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## William Shakespeare's Description of the Difference of Imagination and Realism as Illustrated in His Play, a Midsummer Night's Dream

Dreams, we all have them. Whether they be about the love of our life or our greatest fear, when we fall asleep, we lose the ability to tell the difference between reality and fiction. It's why we actually feel like we're falling off a building and wake up breathless. But when we wake up, we realize we were just dreaming and we can breathe a sigh of relief. However, what would happen if we couldn't tell the difference between our dreams and reality? William Shakespeare in A Midsummer Night's Dream shows us just how confusing and disorienting that would be.

There are rather three and a half stories in this one large story. In the beginning, Theseus and his bride are bored and want amusement before the wedding. That is the half story. Hermia's father brings in his daughter and her beau, Lysander. This being Shakespeare, Hermia and Demetrius are meant to be married, not Hermia and Lysander. But of course, there is the jilted fiancée Helena who is still in love with Demetrius. Hermia and Lysander plan to run off and elope, but Helena tells Demetrius who wants to go after the two, and Helena follows Demetrius into the woods. That is the first story. Next is the carpenters and their little play. This act introduces Nick Bottom, a very self-obsessed part-time actor, who is a little different. The carpenters will be performing a play at the wedding of Theseus and his bride. This scene fades with them agreeing to meet in the woods later on that night. Then you have Oberon and Titania, king and queen of the fairy court. They're upset with each other because of a little Indian boy. Oberon is upset and wants to humiliate his wife so he calls on Puck. Puck, aka Robin Goodfellow, is a trickster and rather careless. Those two things are never really a good combination.

What happens is rather odd, but not all that confusing. Oberon sees Demetrius treat Helena rather rudely and he gets upset, so he tells Puck to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena. Unfortunately, Puck got bored rather quickly so he saw Lysander and Hermia and put the potion on Lysander's eyelids. Lysander woke up and saw Helena. Helena is awkward and tall and probably has never had anyone but Demetrius court her. She thinks he's merely mocking her when he professes his love for her. When Puck goes to fix his mistake however, she believes Demetrius is mocking her as well. She has no confidence in herself. Skip to when Puck goes to find Bottom and turn him into a donkey. He gets it half right. He gives him a donkey's head, but then Bottom doesn't realize this and he scares off his companions, whom are the other actors. So Bottom is upset and when the fairy queen, who has also been given the potion to fall in love with whomever she wakes up to see, he is pleased with himself, still not knowing what fate has

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befallen upon him. Finally when Oberon taunts Titania about being in love with a donkey, she relents about the issue of the boy. Bottom is changed back and sent on his merry way, believing it was all just a dream, that he had just fallen asleep during play practice. So he goes back and all his actor buddies are so happy because they thought that he had been eaten by the donkey monster. Back to the four lovers, Hermia is very upset with Helena, because she figured that Helena had used her height to steal away Lysander. Hermia is ready to fight, but Lysander and Demetrius also want to duke it out for the love of Helena, who still believes everyone is mocking her about her loveless love life. So they all run off into the forest. Thankfully though, Puck sorts it out and Lysander is back in love with Hermia. The four lovers get married along with Theseus and his bride and the actors perform their play. All's well that ends well.

Shakespeare sought to recreate the effects of a dream the same way we don't know that we're not falling until we open our eyes and we're safe in bed. He put in a play events so bizarre that the characters that experienced them could only rationalize them by saying that it was simply a dream. A few of the characters themselves are dreamlike, such as Oberon, Titania and Puck, all of them being of the fair-folk. Magic flowers and fairies are only in dreams and Shakespeare sought to point out that the impossibilities and fantasies that we dream about are much the same. We would not in real life believe that someone's head was changed into that of a donkey's. Nor would we believe that suddenly two men, previously in love with one girl, could just switch to that girl's best friend. It's almost like *déjà vu* because when we see something that we know we've seen before, our brain registers it as odd then files it away in the "I must have been dreaming category." Our minds have been taught that magic itself doesn't exist except in books or in Las Vegas, therefore when something strange pops up, like a man's head suddenly turning into a donkey's, we rationalize it and that was what Shakespeare's point was.

The dreams that we dream at night or during the day are merely fantasies of ours that we cannot enact during the living day. Perhaps they are impossible with the technology we have now. Maybe it's performing a love spell on the person you like. Could it be that you want to be a ninja? "And this weak and idle theme no more yielding than a dream." (Shakespeare, 189) This last line of Puck's is meant to say that if your mind is so set against this play or anything that your brain decides is false, then go on and believe it nothing more than a dream, because after all we never know which is true, reality or dreams.

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