



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## “EXPLORING SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY: STYLE, CONTEXT, AND COMIC ELEMENTS IN PLAY THEMES”

<p>M. VIMANDHANI, MA STUDENT, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH SATHYABAMA INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, SEMMENJERI, CHENNAI-600119.</p>	<p>MS. MRITTIKA MAITRA ASSISTANT PROFESSOR DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH SATHYABAMA INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, SEMMENJERI, CHENNAI-600119.</p>
---	--

### ABSTRACT

Shakespearean comedy is a multifaceted genre that amalgamates humor, wit, and societal critique. This study delves into the distinct attributes of Shakespearean comedy, scrutinizing its style, context, and the diverse comedic elements utilized in its thematic content. Through an analysis of Shakespeare's comedic techniques, this research seeks to illuminate the enduring allure of his comedies and their relevance in today's society.

The analysis commences by exploring the stylistic traits of Shakespearean comedy, encompassing its linguistic nuances, poetic forms, and structural components. It then delves into the historical and cultural backdrop against which these plays were crafted, emphasizing how Shakespearean comedy mirrors the social norms, values, and issues of the Elizabethan era.

Moreover, this paper identifies and scrutinizes the prevalent comic elements present in Shakespearean comedies, such as mistaken identity, wordplay, and the use of disguise. Through a meticulous examination of select plays, the study illustrates how these comic elements contribute to the overarching themes of love, marriage, gender dynamics, and societal hierarchy in Shakespeare's comedies.

**Keywords:** Shakespearean comedy, humor, wit, societal critique, style, context, comic elements, love, marriage, gender dynamics, societal hierarchy.

## INTRODUCTION

Shakespearean comedy is a testament to the playwright's mastery of wit, humor, and human insight. These works, written in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, continue to captivate global audiences with their complex plots, rich characters, and timeless relevance. This paper aims to explore the essence of Shakespearean comedy by examining its unique style, historical and cultural context, and recurring comedic elements that contribute to its thematic depth. By analyzing plays like "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Twelfth Night," and "As You Like It," this study seeks to highlight the blend of farce, wordplay, and social commentary that defines Shakespeare's comedic brilliance. Through this analysis, the paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the enduring appeal and artistic significance of Shakespearean comedy in the realm of dramatic literature.

Top of Form

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Shakespearean comedy has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation due to its enduring popularity and distinctive artistic qualities. Scholars have examined various aspects of Shakespeare's comedic works, including their style, historical context, and thematic elements, contributing to a comprehensive body of critical analysis.

Critics have focused on Shakespeare's comedic style, emphasizing his use of language, imagery, and dramatic techniques to establish a unique comedic ambiance. For example, the utilization of puns, wordplay, and double entendres in plays like "Twelfth Night" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" has been a key area of scrutiny, showcasing Shakespeare's adeptness at manipulating language for comedic effect.

The historical and cultural context of Shakespearean comedy has also been a significant area of exploration. Scholars have investigated how Shakespeare's plays reflect the social, political, and cultural landscape of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, providing insights into the playwright's engagement with contemporary issues. Additionally, scholars have examined the influence of classical comedic traditions, such as Roman comedy and Italian commedia dell'arte, on Shakespeare's works to understand the broader context in which his comedies were created.

Furthermore, scholars have analyzed the thematic elements that define Shakespearean comedy, such as love, mistaken identity, disguise, and the complexities of human relationships. These themes often intertwine with elements of fantasy, enchantment, and the supernatural, creating intricate comedic narratives that resonate across different times and cultures.

In recent years, interdisciplinary approaches to studying Shakespearean comedy have emerged, incorporating insights from fields such as psychology, gender studies, and performance theory. These interdisciplinary perspectives have offered fresh interpretations of Shakespeare's comedies, shedding light on their relevance to contemporary audiences and their enduring significance as dramatic literature.

In summary, the literature on Shakespearean comedy encompasses a wide array of critical perspectives and methodologies, reflecting the enduring fascination with these timeless works and their importance in the broader context of literary and cultural studies.

## SHAKESPEARE'S COMIC STYLE

Shakespeare's comedic style is a defining aspect of his plays, marked by its wit, wordplay, and adept use of language to evoke humor. Within his comedies, Shakespeare utilizes various comedic techniques, including mistaken identity, wordplay, and situational humor, to captivate his audience. An essential characteristic of Shakespearean comedy is its adept blending of lightheartedness with profound themes, often employing humor to explore deeper subjects such as love, identity, and societal dynamics.

Central to Shakespeare's comedic style is his mastery of language, skillfully manipulating words and phrases to create puns, double meanings, and witty exchanges among his characters. This linguistic finesse adds depth to his plays, engaging audiences intellectually while also entertaining them with clever wordplay.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's comedies are renowned for their lively and sometimes absurd plots, frequently featuring elements like mistaken identity, disguise, and romantic complications. These elements contribute to the comedic tension and eventual resolution that are characteristic of Shakespearean comedy.

In summary, Shakespeare's comedic style is distinguished by its linguistic sophistication, clever wordplay, and adept integration of humor with profound thematic content. His talent for crafting engaging and thought-provoking comedies has cemented his legacy as one of the greatest playwrights in history.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND INFLUENCES

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" was penned during the late 1590s, a period marked by notable cultural and historical advancements in England. Understanding the historical backdrop of this era provides valuable insights into the forces that shaped the play. Renaissance England: The late 16th century witnessed a flourishing of intellect and art in England, known as the Renaissance. This period experienced a resurgence of interest in classical literature, art, and learning, which significantly influenced Shakespeare's works.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" mirrors this Renaissance fascination with classical mythology and literature through its references to Greek myths and use of classical themes. Elizabethan Society: Written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the play emerged during a time characterized by a burgeoning national identity and cultural pride in England. The portrayal of the fairy world in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" may reflect the Elizabethan fascination with the supernatural and mysterious.

Theater and Entertainment: The late 16th century was a thriving period for theater in England, with the construction of the Globe Theatre and the popularity of plays across social classes. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was likely crafted for performance at the Globe, designed to appeal to a broad audience with its blend of comedic elements, fantastical plot, and diverse characters.

Literary Influences: Shakespeare drew from a variety of literary sources for "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The play's depiction of the fairy realm may have been influenced by popular folklore and medieval romance literature, while its comedic elements and structure could have been inspired by classical Roman comedies and Italian Renaissance literature.

Shakespeare's Artistic Style: "A Midsummer Night's Dream" showcases Shakespeare's evolving style as a playwright. Combining comedy, romance, and fantasy, the play demonstrates his skill in blending genres to create a unique theatrical experience.

In summary, the historical context of late 16th-century England, with its cultural, intellectual, and theatrical developments, profoundly influenced "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The play reflects the impact of the Renaissance, the characteristics of Elizabethan society, literary traditions, and Shakespeare's own artistic innovations, contributing to its enduring appeal to audiences.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS: COMIC ELEMENTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is infused with comic elements that add to its distinct allure and appeal. These comedic aspects serve multiple functions, ranging from providing light-hearted amusement to offering insightful observations on human behavior and societal norms. A thematic examination of the play's comic elements unveils several fundamental facets of Shakespeare's comedic technique:

**Humor and Wit:** In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," humor and wit are essential in shaping the play's comedic elements, blending seamlessly with its magical and fantastical elements to add depth and entertainment to the characters and their interactions.

One key aspect of humor in the play is the clever use of wordplay, puns, and wit in the dialogue. Characters like Puck and Bottom engage in playful banter and clever wordplay, creating amusing situations that captivate the audience. For instance, Puck's mischievous nature leads to confusion and mistaken identities, resulting in comedic chaos that propels the plot forward.

Another source of humor stems from the absurdity and exaggeration in the characters' actions and situations. The play's supernatural elements, such as the love potion and Bottom's transformation into a donkey, contribute to the comedic absurdity that permeates the story. These fantastical elements enable imaginative and humorous scenarios that defy logic and reality.

Humor and wit also serve to highlight the follies and complexities of human nature. The play's portrayal of love and its irrationality provides comedic fodder, as characters like Helena and Demetrius find themselves in comically exaggerated states of infatuation and confusion. This satirical view of love adds a humorous layer that resonates with the audience's own experiences and perceptions of romantic relationships.

Overall, humor and wit are integral to the comedic charm of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," entertaining, engaging, and shedding light on the play's themes of love, magic, and the absurdities of human behavior.

**Mistaken Identity and Misunderstandings:** In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," mistaken identity and misunderstandings play crucial roles in driving the plot and enhancing the comedic atmosphere. These themes are primarily seen in the interactions between the human characters and the magical interventions of the fairies.

Mistaken Identity:

**Lovers' Confusion:** Among the young lovers—Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius—Puck's mischievous use of the love potion causes both men to fall in love with Helena instead of their intended partners. This results in confusion, conflict, and comedic situations.

**The Mechanicals:** The group of amateur actors, known as the Mechanicals, also experiences mistaken identity when Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. This leads to humorous misunderstandings and chaos during their play rehearsal in the forest.

Misunderstandings:

**Titania and Bottom:** Under the influence of the love potion, Titania falls in love with Bottom, who has been transformed into an ass. This misunderstanding leads to comedic interactions between them and with the other fairies.

**Puck's Pranks:** Puck's actions, such as mixing up the lovers and transforming Bottom, result in misunderstandings and confusion among the characters. These misunderstandings drive the plot and contribute to the play's humorous tone.

These elements of mistaken identity and misunderstandings are central to the comedic nature of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," creating a sense of chaos and absurdity characteristic of Shakespearean comedy. They also highlight the whimsical and unpredictable nature of love and the supernatural world depicted in the play.

Top of Form

**Satire and social commentary:** In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare uses satire and social commentary to mock societal norms, particularly those related to love, marriage, and gender roles. These themes are woven throughout the play, often through the characters' interactions and the absurdities of the plot.

**Love and Marriage:** The play satirizes the concept of romantic love and the institution of marriage. The characters' complicated love interests and the whimsical nature of their affections ridicule traditional ideas of courtship and marriage as rational and orderly processes. The mismatched couples, like the clumsy Bottom and the infatuated Titania, highlight the irrationality and absurdity of love.

**Gender Roles:** Shakespeare also employs satire to comment on gender roles. Helena's relentless pursuit of Demetrius, despite his rejection, challenges traditional gender norms that dictate women should be passive in love. This subversion of gender expectations is further underscored by the role reversals in the fairy world, where Oberon manipulates Titania, reversing the power dynamics usually associated with male-female relationships.

**Class Divide:** The play subtly critiques the social hierarchy and class divide of Shakespeare's time. The mechanicals, who are lower-class workers, aspire to perform a play for the nobility at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding. This subplot highlights the absurdity of social status and the desire for upward mobility, as well as the potential for art to bridge social divides.

**Parental Authority:** Another theme that Shakespeare satirizes is parental authority and the control parents exert over their children's lives. Egeus, Hermia's father, embodies the traditional patriarchal figure who insists on arranging his daughter's marriage against her will. This portrayal criticizes the belief that parents always know what is best for their children and challenges the idea of absolute parental authority.

Overall, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" uses satire and social commentary to question and ridicule societal norms and conventions, encouraging the audience to contemplate the complexities and absurdities of human relationships and social structures.

Top of Form

Top of Form

**Parody and Farce:** Parody is a comedic technique that mimics a specific work, style, or artist in an exaggerated and often humorous manner. It can be used to mock or playfully imitate the original work, or to honor it by emphasizing its unique characteristics. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare uses parody in various ways, notably in the play-within-a-play, "Pyramus and Thisbe," performed by the Mechanicals in Act 5, Scene 1. This parody of a tragic love story is intentionally exaggerated and amateurish, with the actors' lack of skill adding to the comedy. The parody serves to lighten the mood after the play's more serious moments and offers a meta-theatrical commentary on the nature of drama itself.

Farce is a comedic style characterized by exaggeration, absurdity, and often physical humor. It typically features improbable situations, mistaken identities, and a fast-paced, chaotic plot. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," elements of farce can be seen throughout the play, especially in the interactions among the lovers in the forest. The confusions and misunderstandings that arise, such as Puck mistakenly anointing Lysander's eyes instead of Demetrius', leading to romantic chaos, are typical of farce. Additionally, the antics of the Mechanicals, particularly in their efforts to rehearse and perform their play, contribute to the farcical nature of the play. Farce is employed to create laughter and to highlight the absurdity of human behavior, particularly in matters of love and relationships.

**Resolution and Reconciliation:** Resolution and reconciliation serve as pivotal themes in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," integral to the play's structure and message. These themes are predominantly explored in the final act, where the myriad conflicts and misunderstandings are resolved, restoring harmony to the characters' relationships.

A key resolution involves the four lovers: Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius. Initially, Hermia and Lysander are in love, but Hermia's father insists she marry Demetrius, leading to their flight into the forest. There, Puck's mischievous intervention with the love potion further complicates their relationships. However, by the play's conclusion, the potion's effects are rectified, reuniting Hermia and Lysander and Helena and Demetrius in their original pairings.

Another significant reconciliation occurs between Oberon and Titania, the fairy king and queen. Their dispute over the changeling boy disrupts the natural world, causing chaos. Yet, by the play's end, Oberon and Titania reconcile, restoring order to nature.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" employs the themes of resolution and reconciliation to underscore the potency of love and harmony. Despite the conflicts and misunderstandings, love ultimately prevails, bringing the

characters together in peace. This message is reinforced by the play's comedic elements, which lighten the mood and convey the notion that, ultimately, everything will be resolved for the better.

Top of Form

## CONCLUSION

In summary, Shakespearean comedy, as exemplified by "A Midsummer Night's Dream," demonstrates the playwright's exceptional talent in blending humor, wit, and social commentary. Through its distinctive style, historical context, and varied comedic elements, Shakespeare's comedies continue to captivate audiences, offering profound insights into human nature and societal norms. Themes such as love, mistaken identity, satire, and resolution are skillfully explored in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," highlighting the enduring allure and artistic brilliance of Shakespearean comedy. This genre remains relevant in contemporary society, serving as a reminder of the timeless truths and complexities of the human experience.

## REFERENCE

1. "the circulation of Social Energy." *Shakespearean Negotiations*.
2. "Appendix: A further note on Sources." *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
3. Hendricks, Margo. "'obscured by dreams': Race, Empire, and Shakespeare's A Midsummer night's dream."
4. Henning, Standish. "The fairies of a midsummer night's dream."
5. "A Midsummer Night's A Dream in our time." *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
6. "Midsummer Night's Dream in Shakespeare's time." *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
7. Nevo, Ruth. *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare*.
8. "Review notices : Dream in Shakespeare. Front metaphor to metamorphosis. by Marjorie B. Garber.
9. "William Shakespeare, a textual companion"
10. Williams, Meg Harris. "The reason of Love objects : A midsummer night's dream "