**Model Essay**

**Prompt:**

In*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, does Shakespeare make the case that it is possible to control another person’s actions, or not? Using the characters of Puck and Helena from the play, give evidence from the text to support your thinking. Be sure to take into account what people who disagree might say.

**INTRODUCTION:** Sometimes, the person who thinks he is the most in control of a situation turns out to be the biggest fool of all. Control is a major theme in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare. In the play, each character tries to make someone else do what he or she wants. One example is Puck, a mischievous fairy working for Oberon, the fairy king. Puck loves manipulating other people for his own amusement. One of the people he toys with is a young woman named Helena. Helena tries to force Demetrius, her best friend’s fiancé, to love her. Ultimately, Shakespeare makes the case that it is not possible to control another person’s actions, because the results are unpredictable and temporary.

***A Midsummer Night’s Dream* shows that the results of trying to control another person’s actions are unpredictable.** After Oberon tells Puck to use a magic flower to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena, he finds out that Puck put the juice of the flower on the wrong person: *“This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak’st,/Or else committ’st thy knaveries willfully” (3.2.366–367).* Puck’s attempt to control the young lovers results in confusion and strife, and his mistake makes Oberon mad. After Puck mistakenly uses the flower on the wrong person, Oberon tries to fix the mistake by anointing Demetrius as well. Both young men pursue Helena, leading her best friend, Hermia, to confront her, asking, *“How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak!/How low am I? I am not yet so low/But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes” (3.2.311–313).* Helena always tries to force Demetrius to love her, but she doesn’t predict that it would lead to her best friend wanting to attack her. Both Puck and Helena find out that trying to control someone else’s actions can lead to unintended consequences.

**Shakespeare also suggests that the results of trying to control someone else’s actions are temporary.** Another person Puck tries to control is the foolish Bottom. He changes Bottom’s head into that of an ass, but is forced by Oberon to change him back: *“Now, when thou wak’st, with thine own fool’s eyes/peep” (4.1.86–87).* Even though Puck succeeds in controlling Bottom and making him look foolish, he must change Bottom back, so the results of the change were temporary. In addition, Shakespeare sometimes lets the audience know that the result is temporary, even when the characters do not. Helena thinks she has succeeded in making Demetrius love her, but the audience knows his love is actually the result of Oberon’s magic flower: *“Flower of this purple dye,/Hit with Cupid’s archery,/Sink in apple of his eye./When his love he doth espy,/Let her shine as gloriously/As the Venus of the sky” (3.2.104–109).* Demetrius’s love for Helena will last only as long as he is under the influence of the magic potion. If Oberon decides to undo the spell, Helena will realize that she has not succeeded in changing Demetrius’s mind about her after all. Because so many of the changes in the play are the result of the magic flower, ultimately, they are all temporary.

**However, reading the play literally might make it seem like Shakespeare thinks it is possible to control someone else’s actions.** Both Puck and Helena appear to control other people’s actions in the play. In the middle of the play, Puck brags to Oberon about how he is in control of the young lovers, saying, *“Lord, what fools these mortals be!/… And those things do best please me/That befall prepost’rously” (3.2.117, 122–123).* Puck thinks he is in control, and he enjoys the results. At the end of the play, Theseus agrees to marry Helena and Demetrius: *“For in the temple by and by, with us,/These couples shall eternally be knit” (4.1.187–188).* This marriage could prove that Helena has succeeded in making Demetrius love her. But neither Puck nor Helena is actually in control. Oberon tells Puck what to do, and Helena only gets to marry Demetrius because of the influence of the magic flower. Even though it seems like Puck and Helena get what they want from other people, they are both at the mercy of other people’s actions and choices.

**Carefully reading *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* reveals that Shakespeare did not think it was possible to truly control another person’s actions.** Through the comic actions of his characters, he shows us that the consequences of trying to control others are unpredictable and often chaotic. Primarily, most of the changes in the play come as the result of using magic, which doesn’t lead to lasting change. Ultimately, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* shows us that trying to control other people’s actions rarely works out the way you plan … unless, that is, you have a magic flower.