has the head of an ass. She is also a queen and he is an uneducated working man and a match like this would never happen. Bottom has such a problem with language. He speaks in malapropisms. He tries to say one word but always comes up with the wrong one. He is a working man who tries to act more educated than he really is. Through Bottom

and Titania we see that love is blind. Also, while Titania is under the influence of the love juice she releases the changeling boy to Oberon so he did accomplish his goal.

The confusion between Lysander, Hermia, Helena, and Demetrius because of the love juice is full of funny occurrences.

When Lysander wakes up and thinks he is in love with Helena, Hermia is ignored and treated badly by Lysander. Then

not only was Lysander saying he loved Helena, Demetrius was also treating Hermia badly. This left poor Hermia so upset but we as the audience know this is a prank and soon the spell will be lifted.

The main characters in the play are all developed to a point where the audience can identify with them. We learn things about them individually so we can feel happy or sad when things happen in their life. I felt sad for Hermia when she was jolted by Lysander because their love for each other had seemed so strong and she was so confused by his behavior.

Even though the audience knows the truth it is easy to feel sad for her. As the play nears the end, Oberon lifts the spell and everyone seems to believe they have had a rare vision and then their lives go on just as if none of this had happened.

The play brings closure to the reader by having the traditional ending of a comedy. They usually end in weddings and a feast which is exactly what happens in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Lysander and Hermia, Helena and Demetrius, and Theseus and Hippolyta all get married which signifies a new beginning. The working men end the play with a Bergomask dance and the fairies join in the dance and bless the marriages.

A Midsummer Night's Dream contains many elements of a comedy. The most important ones to me are that the play ends happily, it is funny and it made me laugh. Shakespeare wrote Much Ado About Nothing which is also a comedy, but it is a different type of comedy than A Midsummer Night's Dream. Although these two plays share some common elements, they also have differences.

Much Ado About Nothing is a comedy of intrigue. It involves suspense, question and has a detective story element.

Within the comedy of intrigue, there is social comedy involving Beatrice and Benedick. Through this couple and Claudio and Hero, the play explores the way people interact with each other. Shakespeare shows that love can be very logical but also very passionate. Claudio and Hero have a love that is soft, delicate and logical. Beatrice and Benedick on the other hand, are very passionately in love with each other and show this by quarreling constantly.

Claudio's obsession with Hero is from a distance. He worships her and is astonished with her beauty. His love for her is very shallow because he does not know her as a person. Claudio is being logical about marriage by inquiring about Hero's financial state and social standing. After finding out she is an only child, he agrees to let Don Pedro woo Hero in his favor so she would be his wife.

When Claudio and Don Pedro put their plan into action at the masked ball, Don John appears. He acts as a blocking figure in this play and causes many problems. He tells Claudio that Don Pedro wants Hero for himself, which is a lie, but Claudio acts like "easy come easy go". He is not very upset that he just lost his soon to be bride. When the truth comes out, the wedding day is set and the planning begins. Don John is once again planning to ruin things. He is a jealous, sour and unhappy person. The greenworld is also used in this play but not for festive activities. It is used for plotting bad things that will hurt people.

After Claudio is led to believe Hero was cheating on him, he becomes malicious and wants revenge. Claudio disgraces Hero at the wedding. He refuses to marry her in front of all the guests and accuses her of already having sex with someone else.

This serious act of revenge causes the audience to feel sorry for not only Hero, but her family as well because we know that was not her kissing Borachio. The audience may have felt worse for Hero if her character had been more fully developed but she hardly ever spoke even when agreeing to marry Claudio. We can feel sorry for her but not really identify with her because we do not know her very well. Hero is made a spectacle of for no truthful reason and disgraces her family.

After Hero faints at the wedding, Beatrice is furious. She wants revenge against Claudio. Finally she and Benedick declare their love for each other which was made possible by being under tension and emotional stress and she was finally able to let down her guard. She feels out of control because she needs a man to kill Claudio. She is usually able to take care of things herself but not this time. Thankfully Benedick will not kill Claudio and the truth comes out because of Dogberry and Verges.

When the night watchmen overhear Borachio talking about the scheme Dogberry and Verges bring him and his comrade to their superior. It is funny this watchmen could catch anyone doing anything wrong. The watchmen are like Bottom and are comical. They have the same problem as Bottom and have great difficulty communicating.

After the truth is out that Claudio was fooled into thinking that Hero was cheating on him, he is full of grief because he believes Hero is dead. He agrees to marry Leonato's niece, who is supposed to look just like Hero, to make up his terrible mistake to his family. After he marries the masked bride, he is happy to see it is Hero. This certainly is a marriage of convenience. He did not know Hero anyway so it would not have mattered if he knew the bride to be. In a sense, Hero was resurrected from the dead and Claudio ends up being a very lucky guy.

Most of the characters are fully developed, except Hero, so we can identify with their grief and then their joy. As the play

comes to an end everything is wrapped in a neat package. Don John is captured and brought back to be punished, Claudio and Hero, and Beatrice and Benedick are married and the dance and the feast begin.

Measure for Measure is a play that is very different from A Midsummer Night's Dream. The comedy in this play is very raw. The atmosphere of the two plays are different but they both deal with the same issue of sexuality.

After the Duke has left the city in Angelo's hands, he wants to show his power by condemning Claudio to death because he got Juliet pregnant. Angelo is not being reasonable because he has let the power go to his head. Angelo has also had sex out of wedlock, he just did not get Mariana pregnant. In this play sex is portrayed as much more dangerous than it has been in the other two plays.

After Claudio is jailed, he makes a plea to his sister, Isabella, to help him obtain a pardon for his offense. Isabella had not yet taken her vows to become a nun so she agrees to help him. Isabella and Angelo are parallel characters. Both live with great restraint.

After Isabella pleads with Angelo to pardon her brother, he comes up with the idea of an exchange for Claudio's freedom. He wants Isabella to sleep with him so he could have her virginity and then he would pardon Claudio.

Angelo is a very cold person with no feelings and has restrained himself tremendously throughout his life. He has a problem with women and he is tempted more by a virtuous woman than a frivolous one. In a soliloquy, he talks to himself and tries to understand his lust for Isabella. He has a violent image of sex with her because he wants to destroy her virtue. Angelo is very cruel. He is going to torture and kill Claudio and he is getting pleasure by controlling Isabella. This play is dealing with power and who has the most.

After the Duke, disguised as the Friar, over hears Isabella telling Claudio she will not sleep with Angelo, he comes up with a plan. Isabella would agree to meet Angelo at midnight and they would send Mariana instead because the two of them were supposed to have been married before but her dowry was lost at sea and Angelo had backed out on the marriage.

The plan works but Angelo goes back on his word and orders Claudio's head delivered to him at once. The Friar helps keep Claudio in hiding so everyone would think he was dead. The Friar then returns as the Duke and Angelo's world begins to unravel. He is publicly exposed so everyone will know what kind of a person he is. He has been tricked into marriage and is now a very miserable person. Although he had the ultimate power for a brief time, he abused it and now has to suffer the consequences for a lifetime.

After Claudio is produced and allowed to marry Juliet, the Duke asks for Isabella's hand in marriage.

The satire in this play looks at the two extremes and the audience tries to believe something in the middle. The language used in this play is crude when they are discussing sex. The men in the city talk about sex in a nasty ways discussing how many diseases they have gotten from the hoars. Sex is portrayed as a vile and nasty thing.

Measure for Measure is visually unlike other plays. There is insistence on laws that are very extreme. People are being measured in judgement. It shows that you should be reasonable and weigh things out before actions are taken.

These three plays all have different messages which are told in various ways. As a writer, Shakespeare was so talented he could write different types of stories with such grace. These three plays are just a few examples of the different extremes he was capable of. Writing and defining comedy can be very difficult. Many elements of comedy are in his plays and this makes they very enjoyable reading. Comedy helps me to identify with stories since I like happy endings much better than tragic endings. After finishing a book, I like to have a feeling of closure and in these comedies my need is fulfilled.