



Are Shakespearean Plays Suitable Material for Children's Literature? A Comparative Study Presenting the Two Shakespearean Plays: The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream

Nardeen M. N. El-Atrouzy

Faculty of Arts, English Language and Literature Department
Ain Shams University

nardeenatrouzy@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research paper aims to study how classic Shakespearean plays are rich and suitable material to be introduced to children to read and enjoy. Two Shakespearean comedies: The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream will be examined to show how they are read and enjoyed nowadays by children as well as their older parents. This is because both plays have fairytale material that is rich with interesting elements like songs, music and dance. They can be reintroduced to children and still achieve the same successful impact on the young minds raising imagination and excitement. The two most successful elements of fairytales: magic and humour are utilized to present an abundance of interest and laughter through reading Shakespeare by children. Children can experience a variety of themes in a fun context that is also educational, especially when using the 'creative dramatics' technique. Simplified and adapted Shakespearean plays will not be a grown-up literature text read by adults only, but will also be read by children, imagined, understood and enjoyed.

Key words: Children's Literature, Comparative Studies, Drama

Are Shakespearean Plays Suitable Material for Children's Literature?

Literature often imitates life, but “fantasy literature has the magical ability to aid life. It can give children hope for tomorrow. It can change the way they think about things around them. And it can offer them the tools to cope with an ever-changing world” (Martin 2020: 2). Shakespeare's plays present “wit and poetry, laughter and sentiment, farce and fantasy ... as naturally as sunshine and shadow over a stream on a breezy day of spring” (Cecil 1957:5). Such plays have great potential in providing children's literature authors with rich material to build on and expand from to suit children's minds. Thus, this way of introducing classical Elizabethan plays will revive the past and spread it into a different age group of society, namely that of children. It will revisit the past, simplify and adapt it, then revive and represent it to children. Shakespeare's works will not be grown up literature texts read by adults only, they will also be read by children, imagined, understood and enjoyed. This research paper aims to examine how classic Shakespearean plays are rich and suitable material that can be introduced to children to read and enjoy. There are several adaptations of the plays that are rewritten to suit the children's minds. They can also be read and enjoyed using the ‘creative dramatics’ technique. The theatre in Shakespeare's days was open to everyone and the plays' principle objective was to be watched and enjoyed. This shows the importance of introducing Shakespeare's plays to children to read and enjoy too, especially by using the technique of ‘creative dramatics’.

The two Shakespearean plays: *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be examined to show how they can be read and enjoyed nowadays by children as well as their older parents. This is because both plays have fairytale material that can be reintroduced to children and achieve successful impact on their young minds, expanding imagination and excitement. The two most successful elements of fairytales: magic and humor are utilized to present an abundance of interest and laughter through reading Shakespeare by children. “Fantasy fosters a seed of curiosity in the children's minds. It forces them to step out of the primary world and into a world constructed by their imagination. They roam these new worlds, they explore them, and they come to question them” (Martin 2020:3). These fantasy stories help children “to look and think about things in new ways; it encourages them to think more divergently ... divergent thinking is about being able to come up with multiple solutions to a single situation. It is vital if a child is ever to become a creative thinker” (Martin 2020: 4). Phillip Pullman, author of *Northern Lights*, says: “fantasy loosens the chains of children's imagination, it gives them new images to think with, allows them to see things from different perspectives, but more importantly, it shows them new concepts that they can take away and incorporate into their own lives” (2013: 2).

Jean Piaget asserts that a child's mind is not simply a younger version of an adult mind but is something much more "raw and animalistic" (1929: 2) it develops as a child grows and interacts with the environment around him. He states that the best way for this to flourish is "by encouraging a child to stoke his own curiosity through exploration, experimentation and fantasy play" (Piaget 1929: 2). The term 'Theory of Mind' refers to how a person perceives the minds and cognitive functions of others. It enables man "to establish connections and how a child works them into his own emotional life" (Martin 2020: 4), which is vitally important to a child's development. A good story, "can immerse a child in new realities. It can make them care about characters and make emotional connections with them" (Martin 2020: 5). Piaget considers fantasy stories as a learning aid where children can "follow and immerse themselves in the narratives. They can experience new perspectives, using them to enrich their inner world" (1929: 4). The three critics: Pullman, Martin and Piaget assert that fantasy is the key to teaching and delighting children. It opens them up to discover diverse creative ideas. This instruction in a very plausible manner is very successful as it teaches and delights, both at the same time.

Because of their very rich content and multiple plots that can be simplified and altered into new material, various adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have been revisited and recreated specifically for children. These adaptations often simplify the language, alter the plot, and emphasize moral lessons to suit the young minds. They aim to make Shakespeare's works more accessible to young audiences. *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb, first published in 1807 is a collection that retells Shakespeare's plays in prose form, making them suitable for children. Later on, *The Tempest*, originally written by Shakespeare in the early 1600's, has been modified and simplified by authors and translators like Kamil Kilani, from the Charles and Lamb tales, to transform it into a plausible adaptation suitable for young readers in their native language, the Arabic Language.

The late Kamel Kilani (1897-1959), is an Egyptian profound author and translator of children's books who is considered one of the pioneers of children's literature not only in Egypt, but in the whole Arab world. He introduced using the Arabic language adaptations of classical works in the 1920's such as the 'Shakespearian Romances'. His adaptation of *The Tempest*, has provided a new way of introducing children's theatre and 'creative dramatics' into the classroom for children to experience the taste of world literature in a plausible simplified way. The big name of the great universal playwright, Shakespeare, could be introduced to the Egyptian and Arab children in a literary context because of Kilani's hard work at translation and adaptation. Introducing the Shakespearean play, *The Tempest*, in the Arabic language, and as children's literature, interested the students who read it at school and at home in their native language. It also gave them confidence that they too can read world literature and enjoy it. Siks questions "how can we afford to withhold from our children this facet of their

education through which they can gain in physical co-ordination, emotional stability, intellectual expansion, and spiritual depth?" (1958:131). Thus the 'emotional stability' of life lessons, the 'intellectual expansion' of foreign lands and wild ideas and the 'spiritual depth' gained from reading Shakespearean plays and the 'physical co-ordination' of acting out scenes from the plays are a great added value to the regular both English and Arabic classes. Fantasy, magic and humor offer new sights and settings, and most importantly are attractive with mesmerizing plots and actions. Kilani succeeded in presenting an adaptation of *The Tempest* showing how an adapted dramatic play can become an important tool in producing contemporary new masterpieces in a different time and a different language medium, namely the Arabic language, and still be successful and influential.

According to Geraldine Siks' interpretation of the term 'children's theatre' includes all plays written by playwrights and presented by actors who can be either adults or children to an audience of children. The plays can be initially written for children or adaptations of classical plays rewritten to suit younger minds. 'Creative dramatics' is the recreation and the reacting of scenes from studied or read plays under close supervision of an adult figure who can be a teacher at school, a mentor at an activity or edutainment center, or a parent who enjoys reading to his/her children at the convenience of their home. Its main aim is to focus on the "personal development of players" (Siks 1958: 8-9) and it involves an array of interactive activities which besides enhancing linguistic and social skills, works on the creative and imaginative skills of children. Thus, it is safe to say that the relationship between children's theatre and 'creative dramatics' is very close and interdependent. They complement each other where the former focuses primarily on the child as the audience and the latter on children who participate in the action produced. 'Creative dramatics' provide rich tools to the educators to work on their students' academic knowledge, language skills and social and interactive skills. They act as a means of:

preserving creativity through fostering sensitivity, fluency of ideas, flexibility of thinking, and originality, these alone would be reason enough for making this art a part of the everyday life of all children. For educators from all fields have come to acknowledge that the shaping of the future will demand minds which think creatively and which have the vision and imagination not only to seek the answers but to ask the questions which science and technology cannot ask.

Siks, 1958: 128

Besides the many educational benefits to students, 'creative dramatics' add to the students' practice of social and character development. Siks explains how certain social and behavioral values "have been observed as a direct result of creative dramatics experiences" (1958: 129).

Ever since 'The Theatre' (1576), the first public stage in London, and before that when players and performers presented their talents in courtyards and inns, plays were enjoyed by adults, and with time, the same scenario took place with the help of the creative dramatics' the performances developed a creative medium that became essential to children's literature. Siks in terms of defining 'creative dramatics', states that the term:

refers to an informal activity in which children are guided by a leader to express themselves through the medium of drama. Its goal is not performance, but rather the free expression of the child's creative imagination through the discipline of an art form. Other goals include the development of the whole child through a group process ... Creative dramatics can also be used as a part of a total educational unit in which the child concretizes his learning about, say, social science or literature by enacting the characters or situation he is studying. (1958: 4)

The past historical "world picture which the Middle Ages inherited was that of an ordered universe arranged in a fixed system" (Tillyard 1943: 13). This 'picture' has been altered from the old Elizabethan picture to a much more modernized image which shares nothing with the old one except the core idea; that man is the most important being around which everything else revolves. Shakespeare focused on man, highlighting how the whole universe worked to his favor. Fantasy and humor became iconic tools present in most Shakespearian plays. Both *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* show an abundance of these tools and provide material with an appropriate subject matter to suit children's literature.

Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed on the stage, hence, the natural development would be making the best of the written play using 'creative dramatics' to introduce the comedy to the younger generations in a plausible manner. In both plays, the dance, songs and festivities of the gatherings and the weddings at the end of the plays, the magical disappearing banquet, the ship at sea battling the waves are all extravagant scenes written by Shakespeare to be performed in front of an Elizabethan audience. However, decades later, the same plays are to be enjoyed, using the 'creative dramatics' set-up staging the scenes by students and children. And with the help of the acoustic use of music "the most frequent demonstration of magic" (Jamieson 2019: 3) the representation is further highlighted. Children can enjoy the plays in modern times just like the old Elizabethan adults once enjoyed them.

The opportunities dramatic play exploits are very interesting as the main aim of to 'teach and delight' took a measurable shift:

Midway in childhood something begins to happen. There must be adjustment to a factual, material world. Children begin to conform. Adults help the process along, that

adjustment may be made as swift and resistless as possible. Children's minds are railroaded from this station to that, all plainly marked on the map called education. That space so boundless in babyhood, that heavenly pasture for play and joy unbounded, becomes no wider than your thumb. (Sawyer 1945: 117)

It is true then that opportunities for experience in 'creative dramatics' may help change this 'narrowing down' of the growing potentials of the youngsters, which is confirmed by the concern Sawyer speaks about and fears in the course of growing up. And to further assert the importance and complementary action of 'creative dramatics' to children's theatre, Winifred Ward says: "There is no school activity which gives better opportunity for creativity than playmaking" (1958: 7). Thus, imaginative and creative skills will only grow and flourish through consistent and constant practice to produce confident and creative children.

In 1908, Mark Twain called children's theatre "one of the very, very great inventions of the twentieth century" (Ward 1958: 76). Drama and its presentation on stage has always been an art that nurtures the mind and soul of adults and has consequently the same effect on youngsters who are introduced to a play where a story tells the happenings of a protagonist or hero who faces dire circumstances, and has to face them with courage. He becomes involved and faces the forces of good and evil which appeal to the young minds and involve them:

Good theatre pinpoints attention and causes an audience to identify, to "feel-with" the protagonist as he struggles with conflicting forces and eventually triumphs or yields to defeat; but in the end, because of his moral convictions and actions, becomes always a more admirable person. Siks 1958: 6

The 'audience' mentioned by Siks can be either an adult or a much younger audience. Each will relate and identify with the play introduced in their own way, depending on their awareness and experience.

The story of *The Tempest*, written in the early 1600's, unfolds on a remote island near Italy where Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, lives with his beautiful daughter, Miranda. Both father and daughter share the island with two other beings, Ariel, an airy spirit and Caliban, and earthly beast. With the opening lines of the play, Prospero reveals to his daughter the story of how they arrived to the island "by foul play, as thou say'st, were we heaved thence, but blessedly help hither", (Shakespeare 1965:7), and he reveals to her the unfortunate happenings they both had to endure. Being a powerful magician, Prospero conjures a tempest or a storm that sets the first scene for the play and commences all the turmoil and action. He has "put the wild waters in this roar, allay them. The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch, but that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek, dashes the fire out" (Shakespeare 1965: 7). A ship with his evil brother and a

group of nobles suffers from the storm and all characters arrive to the island where Prospero with the aid of his helpers using magic control the action and manipulate the characters. His aim was to correct all the wrongful actions that happened before and claim back his usurped kingdom from his brother, Antonio. A blend of serious and comic scenes take us to the end as Prospero, once again using his magic resolves the situation and announces his return to Italy along with the newlyweds, his daughter and her groom. The play explores mainly the theme of the human nature. It also presents the themes of freedom, love and reconciliation.

Like *The Tempest*, "Shakespeare's best comedy" (Brown 1961: 214), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written in the 1500's, was inspired from the romantic stories of the Middle Ages, which are very rich in tales and fantasy. It is a fanciful tale full of magic, mischief and love. It explores the themes of love, appearance and reality, order and dis-order, showing their impact on characters and their behavior. Set in Athens, the play has several subplots that revolve around the marriage of Duke Theseus and Queen Hippolyta. One subplot is a conflict among four Athenian lovers while another is about a group of amateur actors rehearsing the play they are to perform at the wedding of the Duke. The play's inference of a marriage celebration towards the end which is usually a big family gathering involving all family members, young and old signals a happy ending since the opening lines. King Oberon celebrates this happening reunion saying:

Now, until the break of day, Through this house each fairy
stray. To the best bride-bed will we, Which by us shall blessed
be; And the issue there create Ever shall be fortunate. So shall
all the couples three Ever true in loving be; And the blots of
Nature's hand Shall not in their issue stand; Never mole, hare
lip, nor scar, Nor mark prodigious, such as are Despised in
nativity, Shall upon their children be. With this field-dew
consecrate, Every fairy take his gait; And each several
chamber bless, Through this palace, with sweet peace; And
the owner of it blest Ever shall in safety rest.
Shakespeare 1958: 60

This familiar Shakespearian trait portrayed in an attractive magical setting serves as a suitable text for children to read and enjoy.

The content provided in both; *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reveals a fantastic world in which heavenly powers make fun of earthly fools. Both are wedding-plays, with similar happenings between characters like Caliban discovering a god in the drunken Trinculo that is very similar to Titania's amorous worship of Bottom. The scenery, also, in both is autumnal throughout, and the time is that of the autumn equinox with its storms and shipwrecks. The climate is harsh and northerly, in spite of the southern situation of the island and the southern names. Even the utterances of the goddesses, the blessing of Ceres, for example, show that the season is late September. Such time and place similarities can be

easily presented and used to direct the actions of the plays. They are mysterious, exciting and adventurous, the kind of material children's works thrive on.

'Prospero' and 'Oberon', the two powerful kings in the two Shakespearean comedies, contribute largely to the events that occur - Prospero "safely" (1965: 6) orders Ariel to help him capsize the Duke of Milan's ship, while Oberon instructs Puck to create the love potion or "juice, as I bid thee do" (1958: 27) causing pain and confusion to all the other characters. This seemingly 'evil' versus 'good' struggle provides material for the theatre and for the imaginative minds of children. A 'Good theatre' according to Siks, "will allow children to experience the aesthetic satisfactions of good dramaturgy" (1958: 30). Such qualities,

will be found in all good theatre, but they *must* be in children's theatre if the child is to be introduced to the true value of drama as an art. In a well-written play the basic compositional principles – unity, balance, variety - will be evidenced in a plot with a clear, forward-moving, unbroken story line; fully developed yet not overly complex characterizations, delineated primarily by their own words and actions and capable of logical and consistent growth; and dialogue which is inspiring, imaginative and refreshing.
Siks 1958: 30

In spite of being a very old play, that belongs to the sixteenth century, *The Tempest* became classified as "children's theatre" material and can be studied from a 'creative dramatics' point of view (Siks 1958: ix). The term "children's drama" encompasses

Both children's theatre and creative dramatics. Children's theatre is based on the traditional theatre concept and is concerned with producing plays for children. Creative dramatics is concerned with the process of encouraging children to create informal drama through effective leadership.
Siks 1958: 4

A good play traditionally aims to entertain and instruct the audience old and young. A "good drama feeds a child's heart and mind and causes him to dwell in realms of wonder" (Siks 1958: 7). Thus, thematically, character wise and language wise, Shakespeare's plays can be adapted to fit a young audience. Many of his dramatic plays with their plots, characters and settings can be very interesting and enjoyable in the classrooms of school children.

Teaching Shakespearean plays has been an issue that baffled many educators and researchers regarding how to use it in a successful way:

Educators who know and understand the art of drama have posed these pertinent questions: How may drama which has expressed fundamental human needs since the dawn of civilization become vital for children and youth? How may drama be woven into children's lives in such a way that

cultural values become rooted in society? How may drama become an integral part of education so children's creativity and sensibilities are developed? Siks 1958: 4

To answer the above inquiries, we must study the fairy tale atmosphere, plot and characters in the play that involve many fairies, magical and enchanted characters and settings that are appealing to children and at the same time use them as an educational medium to teach and instruct them about various life values, ethics and future lessons. "Paraphrase and translation analogies can also be useful in considering what I earlier called the ontological shift that can happen in adaptations of an historical event or an actual person's life into a reimagined, fictional form" (Hutcheon 2006: 18).

Among the many factors present in the two Shakespearian plays that make them very successful material to be used as children's literature is the wide selection of diverse characters and their representations. Evil characters or villains, for example are constantly introduced as opposed to the kind hearted characters who do good and sacrifice their happiness for the sake of others and deserve the trophy at the end. The "worlds of fantasy are incredibly important to a child. In play especially, it allows them to explore, learn about, and ultimately come to grips with a world that may seem so daunting to them" (Martin 2020: 4). A fantasy play "provides the perfect staging ground for a child's cognitive and narrative skills to flourish" (Martin 2020: 5). There are many benefits taken by children from fantasy or 'pretend-plays', such benefits "range from self-expression to self-regulation, even how a child comes to understand and use language" (Martin 2020: 5). There are many situations in the plays that present scenes that can be acted. A child can pretend to be 'Prospero' or 'Oberon' and live the experience of a king with all its might and glory.

The Tempest begins its first lines with magic and all the relatable incidents that set the action follow. Lee Jamieson explains how the play "draws heavily on magic" (2019: 1) from beginning to end. There are two types of magic "one is the art of evil through the use of Black Magic and the other being the study of metaphysics and the unknown through the use of White Magic" (Jamieson 2019: 1). The 'Black' aspect of magic is revealed through the character of the evil witch 'Sycorax' who uses the 'Black Magic' to deceive "with half-truths and riddles that lure a person with false promises" (Jamieson 2019: 2). The 'White' or good aspect of magic is presented through the well-developed character of Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan. He resorts to his knowledge of the art of magic to restore himself to his former worldly position which represents order, since he was in the view of the 'Elizabethan World Picture' the rightful ruler. With the power of the 'White Magic' he possesses, he exercises his art of "bringing out the potential that inheres in nature and seeing the form in matter" (Jamieson 2019: 2). The opening scene of the play portrays, the setting which is established with a violent storm milieu at sea where a ship and passengers are about to be shipwrecked and are in grave danger. With this interesting and exciting

introduction of the play, where Prospero, the magician, is at work sets the initiative of magical happenings as the scene begins, “on a ship at sea: a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard” (Shakespeare 1965: 3-4), is coupled with a nostalgic tone of going back in time and remembering the past. The old, dethroned king narrates to his daughter Miranda their sad story which brought them to the island twelve years ago. As the plot progresses, Ariel, an airy spirit that is controlled and rewarded by freedom with the curtains closing by his master, Prospero, is busy at work casting magical spells on the characters in the play. Prospero calls it, “My tricky spirit” (Shakespeare 1965: 67) and gives it power to do the magic guiding and leading the characters to places and areas he finds fit. With Ariel, constantly using music as a “tool for manipulating the group of lords. By practically seducing them with sound, he is able to split them up and lead them to different places on the island, helping Prospero achieve his goals” (Jamieson 2019: 3). The evil act that strikes the beginning as a cruel start exposes the kind hearted characters, Miranda pleading to her father to stop the storm and rescue the ship, says: “if by your art, my dearest father, you have put the wild waters in this roar, allay them ... O, I have suffered with those that I saw suffer” (Shakespeare 1965: 5).

Since drama primarily deals with man, his actions, choices and interactions with others, a child who either watches or plays many dramatic roles matures faster and develops a sensitive understanding of others and is known to have a successful and balanced life. Siks explains how “Experience in drama makes a child more sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others because these are the very essence of his study” (1958: 27). By focusing on characters and their actions, the child relives multiple experiences and learns from them, thus developing in a much faster way than a peer who is not introduced to creative dramatics. Prospero explains to his daughter:

Canst thou remember a time before we came unto this cell? I do not think thou canst, for then thou was not out three years old ... Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve years since, thy father was the Duke of Milan and a prince of power ... By foul play, as thou say'st, were we heaved thence. Shakespeare 1965: 7

In Prospero's case, he was threatened by a forced alienation and an attempt to get rid of him by killing him. But in Alonso's case, twelve years later, Prospero reacted differently. When given the same chance he only teaches his brother a lesson, years later. Prospero forgives Antonio for his crime and reclaims his lost gone dukedom. Consequently, teaching the moral lessons: truth, honesty, integrity and sincerity “are constantly before the child who is part of the creative dramatics and as he plays with all the sincerity, honesty, and belief of which he is capable these attitudes may become a permanent part of his personality” (Siks 1958: 130). In addition to the values taught, the benefit of self-development of children cannot pass unnoticed. For “in the process of this art a child acquires skill

in expressing his ideas. He gains confidence in his own thinking as he contributes to the planning of a creative play, when he plays a role" (Siks 1958: 130). With the play's closing words of Prospero to the group of nobles including Alonso and Sebastian, his future son-in-law, he concludes the play:

With such discourse as, I not doubt, shall make it go quick away; the story of my life and the particular accidents gone by since I came to this isle: and in the morn I'll bring you to your ship and so to Naples, where I have hope to see the nuptial of these own dear-beloved solemnized; and thence retire me to my Milan, where every third through shall be my grave.
Shakespeare, 1965: 69-70

Ending the play in such a way, Prospero concludes his life on the island. He chooses to go back to his homeland, Milan, to claim his Dukedom and land. All dangers and perils, caused by spells and magic are cleared out and order is restored on the island and soon will be in Milan. Evil is punished and kindness is rewarded, putting an end to all the chaos and confusion that took place earlier in the play. Like adults, children will relate to and embrace this happy closure to end the play.

Like in *The Tempest*, much of the action in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has to do with fairies "who interfere by dropping magic juice onto the eyelids of sleeping humans and fairies, which make the victims fall in love with whomever they see when they wake up" (Smith 2021: 3) raising laughter. Some of the characteristics of children's literature are the use of folktales and enchantments, in which the plot is set, which is a direct descendent of oral tradition. Also, witches, ghosts, goblins and other similar supernatural beings, both good and evil, along with the fairies and their enchanted forest can be adapted in such a way as to serve two very important intensions: teaching and delighting. Such "Adaptations are obviously not new to our time, however, Shakespeare transferred his cultural stories from paper to stage and made them available to a whole new audience" (Hutcheon 2006: 2). Shakespeare once wrote and acted his plays and now, children get to enjoy their adaptations many years later. The 'new audience' in our modern time can be children. Hence, the classic plays are enjoyed by both old and young. From the moment when we enter the enchanted woods, at the beginning of act II until Act IV, we are continuously in the company of supernatural beings who are playing the roles of actors, directors and observers. The stage is never boring and never empty. And most of the lines are spoken in the presence of both awake and seemingly sleeping characters.

Like Ariel in *The Tempest*, the character of the mischievous Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* serves as an excellent example of the playful character who attracts attention, creates humor and at the same time is a basic anchor to the main plot. His supernatural appearances add to his charm and can make him even more popular with young readers. He talks with the other fairies boasting his charming influence on the humans saying:

Thou speak'st aright; I am that merry wanderer of the night. I jest to Oberon and make him smile When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile, Neighing in likeness of a filly foal: And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl, In very likeness of a roasted crab, And when she drinks, against her lips I bob And on her wither'd dewlap pour the ale. The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale, Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me; Then slip I from her bum, down topples she, And 'tailor' cries, and falls into a cough; And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh, And waxen in their mirth and neeze and swear A merrier hour was never wasted there. But, room, fairy! here comes Oberon.
Shakespeare 1958: 13

The play begins with music as the opening is lyrical signaling the marriage celebration that is to take place and the family atmosphere children are accustomed to. Theseus addresses his bride to be saying: "Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour Draws on apace; four happy days bring in Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow This old moon wanes! she lingers my desires, Like to a step-dame or a dowager Long withering out a young man revenue" (Shakespeare 1958: 2). The Elizabethan fatherly image of a high authority that is to be fully respected and willfully obeyed is shown since the commencing lines. Hermia is presented as a young girl, blindly following her passion instead of following her father, Egeus, who is older and wiser regarding her marriage choice. The play enjoys a peculiar plot setting which is:

never a probable, true-to-life plot, nor is it meant to be. Shakespeare's aim is to take us out of real life into a more agreeable imaginative region ... (one that) stands for some exotic fairy-tale country, some Never-Never land that appeals to the imagination ... The same is true of its inhabitants, at least of those characters around which the plot revolves. Hero and heroine alike are figures of romance, beautiful, gallant and witty, and with charm.
Cecil 1957: 2

Plot, setting and characters all align up to present the themes revolving around common human relationships highlighting love, family and brotherhood morals. And above all the mixture of prose and poetry, through the use of songs and music. Charlton describes the play as "admittedly Shakespeare's first masterpiece" (1990: 103) and explains that this mastery comes from weaving together

three evidently alien kinds of matter ... into a single composite picture, three distinct and unrelated worlds shaped into one consistent universe. The anachronistic court of a pre-Homeric Athens, the realistic population of a contemporary English countryside, and the realm of a fairy land in which ancient, medieval, and modern have

broken through the limits of time to exist together in one
and the same timeless moment. 1990: 103

Magic, love potions, enchantments and supernatural beings set the unique background of the play. The use of magic serves well in a child's friendly atmosphere as many children relate to the impossible or improbable and indulge themselves in the mystical world with all its intriguing aspects. In the play, fairies and magical beings seem to move much of the play's action, causing multiple conflicts and resolutions between the characters. The wood scenes in the play provide a perfect setting for all the magic to take place, by isolating the minds of the children and inviting them on an enchanted journey, the introduction of a donkey-head character no doubt becomes very amusing and humorous. Puck speaks of more interesting magical animals where he says:

Now the hungry lion roars, and the wolf howls the moon; whilst
the heavy ploughman snores, all with weary task fordone. Now the
wasted brands do glow, 59 Whilst the screech-owl, screeching
loud, puts the wretch that lies in woe In remembrance of a shroud.
Now it is the time of night That the graves all gaping wide, every
one lets forth his sprite, in the church-way paths to glide: and we
fairies, that do run by the triple Hecate's team, from the presence of
the sun, following darkness like a dream, now are frolic: not a
mouse Shall disturb this hallow'd house: I am sent with broom
before, to sweep the dust behind the door. (Shakespeare 1958: 59-
60)

This shows how magic plays a significant role in the play, "in the normal course of events, a person would not fall in love with a man who has been given the head of a donkey, but this is precisely what happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Once magic is introduced to the plot and combines with love, anything is possible" (Smith 2021: 2).

In the woods, the characters' fates become entwined with that of the fairies. Puck, the master fairy who plays pranks and changes appearance at his own convenience, becomes the main action driver. He is in charge of applying the juice of the magical flower, given to him by Oberon who is in turn able to become invisible to others, to the sleeping Demetrius' eyes, so that when he wakes up he falls in love with Helena. The comedy arises with the mistake Puck does in taking Lysandar to be Demetrius resulting in a shift from loving Helena instead of Hermia. Magic is thus used to make people fall in and out of love, creating some comic scenes until order is restored and the play ends with the marriage of the happy couples on the same day of the ceremony of Theseus and Hippolyta.

Like in *The Tempest*, the magic-based theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dominates the whole play. And by using magic, the adapter's job to simplify will be facilitated better as the impossible or improbable can be easily accepted and the flow of the plot connected and understood. Magic is thus used to make people fall in love, in a couple of occasions to set the marriage setup with the closing

lines of the play. This can be used to emphasize the importance of family bonds and human relationships. And to enlighten the adult love theme, the donkey-headed monster scenes serve as the comic and laughter making incidents for the children till the final dance in the play.

The universal love theme is presented in the play in a rather comic way with the aid of the 'love-juice' in the woods which creates more laughter and amusement. Hutcheon states that many adaptations:

relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew.
2006: 3

The adult themes of love relationship and marriage can be simplified and changed to a family making tool in a rather healthy and humorous environment.

Unlike many Shakespearean plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has four, equally important plots. "Most theories of adaptation assume, however, that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres, each of which deals with that story in formally different ways and, I would add, through different modes of engagement —narrating, performing, or interacting" (Hutcheon 2006: 10). A play having multiple plots, is easily grasped by adults but when it comes to young children, the adaptation of the studied text must be simplified and emptied from many details and original incidents to make it plausible for the young learners.

Many of Shakespeare's plays, comedies in particular, contain traceable characteristics, all mixed in varying proportions. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Cecil mentions how "all the elements are present in their most extreme form: the farce is more farcical, the fantasy more fantastic, the relation to ordinary life even slighter and more tenuous than in others" (1957: 3-4). With this note, the action of the play takes place in a "wood where moonlight and fairy influence suspend" (Brown 1961: 84) the reader's sense of reality and transforms him/her to the realm of dreams and enchantment. Children will let loose their sense of imagination when reading a version of the play and will surely get immersed and involved in the magical happenings of a performance of it should they be watchers.

Drama and its presentation on stage has always been an art that nurtures the mind and soul of adults and has consequently the same effect on youngsters who are introduced to a play. Various adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have been revisited and recreated specifically for children because of their very rich content and multiple plots that can be simplified and altered into new material. The theatre in Shakespeare's days was open to everyone and the plays' principle objective was to be watched and enjoyed. These same plays, in their simplified and adapted

forms can serve decades later as a source of teaching and delighting for children. The big name of the great universal playwright, Shakespeare, could be introduced to the Egyptian and Arab children in a literary context because of writers such as Kilani who simplified and translated the plays.

The two plays: *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with their fairytale material and subject matter, express through humour and magic a different kind of literature for children to enjoy. They expose the classic past in a modern framework. Fantasy, magic and humor offer attractive and mesmerizing plots in the two plays. Love potions, enchantments and supernatural beings set the unique background of the plays giving the child the chance to imagine and create the improbable in his/her mind. The content provided in both plays reveals a fantastic world in which heavenly powers make fun of earthly fools. Both are wedding-plays, with similar happenings between characters. The scenery, also, in both is autumnal throughout, and the time is that of the autumn equinox with its storms and shipwrecks. The climate is harsh and northerly, in spite of the southern situation of the island. Such time and place similarities can be easily presented and used to direct the actions of the plays. They are mysterious, exciting and adventurous, the kind of material children's works thrive on. Critics like Martin, Pullman, Piaget and Siks all assert the influence of fantasy and how it can be used in educating children in a fanciful way that is much more attractive and inviting than regular instruction. They all agree that fantasy teaches the child to be open to diverse creative ideas and by using rich plays such as the two Shakespearean plays, this goal is achieved.

Reading Shakespearean adaptations for youngsters can easily teach them how to relate and interact with the plots and the actions of the story. To be able to introduce the actions in the play by resorting to the 'creative dramatics' technique, the children become actively involved. They can perform the fantasy in a creative way. Critics and educators highly praise and recommend this way as it is plausible and educational. They are also able to take it a step further to create their own endings of the story of the two kings: Prospero and Alonso. Whether sentenced to death or pardoned to live in peace, their imaginings of the endings prove how interesting the story is for them to engage in its closure. This proves that Shakespeare can be read and enjoyed by young readers like adults, which is a new feature to be added to Shakespeare's multi-talented faces.

Both *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* show an abundance of tools, namely fantasy, magic and humor, and provide material with an appropriate subject matter to suit children's literature. Many Shakespearean plays prove to be a rich source of literature aiming to teach and delight not only adults, but also children all over the world. Children can enjoy the plays in modern times just like the old Elizabethan adults once enjoyed them.

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