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# It Was All a Dream: Comparing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Midsommar*

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## Abstract

*This paper will analyze the evolution of Shakespeare and argue that Ari Aster's 2019 Horror and Drama film Midsommar is an adaptation of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The use of magic, hallucination, and the distortion of love demonstrates transferable themes and motifs of Shakespeare into the horror genre. Shakespeare's influence continues to shape modern art and culture. This paper specifically discusses the distortion of love using magic and drugs, highlighting bestial and sexual relations in both the film and play. Also discussed is the use of the dream-scape as a liminal space to bend social norms and logic along with the use of horror adjacent themes such as eroticism, objectification, and physical violence. The overall goal of the paper argues for Shakespeare's continued relevance, adaptability, and underlying horror often veiled by the comedy and drama Shakespeare is known for.*

## 1. Introduction

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is generally thought of as one of Shakespeare's greatest comedies, as it follows four lovers caught between love quadrangles, magic, and an unintentional comedic acting troupe. The play resolves itself by the end, and all's well that ends well...or does it? Horrific, chilling, and gruesome elements lie under the seemingly innocent and comedic scenes of the play, from the subtly implied raping of Bottom

to the cult-like loyalty of Titania's fairies. *Midsommar*, a 2019 indie horror film directed by Ari Aster, is not a scene-by-scene copy of the play; it is a contemporary adaptation. Love is at the heart of both the film and play, as they each mutilate it in different ways. As I watched the film, I began to discover the similarities between the unspoken violence and unconscious themes of *Midsommar* with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Midsommar* is Aster's sophomore psychological Horror film, following his debut critically acclaimed psychological thriller *Hereditary*, and follows four graduate students as they enter the heart of a Swedish cult, called the Harga, and their unknowing demise. *Midsommar* is a psychedelic and thrilling horror that is not suitable for the faint of heart due to the subtle yet brutal violence and graphic rituals. The opening scene begins with the carbon monoxide murder-suicide of Dani's sister and their parents. Now orphaned, Dani relies on her emotionally distant boyfriend Christian for support, but as the film progresses, she realizes his shortcomings. Interestingly, the film was advertised as a romantic comedy gone wrong, but it is so much more as Christian's Swedish friend, Pelle, offers them as sacrifices for his cult's traditions. Human sacrifice, bestiality, and sexual assault combined with the powerful feelings of love, loss, and grief create a cataclysmic clashing of raw human emotions. I intend to accentuate the similarities between the film and the classic play, specifically through their shared distortion of love, but first, I will discuss the occurrence of important

themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Then, I will establish how *Midsommar* qualifies as an adaptation and connect both the film and play with Global Shakespeare. *Midsommar* is a unique adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as both grotesquely distort love through magic and drugs. It is worthwhile to view *Midsommar* as a Shakespeare adaptation because it demonstrates Shakespeare's performative evolution and relevance in modern-day culture, media, and Shakespeare's continuous contribution to art.

## 2. Dream on, Dream on, Dream on...

Distortion means to alter or twist something out of its natural state, and for the play to distort love, it needs to distort the setting, the city of Athens, into a dreamlike forest first. The distortion of reality begins as the characters enter the woods; they leave authoritarian Athens and enter a dream. Hermia and Lysander even fall asleep, and only when they are asleep is the audience introduced to the supernatural creatures, supporting the insinuation of a dream world. Dreams, rituals, and eroticism are prominent themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Florence Falk's article, "Dream and Ritual Process in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," discusses the dream's purpose and significance in depth. Falk focuses on the transitional movements from Athens into the enchanted woods, then back to Athens. Athens represents the real world, while the woods act as a liminal space between Athenian society and the supernatural realm. To frame her argument, she introduces the symbolic realms of structure, defined as "the relatively abstract and permanent pattern of a social order whose form is grounded in law and custom," *communitas*, defined as "the spontaneous, temporary, and detached aggregate of persons (and environment) beset by provocative acultural and antistructural conditions," and *societas*, which refers to "structure that has been renewed and leavened by *communitas*" (264). The three realms create a rhythmic transformation of

the characters. Falk's argument revolves around the idea that "each location is associated with a more or less imaginative response to the social and psychic exigencies of living, and each will be considered separately" (265). As the characters enter the dream realm, what seems impossible becomes possible, like sudden unconditional love and magical half-transformations into animals. Falk concludes that "In the woods imagination is released into dream, and play consists of acting out interior fantasies (wish fulfillment). [The] dream bridges the chasm between the real and spirit (or sacred) worlds" (276). Externally, the play can easily be performed as comedic and zany, but internally it is just as psychologically complex as any other of Shakespeare's works. As the characters and audience enter the woods, where there are no laws compared to Athens, the play's interior psychological dream component allows love to be manipulated and warped.

Theseus and Oberon serve as parallels as they distort love and turn love into possession and control. Falk's internal, or psychological, aspect of the play determines that "the psychic condition of the ruler is always reflected in the behavior of his subjects," demonstrated through Hippolyta and Puck as the subjects (266). Theseus is introduced speaking with his soon-to-be wife, Hippolyta. Feminist critics have analyzed Hippolyta's role in the play; however, I interpret her through what Shakespeare presents: a war prize. Theseus declares, "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword / And won thy love doing thee injuries, / But I will wed thee in another key, / With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling." (1.1.17-20). Subtle foreshadowing demonstrates that love in the play must be fought for and won, albeit violently. The resolution of the play, marriage, must take a different perspective, which can only be attained after the dream process. Theseus's authoritarian manner sets up the tone of his relationship with Hippolyta, forced and absent of true and willing love. Hippolyta plays a minor role and has much fewer lines but represents the consequence of love's dis-

tortion: to emerge as either the ruler, who twists, or the subject, who is twisted. Demetrius and Helena are representatives of ruler and subject, and their marriage displays the reversal as, in the end, Helena is the ruler, and Demetrius, still under the influence of the love potion, becomes the subject. Helena can thank Oberon's subject, Puck, for her victory. Puck proclaims his loyalty by eagerly complying with his master's request, as seen in the famous line after Oberon declares Puck intervene in Helena and Demetrius's love affair, "I'll put a girdle round about the earth / In forty minutes" (2.1.181-82). Puck's declaration and generalization of Athenian garb as Hermia and Lysander sleep in the woods initiates the dream sequence of the play that allows love to be manipulated. The dream-like qualities include the hallucinogenic love trance and the presence of mystical fantastical creatures capable of manipulating reality through magic. Theseus and Oberon distort love in different manners – Theseus through war and Oberon with magic flowers. Theseus notably is outside of the woods and controls Hippolyta without using magic, whereas Oberon can use magic because the rules of reality do not exist in the dream realm of the woods.

The lawlessness of the forest enables mysticism, magic, and otherworldly phenomena like fairies, love potions, and half-human-animal creatures to be believable. The dream acts as a ritual as it "reflects the *positive* values of anxiety, humiliation, and of sexual, even necrophilic, fantasies" as the play progresses (Falk 268). Powerful emotions, like love, humiliation, and sexual desires, connect the play to *Midsommar*. The film's Swedish cult and sadistic rituals are more blatant than the play's love ritual, which was the administration of the love potion. Rather than use ritual as a plot device, the play uses the transiting of setting mentioned earlier, Athens, woods, and back to Athens, as a second awakening or ritual process. The purpose of rituals, such as Christian Baptism or Pagan sacrifice, is to trigger a release or expunge any negative or evil qualities. As

the audience experiences the catharsis of the play's resolution, the characters, specifically the lovers, emerge from the woods transformed by the dream ritual. After Theseus happily approves the couples, Demetrius and Helena ponder the details of the night,

DEMETRIUS. These things seem small  
and undistinguishable,

Like far-off mountains turned into  
clouds.

HERMIA. Methinks I see these things  
with parted eye,

When everything seems double.  
(4.1.194-97)

Hermia finishes Demetrius's thoughts as they ponder the lucid and blurry details of the previous night. Reminiscent of being drugged and intoxicated, they do not remember whether the events were real or hallucinations. Nevertheless, the effect of the dream is not small and indistinguishable, rather it is large as Demetrius is now in love with Helena, for what the audience assumes is the rest of his life, and Hermia must live with the experience of Lysander's brief infidelity subconsciously. The many assumptions of the play involve the unspoken sexual and abusive consequences of distorting love through magic. Before magic intervened, Helena already showed signs of willing abuse. Helena famously declares herself as a dog to Demetrius and permits him to treat her as such. Sexually and metaphorically, Helena is Demetrius's bitch. Helena gives Demetrius the power to abuse her however way he sees fit, in which Demetrius refuses, but Helena's confession exposes the unequal distribution of sexual and emotional power between the couple. When Demetrius receives the love potion, his disdain turns into love and devotion. Helena, who begged for Demetrius's love earlier in the play, accepts Demetrius's newfound affection. The couple is happily wed at the end of the play, but what happens after that? Their finalized marriage implies sex and the lingering thought of whether Helena

will take advantage of Demetrius while he is under the influence of the love potion, possibly for the rest of his life. The aftermath and events of the play are horrific as themes of rape, bestiality, and forced intoxication come to light. The play's distortion of love is similar to the distortion of love in *Midsommar*, which bridges the horror film to the comedic play.

### 3. 'Cause Even When I Dream of You

The movie shares more characteristics of the play than just the similar-sounding titles with themes like love, eroticism, and drugs. Allan Lewis's "'A Midsummer Night's Dream': Fairy Fantasy or Erotic Nightmare?" highlights how the play straddles romantic comedy and sexual nightmare. Lewis argues that the "masterly architecture of the play reveals a comedy of sex that is both light and dark" in which "the cruel madness, illogical agony, dehumanization, and selfishness of sex is counteracted by the joy of experience, by the gaiety of knowing and overcoming the pitfalls" (257). The couples of the play and film go through difficult pitfalls, but none of the couples definitively grow stronger in their relationships as they overcome the conflicts of the plots. Lewis then investigates the sadistic pleasure of watching the lovers torn apart and brought together. In addition, Titania's relationship with Bottom becomes complicated as her love for the half-man half-ass elicits joy in Puck and Oberon but leaves room for questioning the bestial undertones of their relationship. Lewis concludes with the dream as binding together the real and unreal, a trait both the play and the movie portray, to demonstrate that tears can represent laughter or horror.

Ari Aster's *Midsommar* is a psychological folk horror film containing the same elements of magic, eroticism, and manipulating love as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The film takes viewers from a typical graduate school vacation to a brutal Pagan cult festival that calls for human sacrifice and potent hallucinogens. Magic in the film

takes form as the potent drugs, specifically the "special tea" Dani frequently drinks throughout the film and the *supposed* love potion Maja uses on Christian, similar to the love potion Puck uses on the Athenians. After arriving in Hälsingland, the town where Christian's friend Pelle is from, there is a brief moment where the camera pans to portray a cloth depicting "kind of a love story," as Ingemar describes it. The cloth foreshadows the events in which Maja, a Harga member, chooses Christian to mate with her and, like Oberon, uses the potion to bid her will. Portrayed from right to left, as opposed to the typical American reading of left to right implying a backwards reversal of reality and social norms, the beginning of the cloth depicts a woman, specifically a Harga woman from the clothing, falling in love with an outsider man, also implied by the difference in clothing. The woman proceeds to pick flowers and place them under her bed along with several Rune symbols. The panel continues that, in the morning, the woman bakes her pubic hair into a meal and places her menstrual blood into a cup to be consumed by the man of her affections. The man becomes influenced by the love potion and impregnates the woman as planned. The cloth implies Maja uses her menstrual blood, but that is confirmed in the next scene showing that Christian's glass is significantly darker, pink or a light red hue, than the other distinctly yellow glasses in the community dining table. The connection to the play's love potion is the use of menstrual blood. Oberon's description of the mystical flower coincides with the implications of the female menstrual cycle. Oberon describes it, stating:

Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid  
fell.  
It fell upon a little western flower,  
Before, milk-white, now purple with  
love's wound,  
And maidens call it 'love-in-idleness.'  
(2.1.171-74)

Menstrual and vaginal blood are associated with

indicating fertility and the pseudomyth that vaginal bleeding occurs with first-time penetration, although the medical community has disproved the latter. Melissa Sanchez asserts that “Oberon’s maddening love-juice is also a sublimation of vaginal blood” as she connects “menstrual blood with the blood of defloration” (113-14). Flowers are a significant part of both the movie and the play, with the innuendo of being ‘deflowered’ as slang for losing one’s virginity or having sex for the first time. The significance of sex for the first time is that both Maja and Hermia imply their virginity, with the film stating Maja just turned of age. Hermia defends her chastity, as she tells Lysander in the woods:

But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy  
Lie further off in human modesty.  
Such separation, as may well be said,  
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a  
maid.  
So far be distant; and good night, sweet  
friend. (2.2.62-66)

Hermia demands Lysander sleep far as not to implicate their pre-marital consummation. Both film and play use menstrual blood and virginity to symbolize the ability to distort love as one chooses. Maja does so forcefully, as she drugs Christian into mating with her against his will, but Hermia clearly states the boundaries of their physical relationship, especially before official marriage. Magic and drugs influence love or lovemaking in both the film and the play.

Further evidence of magic in *Midsommar* is the interpretation of the play’s fairies as the film’s Harga cult members. The fairies abide by the fairy queen Titania. While the Harga men and women flitter around in the background, they also heavily respect nature and abide by their May queen, Dani. The movie introduces Dani’s grief of losing her family, and as she enters the Harga, the feeling of community and a homogenous embrace immediately washes over her. Embrace, or “feeling held,” is essential for Dani’s character arc, as

Pelle explains and helps Dani realize Christian’s faults as a lover. While only a few Harga members are important, the effect of communal suffering is an integral part of the film. Similar to how all the women care for the Harga’s children, all the members mimic the same emotions, displayed in the horrific reflective wailing after the double suicide and the aftermath of Dani’s discovery of Christian and Maja. When Titiana dotes on Bottom, her fairy subjects do not hesitate to bid his will, reflecting their queen’s intentions. Fairies in the play are “mischievous but gay sprites...yet the fairies of Elizabethan England were ‘uncanny and fearful’ creatures, bolder and more destructive than mortals” (Lewis 253). The bold, mysterious, and destructive characteristics of Titania and Oberon’s fairies also describe the characteristics of the Harga. For the most part anonymous, the Harga facilitate the murders of the outsiders and manage to keep the evidence of carnage to the minimum to retain their fairy-like idyllic sense of community and serenity. Like fairies, the Harga is capable of simultaneously existing as nature’s caretakers and horrific figures. They are introduced as high dreamy nature lovers that also turn humans into blood eagles and cut faces off. The most horrific part of the movie is that despite their atrocious actions, their ability to justify the violence based on tradition and constant smiling makes the audience excuse their actions, if only for a brief second. A specific instance is the response to the ritual suicide of the elderly man and woman by jumping off a cliff that took place early during the group’s stay with the Harga. Dani was particularly horrified, but Christian dismisses it as part of the Harga’s normal cultural practices and admonishes Dani, and inadvertently the audience, that they needed to respect the Harga’s customs. While short-lived, the one second of accepting their horrific traditions as ‘cultural’ seems to be the most terrifying aspect of the movie. The microsecond of justification for murder in the name of tradition and culture demonstrates the inner self’s animalistic and violent loving nature. Al-

though the film excludes supernatural elements, it depicts magic in the love potion, frequency of hallucinogenic drugs, and fairy-like qualities of the Harga to resemble a contemporary folk adaptation of the play.

Another contributing factor to support the film as an adaptation of the play is the defilement of human and animal bodies that contribute to eroticism. Bottom is famously transformed into a donkey by Puck and is intentionally placed to be the first creature Titania saw. The sexual implications of Titania and Bottom's relationship are implied as Oberon explains how the flower works: "The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees" (2.1.176-78). Therefore, similar to the immediate love Lysander and Demetrius had for Helena, Titania felt the same erotic and romantic affections towards the hideous man-donkey Bottom. Note the deliberate wording "the next live creature," which grotesquely confirms all aspects of love, including sexual desires even towards animals, demonstrating bestiality in the play (2.1.178). Bottom, although known as the play's fool, is physically mutilated without his consent. His upper half is transformed into a donkey and ordered by Titania to remain in the woods as her love pet as "enacted on stage, the consummation of a perversion in which Titania liberates a deep dark sexual instinct to rape a hairy beast, with Oberon the voyeur" (Lewis 253). Viewing the relationship based on lack of consent and force, it turns the comedic plot of Titania blindly loving a half-man half-donkey to the realization that both Titania and Bottom are victims who lose consent over their body and sexual desires, thus with the erotically grotesque assumption that off stage Titania may have had bestial relations with Bottom against her, and his, free will.

*Midsommar's* Christian relates to Bottom as they both are victims to magic, or in Christian's case, potent drugs, and Pagan sacrificial mating traditions. The scene between Christian and Maja requires delicacy because of the trauma associated

with rape, regardless of gender, especially viewing rape in film. After ingesting a drink with "special properties," Christian becomes nearly lucid when the mating ritual between him and Maja commences. Gregory Marie's article for *Lithium* magazine, "Midsommar, Perceptions of Male Sexuality, and The Quiet Around the Two," discusses the Christian and Maja scene in depth. Concerning Christian's rape scene, which is what it is as opposed to what *Vanity Fair* calls *Midsommar's* 'Wild Sex Scene,' Aster comments in interviews "that this moment is an intentional subversion of the trope within horror movies of sexual violence toward women" and which highlights "that as a society, we don't view male-bodied victims of non-penetrative sexual violence as valid, and maybe even as possible" (Marie). Christian is extremely drugged, stripped, and coerced into intercourse with Maja and, if that was not horrific enough, the entire time he is surrounded by naked Harga women eerily mimicking Maja's moans. Therefore, Christian, similar to Bottom, become involuntary victims of magic, drugs, and sexual affairs. The erotic relationship of Titania and Bottom parallels the consensually questionable relationship between Christian and Maja.

Meanwhile, Lysander and Demetrius are also under the influence, yet are too consumed in fighting each other to truly act on their drugged love for Helena as all four Athenians are "swept away by the impetuous irrationality of emotional response" as "the laughter they evoke is prompted by the ludicrous extremes to which passion will carry them, harmless and inoffensive. On the other hand, the young lovers may be seen as cruel, nameless, and fickle, distorting love for erotic satisfactions" (Lewis 254). The distortion of love connects the film and play as they both create an unsettling, unconsented kind of eroticism to invoke strong emotions from the audience. Titania loving a man-donkey may be meant as a joke, but the sexual assumptions are far from harmless, while the Harga's maltreatment of Christian directly leads to the final act as Dani discov-

ers Christian and Maja, assuming he is willingly cheating on her. Dani's assumption that Christian exchanged her for a younger, attractive woman display that "changing partners in a psychedelic trance can be fun and innocent in youthful games, or it can be a cruel reversion to the anonymity of sex," as she collapses in pain upon her discovery (Lewis 254). In the forest of Athens and Halsingland, social barriers are non-existent as sexual desires and free will are corrupted. In the play and film, the woods act as a liminal space that allows love to be warped and mangled. Love becomes a chance for one person to control another and one person to lose their sexual, physical, and emotional free will. Their erotic undertones demonstrate the horrific and macabre details of the play and film.

#### 4. Sweet Dreams are Made of... Blood Eagles

The play opens with Theseus lamenting the long wait before he can marry the Amazon Hippolyta. The play begins with the dialogue,

THESEUS. 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 stepdame or a dowager  
Long withering out a young man's re-  
venue.  
HIPPOLYTA. Four days will quickly  
steep themselves in night;  
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. (1.1.10-20)

First, Theseus complains about how slowly the

nights pass and feminizes the moon. The moon is a common feminine symbol often used to represent the female menstrual cycle. The significance of the female moon is that it represents Theseus's dismissal of female voice and control over their own sexuality and bodies. Theseus can own Hippolyta, legally and sexually, through marriage because with marriage comes the ability to have intercourse without social repercussions. In other words, it is not that Theseus cannot wait to marry Hippolyta, rather he cannot wait to sleep with her. He won the battle, and his prize is the sexual ownership of Hippolyta. More subtly, Hippolyta does not reciprocate the desire to sleep with Theseus. As shown in the quote above, she states how quickly four days and four nights will pass. A quick reading of the play may seem as though she is attempting to comfort him, but I argue she is secretly voicing her disdain for a fate she cannot change. She also refers to the moon as a divine feminine symbol and, almost sadly, proclaims how the moon will be present to witness that night, similar to the many women forced into marriages beyond their control. While Hippolyta holds little power, Dani, on the other hand, gains power over Christian. Just as the moon and sky's significance has a role in the play, the sky also has an important role in distinguishing between reality and dream in the film. When Dani drinks the tea for the first time and awakens from her acid trip, she asks what time it was, to which Pelle answers nine in the evening, even though it is broad daylight. The extended daylight symbolizes the Halsingland as a "primordial zone where Time and Space are characterized by circularity and express an endless cycle of renewal and regeneration," which corresponds to the Harga belief of an eternal cycle (Falk 266). The film rarely divulges into darkness, except in the opening suicide scene of Dani's family and Dani's nightmare, and continues to use daylight as a motif that what appears may not always be as it seems. Theseus and Hippolyta display that what may seem like love is merely a distorted version of love through their

arranged and politically motivated marriage.

The final connection between *Midsommar* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is that they both contain gruesome themes in addition to distorting love. By singling out individual assumptions, the play can be twisted to be considered a horror rather than a comedy. Morbid elements in the film and play that have already been discussed are rape and bestiality. Animal abuse also appears in the play, through the sexualization of Bottom with a donkey's head, and the film, by the exploitation of the bear. Bears are significant to Pagan Norse culture as "Vikings were said to go berserk (bear-serk) during battle, transmuting from mere humans to grizzly supernatural warriors, imbued with the spirit of bears" (Gaither). When first entering Halsingland, a caged Grizzly bear prompts Simon to comment, "So we're just going to ignore the bear then?" and Ingemar brushes him off, replying, "It's a bear." Symbolism and foreshadowing surrounding the bear are present as early as in Dani's apartment when a painting of a girl with a crown touching a bear appears in the background. Christian stares at an image of a standing bear on fire, foreshadowing his future death, as he waits to be questioned by Siv about his intentions to mate with Maja. While the Harga are not seen beating the animal, the bear was killed and cleaned out to be a vessel for the upcoming human sacrifice, and I constitute that as animal abuse and maltreatment. After Dani is crowned May queen, there appears to be a scene where a Harga member is teaching young Harga boys how to disembowel the same bear's internal organs. The most horrific scene of the movie, out of the many, is Christian's incapacitation, where he cannot move or speak and is stuffed into the bear to be burned alive. By stuffing Christian into a bear, it represents the reversal of internal and external characteristics. Christian's internal ruthlessness and animosity are reflected as he is placed inside the bear. Christian's animalistic and negative qualities are accentuated by placing him inside a bear and offering him as a sacrifice to purge the commune's most unholy

"affekts," or traits. In a vegetative state, Christian has no other choice than to accept his sealed and decided fate. The camera pans on his eyes, suggesting that he is horrifically aware of everything happening around him yet has no power or control over his fate. While Christian was a terrible boyfriend, partner, and support system, the Harga ultimately manipulated Dani into choosing Christian as the ninth and final sacrifice. The Harga uses Dani's love for Christian for their benefit and to fulfil their sacrificial customs.

At the heart of both the film and play are love and relationships, as the film focuses on Dani and Christian's deteriorating relationship and the play toys with the intricacies of the love quadrangle. The relationships in the play become entangled and interwoven. Theseus and Hippolyta demonstrate a clear difference in power, and "as for the lovers, Hermia must come to comprehend loss, Helena gain. Lysander must understand the vows of fidelity, and Demetrius the rewards of stability" (Falk 270). Dani tragically lost her biological family, yet Pelle proclaims, with the Harga, she gained a new one. She grows from her lukewarm relationship with Christian, and instead of burning all his old belongings like a usual breakup, she chooses to burn him alive instead. Dani must comprehend the loss of her family and lover. Christian must deal with the consequences of his disloyalty to Dani within the Harga community and in the real world. Christian is responsible for bringing his friends to the Harga, as Pelle sacrifices them for their flaws. Mark suffers from his ignorance, and Josh succumbs to his arrogance. In *Midsommar* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Falk aptly concludes,

remnants of the sacred world have been transformed into the world of romance, whose root assumption is the pastoral myth: human regeneration and indeed transformation require periodic and temporary disengagement from a complex and oppressive environment into one that is relatively simple and

free. (276)

The Athenians enter the woods to free themselves from the pain of rejected love, one couple rejected by Hermia's father and the other couple rejected by unreciprocated feelings. The dream must take place free from strict laws and even the rules of reality, as magic and fairies run rampant to interfere with human affairs. In Halsingland, the Harga are so removed from society that the social expectations of viewing murder and suicide as taboo are abolished to make way for the Harga belief in regeneration and sacrifice. The separation from social norms and rules allow love to be distorted for the benefit of a select few, Helena and the Harga.

In conclusion, *Midsommar* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* use magic, drugs, and a setting distant from reality to warp and distort love. *Midsommar* qualifies as a film adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, not through the typical plot, but by the parallel symbols, motifs, and equal share of conscious and unconscious horror. Why is it important for *Midsommar* to be an adaptation of the classic Shakespeare play? It represents the ability for Shakespeare's works to transcend media, from play to film, but also the ability to transform into a different genre completely. The adaptability and pliability of Shakespeare's works contribute to why they are still appealing today. *Midsommar* has gained critical acclaim and accolades by itself, but by proposing the film as a Shakespeare adaptation, it adds new layers into what genres and how gruesome Shakespeare can be when performed. There have been purposeful horror adaptations of Shakespeare in the past, like R.L. Stein's *A Midsummer Night's Scream* and *Sleep No More*, an interactive film-noir Macbeth experience. However, the significance of an unintentional adaptation reveals the cultural power of Shakespeare. Simply using a title similar to one of Shakespeare's plays immediately brings audiences a sense of familiarity and assumption of what the film may entail. Before watching the film, just from the title, *Midsommar*, and my knowledge of the themes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I assumed there

would be strong elements of nature, magic, and mischief around love. Those assumptions are present in the film with an addition of realism-based psychological horror as well. On a global scale, Shakespeare constantly adapts and changes the way 'traditional' Shakespeare may be consumed while telling the same story just through different genres, times, and spaces.

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