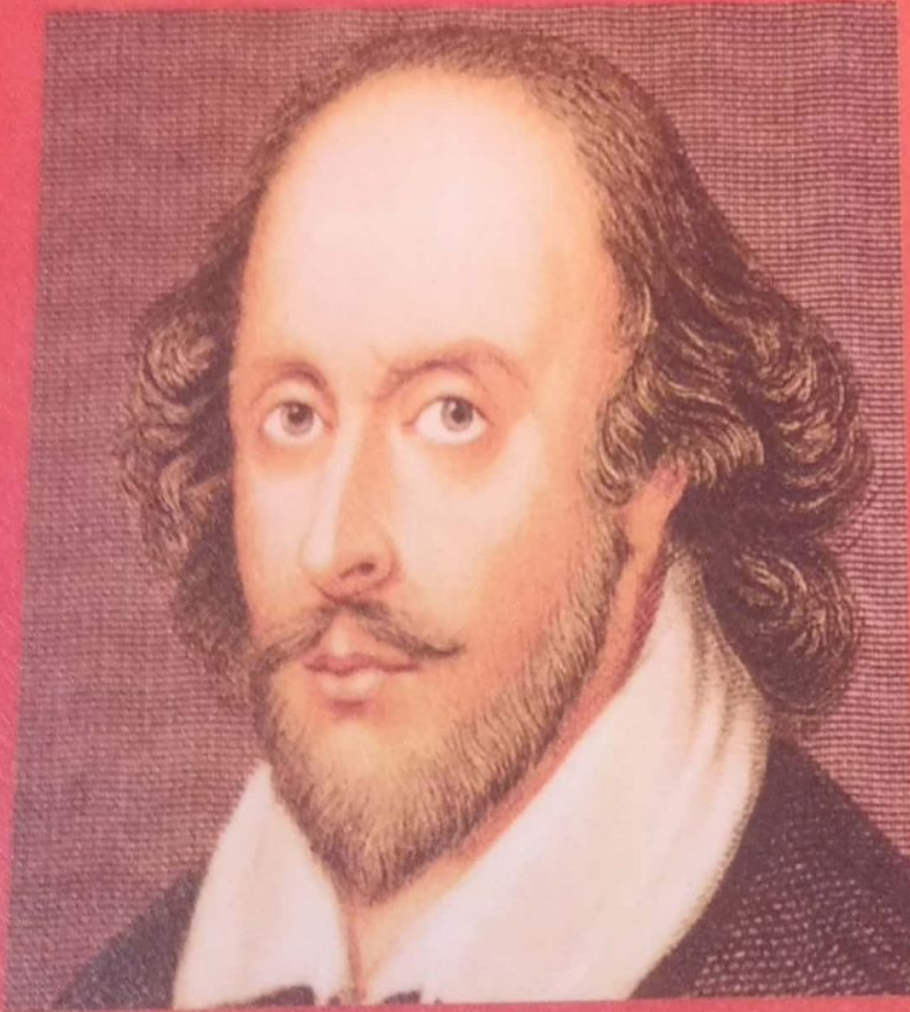


# SHAKESPEARE FOREVER

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## "WINGED PUPPETS": A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE'S ARIEL AND PUCK.

R.MANO SOWMIYA

Magic is about the supernatural elements of the mythic and fairy world. There's the magic of love, the magic of the morning dew, and even the magic of poetry and art. Magic is the delightful thread that runs through the tapestry of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* Shakespeare's two most magical plays. These plays contain many supernatural elements, e.g. magic and transformation. With these elements, Shakespeare produces a new dramatic genre. A play is a kind of magic, as the theatre itself is a place of magic. Considering that there is no play without characters, any of the characters of other plays do not differ from the miraculous characters of Shakespeare's magical plays simply by being supernatural.

What makes them different then? Shakespeare has probably discovered that the characters of his plays cannot be natural; therefore he wanted to express this by accentuating his characters' unnaturalness. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* these characters are as 'real' as any other characters on the stage except that they explicitly declare that they are a part of a dream. There are two 'honest' similarities between two characters, Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Ariel from *The Tempest*. The word 'honest' means in this respect that they play a role, the role of 'the character', but they believe that this is only a role and not life itself.



The most conspicuous correspondence between Ariel's and Puck's characters is that they are both fairies; neither have a gender though both have male names (this is probably because of the age's 'male-centered thinking'). For this reason, they will be referred to as male characters in the essay. Shakespeare took the characters from the world of classical English fairytales. Puck is a sprite, quick-witted and mischievous. The character of 'Robin Good fellow' occurred many times in 16th century fairy tales. The character of Ariel is more of an original creation. He is quick-witted too, but not as much as his master, therefore Prospero cannot treat him as his equal. He is a great helper and a joyful creature as well. He is similar to his master, making magic on stage, as his master does. Ariel can reshape himself to be a nymph, a goddess or an animal, which is real magic on stage. Puck never disguises himself.

Another important part of old English tales is music, with which Ariel and Puck are both surrounded. Music is the way of telling stories for Ariel and this is the way for him to transform too. In *The Tempest*, Ariel is the only character who sings, except for the drunken people, Stephano and Caliban. However there is a great qualitative difference between the two modes of singing; while Ariel makes magic with music, these men sing because of their lack of self-control. Drunken people often sing and are loud, but that is an unpleasant sound. In Ariel's songs Shakespeare reveals his metrical skills, and in Puck's speeches he shows his rhyming skills of making rhymes. In both the plays, he is great in making word-games. Both Ariel and Puck are capable of word-games, as well as other tricks.



The two scenes, Act III, scene 1 in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Act IV, scene 1 in *The Tempest*, are very similar. The two characters scare those who are inferior, though this has a different meaning in the two plays. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the craftsmen are weak in the sense of being half-educated, which is acceptable; while in *The Tempest* the weak are evil and treacherous. Their punishment is of a different level. Ariel and Prospero scare the drunk for the sake of punishment, but Puck scares the craftsmen for the sake of fun. They are both helpers of their lords, who treat them as their best and most beloved servants. They both do what is asked of them with enthusiasm. If they are asked to go somewhere, they are fast, when they are asked to do something, they are precise, or if they are mistaken, then that is not their fault. They love helping their masters, whom they love, and they are proud of being able to do the things they are asked to do. They enjoy life as it is, and live it to the full.

They are lively, full of joy and optimism. They do everything with joy and they think that everything they do is proper. They both love serving a wise sovereign because they both believe that what they do by helping their masters is always correct. That makes their life easier.

Ariel is a servant because he has to be, Puck is a helper because he wants to be. Ariel gets freedom as a gift in the end for his great services, while Puck does not need freedom because he is free and serves Oberon for his own pleasure (and to have the comfort of belonging somewhere). Ariel is a native ruled by the conqueror and Puck is a conqueror himself, conquering

Nature and natives wherever he goes. In other words, Puck's magic is natural while Prospero's is learned from books, and because of that, Ariel's magic has a learned aspect as well.

Ariel is called to be a servant; Puck is called to be gentle. The relationship of fairy and master is different in the two plays, which can be seen through the use of you and thou: Puck can say "thou" (except when he is trying to explain that he only made a mistake) to Oberon, and vice versa, but Ariel says "you" to Prospero, who says "thou" to Ariel. Prospero gives commands to Ariel but Oberon asks favors from Puck. Though they both enjoy their job, Ariel does it because he has no choice, but Puck does it for fun. Ariel cannot make mistakes because he is a slave that has to be precise; Puck can be mistaken, because he can solve the problems himself. They can both be scolded, but Ariel is because he had asked for something he is supposed to get, convinced or blackmailed not to cry for freedom. Puck is scolded because of a real mistake; he deserved to be scolded, and tries to set things right. He understands the situation and solves it. He is a friend to his lord or captain, and agrees to what he does. Ariel is a servant to his master and does not really know why he has to do what he does. He does it to satisfy his master.

Puck has an identity and he wears it with pride. Ariel has not got a real identity, his main characteristics are that he is a servant and longs for freedom. The characterization of the two characters shows two different ways of telling the antecedents. In *The Tempest* Prospero tells the whole story as a narrator and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* many characters tell it during their arguments. The reason for this is that in *A Midsummer*



*Night's Dream* there is no one main character, while in *The Tempest*, Prospero is the main character.

*The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are set in another world than ours, which sets them apart from Shakespeare's other plays. Perhaps *Macbeth* and *Winter's Tale* can be related to these plays, but in these two there is no helping spirit to make other's lives easier, only witches, either good or bad. Magic runs through the whole plays, not only when Prospero or Oberon actually make magic but it is 'in the air'. The island of *The Tempest* can be called a dreamland (like Peter Pan's Neverland), and in this respect both plays are two and a half hour-long dreams. In the whole oeuvre of Shakespeare, Ariel and Puck are the most magical and entertaining of the supernatural characters and they forever claim an immortal position in the hearts of Shakespeare's admirers.

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