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MAGIC, ROYAL WEDDINGS AND CENSORSHIP IN SHAKESPEARIAN THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

With an interdisciplinary approach, this paper studies how Shakespeare had to deal with Elizabethan censorship, which forbade staging weddings that were the expected happy ending for any comedy. However, when it came to aristocratic unions, surrounded by luxurious feasts, as well as rituals and magical practices to ensure their prosperity and fertile offspring, he restaged those nuptial ceremonies in the form of courtly masques, pageants or analogous metatheatrical devices. Through them he was able to offer profound insights about the limits and possibilities of the dramatic art, engaged in a radical process of change in Early Modern England. He also drew on related genres, such as the epithalamia, and medieval traditions, as it can be seen in *AYLI*, *TT*, *LLL* and *AMND*.

KEY WORDS: Liminality, nuptial rituals, wedding masque, epithalamia, metatheatricality.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

I. Thematic overview

The starting point of my research was the verification of a surprising coincidence: Shakespeare always inserts a play-within-the-play when a wedding of aristocratic characters is going to take place. Although the author deals with issues related to marriage in many of his works, either comedy or tragedy, the mentioned theatrical solution is only present in four plays, in all of which a marriage bond between aristocrats appears: *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Notwithstanding the scheme is different in each one. In the two first examples we find a masque: the magical masque of Ceres, Juno and Iris to announce the betrothal of the royal heirs Miranda and Ferdinand in *The Tempest;* a wedding masque in *As You Like It,* when Hymen enters to bless the marriage of Rosalind, the legitimate Duke´s daughter, to the knight Orlando de Boys. *Love ´s Labour´s Lost* contains a danced masque, a pageant, and a dialogued final poem. And *A Midsummer Night´s Dream* presents a masque-like quality considered as a whole and, besides, a comic play performed by rustic artisans to honour the royal couple of Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in their wedding day. It closes with a beautiful epithalamic song, the blessing from the fairy world.

Masques, in which Ben Jonson mastered, belong to a different theatrical tradition, the courtly calendar of festivities. They have very distinctive traits from the plays staged at the public theatres. Frequently wedding masques were performed to commemorate the dynastic union between two powerful lineages. It might have been the case of *A Midsummer Night ´s Dream* itself, eventually conceived as a wedding play to be performed in a noble household. Masques, already in vogue in Tudor and Elizabethan times, flourished under the Jacobean patronage. It was then that they acquired their characteristic features: a spectacular display of lavish costumes, choreographed dances, highly sophisticated architectural sceneries (in the hands of Inigo Jones)... They used a minimal narrative basis because their aim was to glorify visually the wealth and

power of the new royal dynasty and the splendour of the court through mythological or allegorical characters and situations.

It is important to remark that this tradition of the courtly masques, consolidated in the Early Modern England, came from Italy, where it obtained an autonomous and parallel development: the *Intermedii*. They were elaborate interludes interspersed between the successive acts of the wedding plays but without a content related to the latter. From 1539 on the Medici promoted these magnificent spectacles displaying a complex machinery, luxurious staging and superb music and dances, to the point that they became more appreciated than the plays themselves. Eventually this led to the birth of the opera as early as in 1598 when Jacopo Peri staged *Dafne*, although it was Monteverdi who capitalized the great invention with *L´Orfeo. Favola in musica*, 1607, also at a court feast. We must remember that in its origin opera was, first and foremost, a theatrical work with music and dance, as that subtitle clearly shows.

Queen Anne of Denmark is credited as the promoter of an important structural element in the masque: a bizarre episode, the anti-masque, destined to create a sharp contrast between the forces of evil and the triumph of celestial harmony. We can find aspects connected with the anti-masque in *The Tempest*, *Love´s Labour ´s Lost*, and *A Midsummer Night ´s Dream.* Nevertheless, the masque form also embeds some traits from autochthonous medieval traditions, as the mystery plays or the pageants in the Corpus Christi´s festivities. They were suppressed by the new order created under the Reformation, which introduced newly civic celebrations like Elizabeth´s Accession Day or the Lord Mayor's Day. Shakespeare took advantage of all those theatrical precursors as we see in the *Love ´s Labour´s Lost* ´s Pageant of the Nine Worthies. On the other side, due to the prohibition of staging religious ceremonies, Shakespeare made use of wedding masques, pageantry and the play-within-the-play as acceptable substitutes for the censored rite, but always given them a symbolic additional meaning or a comic twist, as in *A Midsummer Night´s Dream* or in *Love´s Labour´s Lost*.

Finally, many social and cultural aspects can be detected in the plays quoted above. In *A Midsummer Night´s Dream* the author took as a reference

the actual wedding customs and the late medieval festivities of Saint Valentine's Day, Mayday or the Summer Solstice.

2. Specific objectives of the research

Firstly, the contribution to re-historicize those plays is one of the purposes of my work. At the same time that theatrical productions were a response to the changing cultural needs of the Elizabethan- Jacobean times, they also operated within traditions that dated back to centuries ago. They maintained an ambivalent position between past and present in a moment of intense social and political changes in England, a quality especially present in those four plays.

Secondly, I intend to show that the masques and plays-within-the-play in dramatic works dealing with royal weddings were a self-evident need for the Elizabethan and Jacobean spectators, whether in courtly performances or in public playhouses. They could be void of meaning for us because that custom is no longer in practice, so their relevance is nearly imperceptible to our contemporary eyes. On the contrary, for the courtiers and the theatregoers the presence of those metadramatic devices was the right and proper thing, as a way to desire a successful and fruitful union to the newlyweds, foreshadowing the happy ending. Without this narrative cue, the spectators might have understood that the wedding would not be prosperous, an idea that can be easily illustrated, as in the negative of a photograph, with several revealing details in *Othello*. So inside the framework of the “magical thought” (in the terms of anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl) of a pre-modern mentality, the aforementioned theatrical interludes were considered propitiatory rites of fertility and happiness, even if we could hear echoes of Shakespeare ´s real opinion about the question in Duke Theseus´s peevish words in *A Midsummer Night´s Dream* (an entertainment for the tedious hours between the wedding feast and the bedding), or see his use of the metadramatic devices as a means to reflect additionally upon the social and literary function of the playwriting. The custom of the wedding songs -and the diverse modalities derived from them- sinks its roots in the Greek epithalamium, inherited by the Roman poetry. It lived an extraordinary revival in the Jacobean

reign, following the Spenserian example of the *Epithalamia* (1596) whose influence can be detected in Shakespeare.

And, thirdly, I will analyse the four plays as intrinsically interrelated due to their subject, occasion and theatrical tools. In doing so, the enigmatic open ending of *Love´s Labour ´s Lost* could be resolved through some lines in *As You Like It*, only to mention one single aspect derived from my proposal of reading. I will also comment on how Shakespeare drew upon the masque, the epithalamium and the medieval plays, at the same time following and subverting those traditions, as it is customary in the playwright.

3. State of the question

The anthropological aspects in Shakespeare´s plays have been particularly addressed by several outstanding books published in the 1990s, *Shakespeare ´s Festive Comedy* (1990) by C. L. Barber; François Laroque ´s *Shakespeare Festive World* (1991); David Wiles ´s *Shakespeare's Almanac* (1993); Linda Woodbridge ´s *The Scythe of Saturn* (1994), or *The Purpose of Playing* (1996), by Louis Montrose. The latter revises *A Midsummer Night´s Dream* in the light of the cultural politics of the Elizabethan theatre, trying to prove how it shows the dynamics of subversion and containment. Wiles, instead, focuses on demonstrating that it was a wedding play and which of the several possibilities could be the most likely one. Although those texts are truly impressive examples of New Historicist criticism, my intention is completely different. I take them only as a point of departure and, at the same time, as sources of invaluable information about the Elizabethan milieu. I have gathered a good deal of articles about the plays studied but they do not analyse the issues I want to clarify. They have been listed in the bibliography in the last section, alongside with some audio-visual resources. It is interesting to check how cinema or theatre, in the case of an astounding staging of *The Tempest* by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2017, with state-of-the-art technology, have shown the brief scenes in question.

Regarding *Love ´s Labour ´s Lost*, there is not a specific approach to the Muscovite Masque, the Pageant of the Nine Worthies and the double final

poem in their wholeness, as a celebration of the courtship and betrothal as necessary steps into the wedding, which is only an implicit future in the play. I will argue that the solution can be found in an allusion that some lines in *As You Like It* make in relationship to the seasonal cycles, an essential anthropological aspect in the Elizabethan mindset.

About the Masque of Hymen in *As You Like It,* Dover Wilson radically proposed to omit it as a tardy interpolation. Other scholars consider it a symbol of order against the carnivalesque Arden greenwood. Marilyn L. Williamson (1968) interprets the Masque in tune with the pastoral genre that the play embodies. However, it could be perhaps the best example of my thesis: predictably, when a royal wedding is announced, a theatrical celebration inside the play must follow, as socially expected to desire a successful union to the parties.

When dealing with *The Tempest,* there are two completely different approaches at the metaphorical level: John Gillies (1986) situates the Masque of Ceres, Juno and Iris within the Virginian colonial venture, meanwhile Barbara Fuchs (1997) convincingly analyses the Mediterranean geopolitics in the play. Given that irresolvable contraposition, I will explore the literal level of the betrothal masque in relation to the wedding customs, with their highly regulated distribution of the steps (courtship, betrothal, wedding, and bedding) and their astrological relation to the parts of the day, on the basis of calendrical ideas in a sort of imitative magic of the movements of the Sun and the Moon and their symbolic meaning.

4. Methodology

Given the nature of my research, a qualitative method is required with an interdisciplinary scope: literary criticism, a social historical approach, and an anthropological perspective. T.S. Eliot repeatedly insisted on the importance of anthropology for the literary scholarship, but it was inside the frame of the New Historicism when it became a fully recognised instrument for unveiling hidden literary meanings.

The Rites of Passage (1909), a classic text by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), is a fundamental work in the field. He describes a transculturally valid scheme, distributed into three successive phases: separation from the previous *status quo,* which leads to preliminary rites; then, the intermediate situation when threshold rites are performed; and, finally, the incorporation of the neophyte to a new social condition. Those rituals are present, among other vital human cycles, in marriage, as one or both members of the couple become separated from their families, underwent official ceremonies in front of the community, and then they perform private acts leading to consummate the legal union (which can be also socially controlled). Hereinafter they acquire a mature social status. The concrete aspects surrounding those rites widely change among the different societies and along history. Any case, there is a permanent, universal line: on the one hand, they are pre-ordered to publicly signalling a change of the married couple inside the social group; on the other hand, the wedding ceremonies are designed to secure them a successful union.

As we will see, the second phase is marked by the “liminality”. In *The Ritual Process* (1969) Victor Turner explored the complex meaning of this central time of transition in which the social change is prepared. Shakespeare specially focuses on it due to the tensions and problems that this stage provokes, so interesting from a narrative viewpoint. The liminality projects itself not only in time but also, significantly, in space. The greenwood in *A Midsummer Night´s Dream* and *As You Like It*, the park in *Love´s Labour's Lost*, or the faraway island in *The Tempest* are outstanding examples of those liminal spaces where transitional events take place. Elizabethan England can be equally seen as a liminal epoch, maintaining features of the pre-Reformation world and, at the same time, anticipating the great social, political and commercial development to come, an aspect easily detectable in the literary works of that period.

An important interpretative tool to be used is the “thick description” defended by Clifford Geertz in his seminal book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). As human works are always created within a dense network of frequently competing meanings in a specific moment of history, they share multiple traits and the best way to understand them is jointly, thus facilitating their consideration as a cultural whole. Indeed the purpose of my work, in tune with Geertz´s

proposal, is to situate the four Shakespearian plays cited in a continuum, their historical and cultural context, trying to understand how social “actors” (the playwright, the spectators at courtly performances or in public theatres) could have understood the issues at stake. The objective, as I have already said, is to enrich the inherited meaning of the plays.

In order to explain synthetically the steps my research has followed, I had made a thorough study of each play, trying to situate the metatheatrical devices inside its complete structure and their contribution to the different interpretations of the work. This might allow to establish similarities and connections between them in an intertextual reading.

At the same time I have gathered qualified and specialized information about those plays, in particular scholarly books and articles referred to the specific parts studied, and also about the issues related: pageantry, epithalamium, court masques, the wedding customs and laws in the Elizabethan period, the possibilities for their performance and how Shakespeare managed to circumvent the prohibitions to avoid censorship.

I also relate the performative function of the wedding rites (illustrated through quotes from Shakespeare ´s plays when possible), the sociological facts, the legal conditions and the literary texts in a deep analysis, with the aim of elucidating the problems and sustaining relevant conclusions arisen from the intersection of those sources.

CHAPTER II. PRELIMINARY NOTIONS

Some fundamental techniques and concepts

> As we move downward on the scale of civilizations (…), we cannot fail to note an ever-increasing domination of the secular by the sacred. We see that in the least advanced cultures the holy enters nearly in every phase of a man´s life. (Van Gennep, 2019:2)

Participant observation

It is a widely spread misconception that only primitive peoples perform sacred rites. A rationalist worldview is prone to contemplate life as devoid of the well- rooted customs that guide meticulously the life of ancient or remote peoples, but this conclusion is true only to a certain extent. As Arnold van Gennep demonstrated, the rites of passage are phenomena that structure the social life worldwide and in every moment of history. They are an example of the few anthropological universals existing, that is, congenial to the human mind in all cultures. The only difference that could be found is the degree of fidelity to the tradition through which the social rites are executed and of the confidence in their magical force. In the desacralized societies this belief is partly diluted but it never vanishes completely. However, the all-pervading veil of scientific ideology partly prevents us from detecting the survival of the magical thinking in modern cultures. The anthropologist must make an effort to overcome that obstacle by using the "participant observation", a concept elaborated by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), the most outstanding figure in this academic field. Through this detached form of qualitative research of the cultural phenomena the anthropologist, as a learned stranger, interacts with the object of study either in other society or in his/her own. Nevertheless, the participant observation seems to be also a fundamental tool in the anthropological investigation of the past cultures, such as the Early Modern England in which Shakespeare lived. Thus, it will be the compass to guide this investigation, a principle that obliges to see the world through the eyes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean times.

Thick description

When using these anthropological lenses, the first problem that should be taken into account is the revolutionary consequences that Reformation caused in England. It was effected markedly with the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which put in motion an increasing ideological transformation of the society from the Catholic tenets to the Protestant ones which was almost complete in the late 1590s. Protestantism attempted to remove the magical elements from the religious cult, yet cultural practices associated with the Old religion, as it was intrinsically connected with the English festive calendar, remained strong especially in the countryside. Shakespeare wrote in the framework of that cultural transition, so it is no wonder that traces of such transcendent changes are easily perceptible in his plays, as he drew upon a complex and contradictory background to please his diverse audiences and in which he himself was so fully immersed that he could not escape. This is why, contradicting the title of Jan Kott´s famous book, Linda Woodbridge (1993:23) asserted:

> Shakespeare is *not* our contemporary. In his day witch trials were common. Scapegoat rites were practiced: certain poor people, sin- eaters, were paid to eat bread and beer passed over a corpse, to absorb the dead man's sins and keep his ghost from walking. Magical cures abounded; illness was charmed into rushes that were floated down- stream, into snails or tree trunks, dogs, potatoes, or rings; warts were transferred to sticks; whoever picked them up got warts. Soothsaying and belief in omens were common. In 1604 "the House of Commons rejected a bill after the speech of its Puritan sponsor had been interrupted by the flight of a jackdaw through the Chamber - an indisputably bad omen." Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* documents massive practice of magic in Shakespeare's time: reading of the gospel in fields to promote crop fertility, wearing rings with spirits imprisoned in them, sticking pins in wax models of victims, the royal touch for scrofula, magical divination to recover lost property, leaving of milk to propitiate household fairies, brewing of love potions, fortune-telling, ghost-laying. The last words attributed to Shakespeare are a ritual curse on whoever disturbs his grave. Despite the advent of new, rationalistic modes of thought, in Shakespeare's day magical thinking still permeated life.

It is really worth reading this long quote as it clearly reveals the motley discourse in early modern mentality that must be discerned. The essential instrument to do this is the "thick description". Synthetically, it could be defined as the depiction of a phenomenon in sufficient detail to make explicit and meaningful the cultural patterns operating within a social group in its historical context, without forgetting its evolution, that is, in a synchronic and diachronic way. Since this technique presents the social act investigated as a "text" that can

be interpreted within a complex web of significance, it is not strange the enormous appeal of this method, elaborated by Clifford Geertz for ethnographic purposes, to literary criticism. In order to follow those principles it is vital to make an extraordinary effort of prolixity in our research. If the aim of my investigation is to clarify the literary way through which Shakespeare approached the question of the aristocratic weddings, it is necessary to deepen as much as possible in the competing ideologies of the playwright´s time and in all the issues at stake. Besides the contraposition between city and countryside already mentioned, there should be carefully considered two more fundamental aspects: gender, as rites of passage are segregated and asymmetrical for males and females; and social class, which also introduced a radical difference regarding nuptial rites, particularly in the royal weddings in relationship to the ordinary people´s ceremonials.

Rites of passage

> Transitions from group to group and from one society situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. (Van Gennep, 2019:3)

Van Gennep defined the rites of passage as "ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individuals to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (2019:3). They were treated by Shakespeare firstly as a literary *topos*, as in Jacques´s memorable discourse of the Seven Ages of Man, from *infans* to *senex,* but secondly, and more importantly, under a theatrical metaphor that perfectly matches with van Gennep´ s anthropological insights: in every of those stages people play their parts, with their exits and entrances (*AYLI*, II.vii.139-166).

As it has already been said before, rites of passage have a preliminary phase of separation from the previous condition; a liminal stage of transition or *marge*; and finally, the postliminal incorporation to a new situation. In every kind of rite the stress might fall upon a different phase. Rites of incorporation are prominent at marriage whereas courtship and betrothal are examples of rites of transition. Wedding ceremonials may include additional rituals (purification,

fertility…). The reason for such an elaborate cultural construction is clear: marriage is essential for the continuance of society but, at the same time, its potential failure could destabilize the community. Wedding rites of separation appear in the elopements staged in *Othello* or in *The Merchant of Venice.*

Curiously enough, van Gennep mentioned the “multiple synchronic marriages” in which all the social groups participate but he did not include any Shakespearian example, so common in comedy (in the works studied, three couples in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* four in *As You Like It*, and implicitly five -the King and his courtiers, plus Armado and Jacquenetta- in *Love´s Labour ´s Lost*). Instead, Victor Turner resorted to Shakespeare in his study of liminality, thus mingling anthropology and literary criticism.

Magical thinking

Within his classification of the different rites Van Gennep approached the sympathetic rituals. Such a concept is highly relevant for this research since the performance of plays and masques was a constitutive part of the celebrations of betrothals or weddings in noble households. Of course they were a symbol of richness and high social status. But, at the same time, due to the sympathetic magic that they attributed to theatrical performances based on the trust on the reciprocal action of the similar on the similar, they considered that the content of an appropriate play would have a real power to influence the future of the newlyweds. Anthropologist Lucien Lévy- Bruhl (1857-1939), in his work *How Natives Think* (1910) -published in Spanish as *La mentalidad primitiva-* ascribed this way of thought to a pre-logical stage. On the contrary, as Heinz argues (1997:165), from a functionalist perspective Malinowski refigured the problem by affirming that magical thinking is not exclusive of the so-called savage peoples. Magical practices are accepted by the members of a social group if they regard them as useful, which could be coherent even from a rationalist point of view. This utilitarian perspective is the key to understand the resort to magical thought regardless the degree of instruction of the individuals. Thus, being all the vogue the staging of plays, masques or epithalamial songs in the aristocratic wedding feasts, whether especially written for the occasion or selected those whose

characteristics best suited for it, their omission could be understood as an ill-omen. Different from acts of direct magic (like a curse or a spell), those theatrical events are examples of indirect rites, such as vows or prayers. And when placing that question in a metatheatrical level, the absence of a play-within-a-play or similar device in a comedy dealing with nuptials would have been interpreted by the theatregoers as a prediction of failure of the union.

CHAPTER III. MARRIAGE: LAWS, CUSTOMS AND POETRY

1. Liminality and legal prescriptions about religious ceremonies on stage

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to be in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (V. Turner, 1969:95)

Victor Turner centred his study on the second stage, the liminality, which corresponds to van Gennep´ s marginal or transitional step. Turner highlighted as its most prominent characteristic the state of *communitas* or solidarity between the neophytes, not exempted from psychological conflicts and crises in what he named the "social drama". No doubt it is the most interesting of those stages in the three-part schema and it can be easily translated to the theatrical dominion due to:

1. The tensions arousing "betwixt and between", which revolve around the fruitful, almost sacred notion of "threshold", lead to a renewed social order. But before that, the neophytes /characters of the play have to pass trials and tribulations and discover their true identity and desires (the *anagnorisis*) leading to personal and social harmony.
2. The separate spatial setting in which the transitional changes take place. This is something especially visible in the texts to be studied, although it falls far beyond the scope of this work: The Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, the Athenian Wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the magical island of Prospero in *The Tempest*, or Navarre´s Park in *Love´s Labour's Lost*.
3. Liminality also projects itself in time. In those places the characters are mainly in a festive mood, proper of holidays, in contrast with the severe gravity of everyday life.

Liminality stands as a concept of paramount importance for the scholarship about the Early Modern England. The Elizabethan age was marked by the transition from the medieval organic structures to a mechanical world, as

in Descartes´s philosophy, and from the pagan, pre-Christian religious and social customs to a rationalist worldview; by the displacement of the weight from a rural economy to a proto-capitalism and, in parallel, an increasing loss of presence of the life in the countryside in favour of the cities; by the development of manufactures, precursors of the industrialisation or by the beginning of the transformation of an isolated kingdom into a global empire. Traces of all those phenomena can be found in the Shakespearian plays.

Regarding specifically theatre, the most experimental art in Shakespeare's time, that liminality is visible, first and foremost, in the social changes that the profession underwent, from the amateur acting in popular festivals, or in Queen Elizabeth ´s summer royal progresses (like the 'Rude Mechanicals' in *AMND,* or the Pageant of the Nine Worthies played by Navarre´s subjects in *LLL*), to a regular professional activity in public, permanent playhouses, and private or courtly theatres. However, liminality appears, above all, in the intense metatheatricality, the self-reflection about the nature of an art in transition from the mystery plays, fused with religious creed, to a desacralized art which, furthermore, serves to think about all those economic, social, cultural and artistic novelties.

Finally, there is another crucial dimension of liminality in the theatrical productions that cannot be overlooked in this research. In 1559, by means of the Proclamation 509, the Queen banned the staging of religious subject matters. Given that the more marriages the better it was the axis of Shakespeare´s comedy, he had to displace the final resolution of the comedic plot (the marriage, belonging to the phase of incorporation) to a previous moment, the liminal stage, in order to avoid censorship. Thus, the author only showed the nuptials rites:

-off stage, as in *AYL* (V.iv.183-4), in *AMND* (IV. ii.15-6), in *Othello* (through the proclamation made by a herald, in II. ii. 6-11), or in *Romeo and Juliet*:

> Friar Laurence: Come; come with me, and we will make short work.
>
> For, by your leave, you shall not stay alone
>
> Till holy church incorporate two in one.
>
> [*Exeunt.*] (II.iv.35-7)

There is a striking exception in *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which the ceremony takes place inside the church. However, the “broken nuptials” (an expressive concept used by C.T. Neely, 1993) protected the playwright from being punished:

> LEONATO Come, Friar Francis, be brief; only to the plain
> form of marriage, and you shall recount their particular
> duties afterwards.
> FRIAR You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?
> CLAUDIO No (emphasis added)
> (…)
> FRIAR Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?
> HERO I do.
> FRIAR If either of you know any inward impediment why
> You should not be conjoined, charge you, on your souls,
> to utter it. (IV.i.1-12)

-in a syncopated form, as in *AYLI*, when Rosalind/Ganymede anticipates the religious formula for the sake of the love cure (IV.i.105-118), and it is also mocked by Touchstone in II.iii.30-84. Despite their incomplete nature, the repetition of the formulaic phrases provides a global sense of closure;

- or mainly, by substituting the religious ceremony for an analogous surrogate of metaphorical significance, such as the masque of Ceres and Juno, goddesses of fertility and marriage respectively, in *The Tempest*; the masque of Hymen in *AYLI,* in which the god plays priest; or the performance of the myth of “Pyramus and Thisbe” in *AMND*, with its hidden religious undertones, as it will be analysed in chapter V.4.

2. Marriage rites and customs in the Elizabethan era

> Marriage was always as much an economic and social alliance as a religious one: property transfer was an integral part of the process of husband and wife becoming one flesh. (C. Peters, 2000:64)

The election of partner

A Midsummer Night´s Dream agglomerates the love rites proper of different spring celebrations, like Saint Valentin Day, May Day and Midsummer,

when Elizabethans went to the forests to gather aromatic, protective plants for decking their houses, a symbol of spring entering inside the individuals jointly with the transformation of Nature and its seasonal cycles. They also spend the night in the "green-world" (Northrop Frye´s celebrated expression), like the lovers in *AMND*, thus giving reasons to the Puritanical ablaze with anger.

There were several customs associated to love in those feasts, like the divination of the future partner in the person dreamed of in St John's Night, the first person who someone meets in the morning of St Valentine's Day, and a kind of lottery of love (echoed in the wanton mistake of Puck, causing the change of the loved ones, or the zoophilic, crazy love of Titania for Bottom). However, within the upper classes marriage was not a question of free election but of paternal decision, sometimes leading to disgrace, as in *Romeo and Juliet,* or in *Othello*, when the defiant daughters, guided by love and desire, truncate unions designed on account of lineage and wealth. Undoubtedly the free election of a couple was a burning issue in Shakespeare´s time. The author took the problem to the limit of absurdity (using a well-known rule of argumentation to demonstrate logically a truth), in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Hermia faces a death penalty for disobeying the Law of the Father.

Courtship and wedding contract

Wooing is at the heart of *Love's Labour Lost*, in which the playwright makes fun of his contemporaries´ craze for Petrarchan poetry. The ingenious Berowne says:

> Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
> Figures pedantical (…). (V.ii.406-7)

The delivery of tokens or favours to the loved one was also customary. Navarre and his Lords give their mistresses a jewel, a pair of white gloves, a miniature portrait and pearls. However, the ladies take advantage of that to mock their wooers by masking themselves and interchanging their identities through those metonymic gifts.

It is worth remembering that the exchange of tokens could be considered a legal union if followed by sexual intercourse. However, the bridegroom had to ask permission to the woman's father to make the courtship proposal. The betrothal required only the handfasting, or an oral agreement. The prototypical *verba de futuro* was “I promise to take thee as wife/husband”. A good example of this can be found in *LLL*, when the Princess and her ladies consent to marry after a period of trial of the courtiers´ lasting love:

> Then, at the expiration of the year,
> Come challenge me, challenge me by these deserts,
> And by this virgin palm now kissing thine,
> I will be thine. (…) (V. ii.798-801)

As Heather Dubrow reminds in *A Happier Eden* (1990), after the Reformation the marriage was not considered a sacrament but a wholly secular act. The Church only solemnized unions that had already occurred. Nevertheless, it was a highly controversial question if only the nuptial contract was enough and these contradictions increased even more the complexities of the life in the Renaissance England. Whatever the case, the public contract was seen as a way to avoid secret marriages which could trigger tragedies, as in *Romeo and Juliet* or in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-13). In *Othello*, Brabantio attributes the improper conduct of his daughter Desdemona to the effect of a love potion:

> She is abused, stol´n from me and corrupted
> By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks; (I.iii.60-1)

The wedding promise could be broken off upon the payment of a sum. The families of the contracting parties negotiated the dowry to be proportioned by the bride´s father, and the jointure paid by the groom ´s family in order to secure the maintenance of the widow. In *The Taming of the Shrew* it can be found the following exchange of proposals, a truly piece of legal English:

> Petruccio: Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love,
> What dowry shall I have with her to wife?
> Baptista: After my death the one half of my lands,
> And in possession twenty thousand crowns.
> Petruccio: And for that dowry, I'll assure her of

Her widowhood, be it that she should survive me,

In all my lands and leases whatsoever.

Let specialties be therefore drawn between us,

That covenants might be kept on either hand. (II.i.117-125)

Crying the banns

The couple's names and their intention to marry were announced in the same parish in three consecutive Sundays, thus permitting any interested person to raise objections. Upon the completion of this requisite the couple still had to wait one month, except in the case of hasty marriages. Paying an additional sum only one proclaiming of the banns was required. This was the case of Shakespeare himself, since Anne Hathaway was pregnant, and that of Bianca and Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the following excerpt the problem of the nature of marriage already mentioned can be clearly checked: the match is complete, the protagonists are already considered husband and wife, yet the religious ceremony should be performed:

Baptista: I know not what to say, but give me your hands,

God send you joy, Petruccio. ´Tis is a match.

Gremio, Tranio: Amen, say we. We will be witnesses.

Petruccio: Father, and wife, and gentlemen, adieu.

I will to Venice. Sunday comes apace,

We will have rings, and things, and fine array,

And kiss me Kate, we will be married a Sunday. (II.i.310-316)

The bridal procession and the ceremony

According to the canon law, the marriages must be practiced before noon, a reason for the accent placed on the bridal´s awaken at dawn. In the wedding day the bride and the groom were accompanied to the church with all kind of jollifications like music and bawdy jokes (destined to promote desire and, therefore, fertility) in a highly festive spirit. In *Romeo and Juliet* all this ritual can be seen in an inverted mirror:

Capulet: All things that we ordained festival

Turn from their office to black funeral:

Our instruments to melancholy bells,
Our wedding cheer to a sad funeral feast,
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change;
Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corpse,
And all things change them to the contrary. (V.i.111-117)

When the couple arrived outside the church door, the priest initiated the service, conducted in accordance with the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559). He asked: “Who giveth this woman to be married unto this man?” as a symbolic transfer of the *manus* (from the father to the husband via the priest). In *AYLI* Sir Oliver recalls this ritual phrase in a comical, overtly erotic scene: “Is there none here to give the woman?” (II.iii.51). Later on Shakespeare joyfully plays with the sacred formula:

Orlando: Pray thee, marry us.
Celia: I cannot say the words.
Rosalind: You must begin, “Will you, Orlando,”-
Celia: Go to! Will you, Orlando, have to wife this Rosalind?
Orlando: I will.
Rosalind: Ay, but when?
Orlando: Why now, as fast as she can marry us.
Rosalind: Then you must say, “I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.”
Orlando: I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.
Rosalind: (…) I do take thee, Orlando, for my husband. (IV.i.105-115)

The priest commanded the bride to “obey and serve, love, honour” the spouse. Then the ring was sanctified and placed on her finger, the couple received a blessing from the priest and they were announced husband and wife, entering the church (a symbolic threshold transition) for the mass wedding. They both had a veil placed over their heads and its final lifting meant the end of the ceremony. However, to be legally married the sexual union had to be consummated:

Lovers, to bed; ´tis almost fairy time
(…)Sweet friends, to bed.
A fortnight hold we this solemnity,
In nightly revels and new jollity. (V.i.350, 354-6)

After the ceremony the wedding party returned and enjoyed a banquet but, when talking about a noble household, the celebrations were extremely opulent and sophisticated. As the quote above demonstrated, they could last over a fortnight and included epithalamial songs, wedding plays, masques or pageants, as it will be further developed in the next chapters.

Taboos and weird customs

Laurence Stone, invoked by Dubrow (1990), confirms that contemporary mortality rates were really high. Death interrupted over a third of all first marriages within 15 years. The fear of risks and dangers of different kinds associated to marriage (childbirth death, cuckoldry…) are at the bottom of many of the protective magical-religious rituals and prohibitions directed to avert misfortune. They could not marry in Lent and in May, as it was forbidden to have sex in those periods. C. L. Barber (1990:139) writes:

> It was customary for the clergy, at least in important marriages, to bless the bed and bridal couple with holy water. The benediction included exorcism (…). This custom may itself be an ecclesiastical adaptation of a more primitive bridal lustration, a water charm of which dew-gathering on May Day is one variant.

Despite their pagan affinities, they did not conceive those acts as opposed to the Christian faith. François Laroque (1991) also points to the fear of witches, who directed spells able to kill the husband´s desire on the wedding night. Astrological predictions were strictly followed. There was a vogue for almanacs in order to identify the most propitious days to marry. In *AMND* (III.i.44-5) Bottom calls for "A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanac: find out moonshine, find out moonshine!" which was a symbol tightly associated to fertility.

A popular tradition was to strew the bride and groom´s path to the church with rushes or flowers, and Morris dances of overt sexual undertones were performed in the way to church. Before entering her new home the bride was lifted to avoid the action of evil spirits. Also in *AMND* Puck is

> Sent with broom before,
>
> To sweep the dust behind the door. (V.i.374-5)

In Ben Jonson´s *The Masque of Hymen* (1609) the bride was carried out to elude any contact with the magical drugs that witches buried in the houses´ thresholds.

The ears of wheat were symbols of fertility in the bridal arrangement and with the same finality she drank sweet wine, or ale for the less wealthy.

In the morning following the consummation, the newlyweds were greeted by a *mattinata*. All those gestures were thought to make a significant contribution to the success of the wedding couple and the masculine sexual power, that is, they constitute a sort of apotropaic magic.

3. Epithalamia: Greek- Roman songs and Spenserian poetry

The ancient tradition

Hymenaios, god of marriage in the ancient Greece, became equally a synonym for wedding. He was repeatedly invoked in the special song for this day, the *epithalamos*, whose name refers to the place where the song was chanted, outside the marital chamber in the wedding night and in the following morning. The addressees could be the bride, the groom or both altogether. The speaker in the poem describes the nuptial rites with their gendered, separated spheres. It was typical in the hymeneal songs the bride´s lament for the loss of her childhood world and virginity, whereas in the case of the groom the emphasis was placed on a productive adulthood. On the whole, there was an erotic discourse aimed at persuading the reluctant bride. The Greek poets imagined the gods by attending the ceremonial and offering their blessing: Hymen, with his saffron garment, or Afrodyte as the matron who prepared the bride. However, the Renaissance poets recovered this poetic genre from the hands of the Roman Catullus, through the model established in his poem number 61, *Epithalamon: for Vinia and Manlius*:

(…) And call the bride to her
new husband's loving home,
her heart bound fast with love,
as the clinging ivy enfolds the tree,
winding here and there.
And you chaste virgins too,

whose own day will come,
singing harmoniously
cry, O Hymanaee Hymen,
O Hymen Hymenaee.
That, hearing himself called
to perform his service, he may
suffer himself to approach,
the commander of wedding joys,
the true uniter-in-love.
What greater god do you love
sought out by lovers?
What divine one do men
worship more, O Hymanaee Hymen,
O Hymen Hymenaee? (…)

According to Dubrow (ibid.), the poet describes the events in a chronological fashion, acting as a master of ceremonies as well as a wedding guest. He invokes Hymen, he invites the nymphs, he lists the marital customs performed and praises the couple; he alludes to the perils they should avoid and offers prayers for their good fortune.

The renaissance of the epithalamia

The humanist Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558), in *Poetics Libri Septem,* enumerated the topics to be treated in wedding poetry: courtship, lineage, beauty, favourable omens, including predictions of the birth of offspring and the exhortation to make love, as well as the wedding practices, rituals and charms.

The *Third Eclogues* of Philipp Sidney ´s *Arcadia* (1593) recuperated Catullus´s scheme. However, the most outstanding example belongs to Edmund Spenser who, apart from his use of an aristocratic genre for autobiographical purposes, added an important poetic innovation: the speaker is also the bridegroom who passionately narrates his own wedding day. *Epithalamion* (1595), which strongly influenced Shakespeare´s *A Midsummer Night´s Dream*, is especially important as he meticulously describes the whole day in a long

poem: the speaker commands the bride to awake like Hymen has already done, then he launches the wedding invitations and asks the god to attend with other divinities (in the third stanza):

> Bring with you all the Nymphes that you can heare
> Both of the rivers and the forrests greene:
> And of the sea that neighbours to her neare,
> Al with gay girlands goodly wel beseene.
> And let them also with them bring in hand
> Another gay girland
> For my fayre love of lillyes and of roses,
> Bound truelove wize with a blew silke riband.

The bridal procession is gay and noisy with the merry music of the piper and the tabor. The bride,

> crowned with a girland greene
> seemed lyke some mayden Queen.

He marvellously describes his bride´s bodily and inward beauty. In the twelfth stanza, the solemn ceremony inside the temple, adorned with plants, is vividly described as full of musical sounds:

> Bring her up to th'high altar that she may,
> The sacred ceremonies there partake,
> The which do endlesse matrimony make,
> And let the roring Organs loudly play
> The praises of the Lord in lively notes,
> The whiles with hollow throates
> The Choristers the joyous Antheme sing,
> That al the woods may answere and their eccho ring.

They returned home victoriously and celebrated a feast with singing and wine. Spenser married in the Midsummer of 1594, "the longest day in all the yeare,/ and the shortest night", a metaphor for the long waiting to consummate the marriage. The detail is not casually mentioned by the poet: it was socially prescribed that the husband must refrain himself until the day was completely over, and it is a question of cardinal importance when studying *AMND* and *Othello*. The reason was that the couple should imitate the movements of the

Sun and the Moon so as to connect with the grandiose order of the cosmos. Thus, in the sixteenth and eighteenth stanzas Spenser proclaims:

Ah when will this long weary day have end,
And lende me leave to come unto my love?
How slowly do the houres theyr numbers spend?
How slowly does sad Time his feathers move?
Hast thee O fayrest Planet to thy home
Within the Westerne fome:
Thy tyred steedes long since have need of rest.
Long though it be, at last I see it gloome,
And the bright evening star with golden creast
Appeare out of the East. (…)

Now welcome night, thou night so long expected,
That long daies labour doest at last defray, (…)
But let the night be calme and quietsome,
Without tempestuous storms or sad afray: (…)
And let the mayds and yongmen cease to sing:
Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr eccho ring.

Whereas the calendrical interdiction is strictly followed by King Theseus, Othello and Desdemona, instead, abandon the wedding feast at ten, which is fuel to the malicious comments of Iago and Cassio:

Casio: Welcome, Iago; we must to the watch.

Yago: Not this hour, lieutenant; ´tis not yet ten o´th´ clock. (emphasis added)

Our general cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona, who let us not therefore blame: he hath not yet made wanton the night, and she is sport for Jove. (II.ii.12-16)

Spenser finally calls for the help of the positive forces of Cynthia (the Moon), Juno, Hymen, Genius (the spirit protector of the bed, *lectus genialis*), and Hebe, he rejects the evil dangers and he silences the birds or animals of ill-omen (stanza 19):

Ne let the Pouke, nor other evill sprights,
Ne let mischivous witches with theyr charmes,
Ne let hob Goblins, names whose sence we see not,
Fray us with things that be not.

> Let not the shriech Oule, nor the Storke be heard:
> Nor the night Raven that still deadly yels,
> Nor damned ghosts cald up with mighty spels,
> Nor griesly vultures make us once affeard:
> Ne let th'unpleasant Quyre of Frogs still croking
> Make us to wish theyr choking.
> Let none of these theyr drery accents sing;
> Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr eccho ring.

Adrienne L. Eastwood (2013) indicates that very few English poets wrote epithalamial poetry during Queen Elizabeth´s reign since the marriage was a taboo subject to be avoided in her presence. On the contrary, after 1603 there was a veritable explosion of wedding songs.

CHAPTER IV. THE MASQUE, A GENRE FOR THE NOBILITY

1. Origins and development

> The masque presents the triumph of an aristocratic community; at its center is a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization. Philosophically, it is both Platonic and Machiavellian; Platonic because it presents images of the good to which the participants aspire and may ascend; Machiavellian because its idealizations are designed to justify the *power* they celebrate.(…)The age believed in the power of art -to persuade, transform, preserve- and masques can no more be dismissed as flattery than portraits can. (S. Orgel, *The illusion of Power*, 1975:40)

The “masque” was formally introduced as such in Tudor England in 1512, when Henry VIII and eleven knights, all disguised and accompanied by musicians and torchbearers, invited the ladies to dance. But except for the name, it was not a real innovation. C. M. Shaw (1958), F. Laroque (1991) or E. Welsford (2005) find its origins in a rich background of the English folk lore: the Roman *Ludi*, pagan rituals tolerated by the Christian Church, evolved into the Lord of Misrule at Christmas feasts, the ritual procession on New Year's Day and its symbolic gift giving (heir to the Saturnalia), the mock combat in the sword dances and Morris dances or the mummers, with their blackened faces, metaphorically representing death and resurrection. Despite this mixture of popular and elevated customs, the masque ended up being an exclusively elitist entertainment. For the nobility, the year divided into two semesters but it was the winter season when the revels took place. It opened on November 17, being Twelfth Night the most relevant feast as it celebrated the year ´s last night in the Julian calendar, at the end of the 12 days from December 25 to January 5, aimed to fulfil the lapse between the solar and the lunar years. The masques became central to those Christmas festivities. The Master of the Revels assembled the troupes of professional or amateur actors, such as the students of the Inns of Courts, and he also chose the plays to be performed, providing them with the costumes and scenery needed.

The masque´s idiosyncratic components were music, dance, poetry, songs, the mythological and allegorical settings and characters, masks and expensive costumes at the cost of the nobility. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, the genre had acquired a growing sophistication. Regarding its basic structure, initially the courtiers made their entry and chose their partners from the ladies in the audience. While the latter remained seated in the “state”, masked and disguised, the

masquers danced in front of them. After that, they drew out the ladies for the Grand dance and, once finished, the gentlemen took seats and witnessed the Antic-Mask performed by the Mummers, who were professional actors. Once finished their mime, the latter invited the audience to dance in a ceremonious part known as the Revels. Following this final dance, they honoured the Queen and processioned out of the Hall while the musicians played the going-out song.

According to S. Orgel (1975), these festivals took place at Windsor, Richmond, Hampton Court and, in London, in the small theatre attached to Whitehall, although it was the Great Hall of the magnificent Banqueting House, beautifully decorated with frescoes by Rubens, which housed the most lavish productions in the Jacobean period. The accession of James I to the throne in 1603 marked a radical change in the history of the courtly masque due to the fortunate coincidence of Ben Johnson's dramatic genius (the main contributor, since he wrote 20 masques from 1605 to 1625), and the elaborate scenery, choreographies and costume designs by architect Inigo Jones, alongside the munificent royal support. Thus the masques became a mirror in which the prestige of the new royal dynasty could be projected to all over Europe. Following Orgel (ibid.) and M. Butler (in Bevington and Holbrook, 1998), it was carefully calculated the position of the monarch at the visual centre of the stage, watched by all courtiers while he was watching the spectacular display of his power and wealth in an ephemeral but indelible art work, the hallmark of the English monarchy. Surely we would be tempted to think that this was a modern invention of the absolutist ideology but, far from this, in a similar fashion, primitive rituals honoured the gods who were considered both present as observers and participants in the rites incarnate in the priests. Evidently, they are mechanisms of social control that reappear now and then throughout history.

2. Structure

Queen Anne took an enormous interest in the masques. This is why, from 1604 to the season of 1611/1612, the Queen herself and her favourite ladies played the most appropriate roles to glorify the British royalty. The change started in 1603/1604 with Samuel Daniel's masque *The Vision of the 12 Goddesses*, which was followed by Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) and *The Masque of*

Beauty (1607/1608). Nevertheless, the turning point is famously represented by *The Masque of the Queens* (1608/1609), as it will be further developed in the next paragraph.

The Jacobean royal household assumed the cost of the magnificent costumes for the courtiers, who rehearsed for months the intricate dances imagined by the talented Inigo Jones. Luxuriant disguises, symbolic dances, an astonishing machinery, the lighting effects, the elaborate patterning in the presentation of the allegorical characters… all contributed to the triumph of a show which was voiced by the foreign ambassadors specially invited for the occasion.

The masque started with a prologue, conventionally the next moment was the comic anti-masque, and then the masque proper in which there was no dialogue but a static display of characters in tableaux. Although the Queen actively participated in selecting the subject matter of the masques and she approved Jones´s designs and symbolic colours for the garments (white, golden, silver, green, blue), the intervention of the Revels Office was fundamental in the ideological operation of ensuring the location of the King as the focal point of the masque, sometimes conceived under a perspectival optic. As Orgel (ibid.) states, it was central to the masque the absolutist ideology that structured and gave meaning to the Stuart rituals of state:

> This is the context within which the court audience saw the masque, with its scenic illusions and spectacular machines: as models of the universe, as science, as assertions of power, as demonstrations of the essential divinity of the human mind. The marvels of the stagecraft -the ability to overcome gravity, control the natural world, reveal the operation of the heavenly spheres- are the supreme expressions of Renaissance kingship. (S. Orgel, 1975: 58)

David Wiles (1993) concludes that the courtly plays, to be executed in a rigidly prescribed time and place, were unique, unrepeatable events, unlike the plays written for the general audience which were commercial commodities infinitely reproducible in the public playhouses. In this dichotomy it can be easily detected the net difference between the aristocratic masques and the plays in the framework of the mass culture in a progressively commercialized world.

3. The anti-masque

> And because her Majesty (best knowing, that a principal part of life, in these Spectacles, lay in their variety) had commanded me to think on some Dance, or Shew, that might precede hers, and have the place of a foil or false Masque: I

> was careful to decline, not only from others, but mine own Steps in that kind, since the (b) last Year, I had an Anti-masque of Boys: and therefore now, devis'd, that twelve Women, in the habit of Hags, or Witches, sustaining the Persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, &c. the Opposites to good Fame, should fill that part; not as a Masque, but a Spectacle of strangeness, producing multiplicity of Gesture, and not unaptly sorting with the current, and whole fall of the Device. (B. Jonson, *The Masque of Queens*, 1609)

As it will be seen in chapter V.1, the main features of the anti-masque were already present, at least in an embryonic form, before 1609. But undoubtedly the location of the foil or false masque in the first position highlighted the civilizing powers of the goddesses or queens impersonated by Anne of Denmark and her ladies-in-waiting, who subdued the dark forces of anarchy and evil. In the aforementioned *The Masque of the Queens* a mess of witches (whose names were Ignorance, Suspicion, Credibility, Falsehood, Murmur, Malice, Slander, Impudence, Excruciation, Bitterness, Rage and Mischief) executed an infernal dance surrounded by hellish sounds. However, they were dispersed when the twelve warrior queens (the numerological requisite is always carefully observed) occupied the House of Fame. Of course the characters in the anti-masque were executed by professional actors since it had a dialogued part and because its content violated the strict rules of decorum at court. It could be a bizarre episode, a carnivalesque scene that created an intense narrative polarity. In the end, the anti-masque reinforced the central position of the main masque, as the former appeared clearly subordinate to the latter in dramatic and ideological terms. Other examples of grotesque characters that appeared in the anti-masque were satyrs, barbarians, savages or vices. As in the case of the masque proper, they were grouped in sets of twelve, which could be a calendrical reference.

The anti-masque replicates a rite of inversion, as well as it corresponds to the dynamics of subversion and containment so well defined by Stephen Greenblatt. For me, the most perfect example of it can be found in the episodes of treason and rebellion encouraged and then cruelly punished by Duke Prospero in *The Tempest,* which reassures his god-like power and ability to anticipate and control his subjects´ actions, as it will be analysed in chapter V.2. The structural duality but hierarchical predominance of the masque proper over the foil masque would have reinforced the message of an all-controlling royal surveillance in the Jacobean eyes.

4. **Wedding masques and wedding plays**

> Towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth, the masques had grown in popularity until they were the accepted method of entertainment at special events and festivals and their dramatic qualities were tuned to honour the host, any special guests, the principals involved in a particular celebration, such as a betrothal or a marriage. (C. M. Shaw, 1958:10-11)

The pastoral and allegorical settings and characters were considered the most suitable formulae to celebrate a wedlock in a noble household. Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Hymeneai* (1605) will be studied below as a moment of transition between *AYLI* and *The Tempest*. Significantly, it also marked the starting point for the long collaboration of the tandem Jonson-Jones. They reconstructed the Roman rites of marriage to please the bridal couple, the Earl of Essex and Frances Howard. However, a play could be equally appropriate for such an occasion. It would include a bridal procession, the praise of Hymen, Juno, Venus and Cupid…, the encouragement of the conjugal harmony and the marital duties as subject matters, and also other epithalamic elements. These aspects are perceptible in *AMND*, which seems to have been a play specially written for a wedding celebration. Its action occurs between the nuptials and the wedding night, in whose revels a (metatheatrical) wedding play is offered by the Athenian artisans to honour their Duke and his conquered wife; and the main plots revolve around the true nature of love and the risks coming from marital disturbances. In *The Tempest* Shakespeare included a masque to celebrate the betrothal of the royal heirs with mythological characters allusive to the fruitful marriage expected, whereas in *ATLI* a wedding masque puts an end to the play. Finally, in *LLL* diverse shows precede the expected royal wedding, that of the Princess of France and the King of Navarre: a masque, a pageant and a final dialogued song full of allegorical meaning. In these plays, most probably performed for courtly and/or wedding occasions, the specific references to real facts and emblems of the royal or noble couples were carefully erased to respect their privacy when those plays entered in or returned to the commercial circuits, which were guided by a completely different logic, that of the market, as we have already seen. This is a fascinating move that reveals the alternative possibilities of the theatrical development in Early Modern England and the routes they took.

5. A parallel development. Brief reference to the Italian *Intermedii* and the birth of the opera

It is now time for examining another theatrical "mutation" which resulted from the intense experimentation with the different arts in the Renaissance. Musicologist Skip Sempé shows that, in 1539, the wedding of Cosimo I de´ Medici and Eleonora de Toledo was the occasion for the birth of a new musical and scenic tradition, the interludes or *Intermedii*. They were intended for entertaining the audience between the different acts of the play rather than using the curtain for that purpose. With the passing of time these interludes developed a more complex scenography to the point that they became the most expected part of the shows. In 1589 this artistic genre reached its peak when the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I married to Princess Christine of Lorraine in Florence. The set of *Intermedii* performed is considered one of the greatest events staged in the 16th century. Such a diffusion reached *La Pellegrina,* performed at the Uffizi, that the *Intermedii* began to be known under that very name. Since they were so valued, their number raised from four to six, adding one at the beginning and another at the end, thus revealing its predominance over the main play. According to contemporary documents the grandeur was their main feature, achieved through heroic and divine subject matters worthy of being represented before the princes, as it also happened with the masques. They share many other traits: the astonishment, that is, the visual and auditory pleasure achieved through music and dance, their appropriateness, the mythological or allegorical and also grotesque characters... In *La Pellegrina* the interludes were: The Harmony of the Spheres; The Muses defeat the Pierides (in a singing contest); Apollo slays the Python at Delphi (the battle ends with the death of the monster followed with songs and dances of joy); the Realm of the Demons; Arion and the Dolphin, and The Gift of Harmony and Rhythm to Mankind by the gods, concluding with a Ballo. It was a magnificent spectacle as a result of the contribution of famous poets, composers, musicians, architects, singers, dancers and costume designers.

The masques had been developed in Italy long before England and this is the reason why the *Intermedii*, in which singing and music were equated to staging in importance, could evolve towards a different genre, the opera, whereas in the masque the crucial element continued to be the dance and the political celebration

of the royal power. In any case, E. Welsford (2005) reveals that Inigo Jones was strongly influenced by Italian *Intermedii* in uncountable details.

For Sempé, a comparison between the two genres reveals that they were part of a dramatic continuum: on the one hand, when the single plot of the interludes was brought together apart from the main play, in a balanced combination of music and scenic representation, “Opera, celebrating staging rather than the purely musical performance, had been born”. The official date was 1607, thanks to Monteverdi ´s genius, who selected as its subject matter the tragic love of the mythological hero Orpheus for the Nymph Eurydice and the power of music to transcend the limits of death.

CHAPTER V. METADRAMATIC DEVICES AND ROYAL WEDDINGS. ANALYSIS OF FOUR SHAKESPEARIAN PLAYS

1. *As You Like It*. The enigmatic masque of Hymen

"*There is no dramatic necessity for this masque-business*". (Dover Wilson, quoted by J. Dillon, 2007:18-19)

In this chapter we are going to study the *raison d´être* of the masque of Hymen in V. iv. 94-184, though previously we need to make a brief approach to the play. Regarding the date of its composition, it is only known for sure that it was annotated in the Stationers´ Register in August 1600. As Frances Meres did not list it in 1598, the most reliable year for its composition is 1599. Juliet Dusinberre (2003) suggests that, as in all the late plays, there is in *AYLI* much music, singing and a wedding masque, which points to a first courtly performance, probably on Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Grass), 20 February 1599, in the Great Hall of Richmond Castle. The same author cleverly detects a parallel seasonal and moral movement: the play opens in winter, in tune with the portrayed familiar disharmony, and it closes in a golden age spring.

The text is a parodic exercise of diverse literary genres: medieval romance and legends, the pastoral, the courtly love… Its multiple sources make of it a veritable patchwork: Sydney's *The Countess of Pembroke´s Arcadia* (1593); Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579); mainly Thomas Lodge ´s *Rosalynde, or, Euphues ´s Golden Legacy* (1590), in turn based on the medieval English poem *The Tale of Gamelyn*; *L´Orlando innamorato* by Matteo Maria Boiardo; the Robin Hood Legends of Sherwood Forest or Cervantes´s *La Galatea* (1585).

With respect to the themes approached in the text there is, firstly, a stark contraposition between the arbitrary abuse of power in the corrupting court and the idealism and generosity of the festive community of Arden, a restorative and transformative liminal *locus* where the rituals of passage occur and, finally, the reconciliation of the characters takes place. In fact, apart from being a literary monument, *AYLI* is no less a sort of treaty on practical anthropology. Susan

Baker (1989: 14) affirms about Shakespeare´s configuration of the opposed spaces and characters:

> The psychological matrix of the green world can be called liminal, partly because of its marginal and transitional status, but more importantly because it operates through dislocation, disorientation, and disjunction of customary structures of customary structures to create refreshed, revitalized, and regenerated perceptions of reality.

Secondly, regarding the psychological transformations associated to that threshold period, Rosalind ´s disguise is not merely a means for lying. It is usual, in initiatory ceremonies for youngsters, the cross-dressing, the in-between gender state as a necessary step for self-discovery. Thus Rosalind/Ganymede, through this gender reversal, checks her own strength and gets to know who she really is. It is not irrelevant, then, that just before Hymen enters and dispels the comic confusion created by Rosalind (who has deceived Orlando by pretending to have studied with a great magician, a detail proper of the chivalric novels), Touchstone and Jacques were discussing the "seven degrees of the lie". Magic is a transcendental question in the scene, as it is associated to the unveiling of the real identities of the ladies. It is increased by the epiphanic intervention of the god and highlighted by the use of the semantic field related to charms: apart from the reference in V. iv.30-4 above, in the *Epilogue* Rosalind/Shakespeare famously reminds that "My way is to conjure you". It is impossible not to perceive the evident kinship with the analogous part in *The Tempest* because of their lexical, structural and dramatic similitudes.

An extended opinion, as in John Russell Brown (*Shakespeare and His Comedies*. London: Methuen, 957, 1962, quoted by D. Bevington in "Critical Reception") is that Hymen expresses 'Shakespeare's ideal of love's order'. The deity exclaims:

> Hymen: Peace, ho! I bar confusion.
>
> ´Tis I must make conclusion
>
> Of these most strange events. (V.iv.111-113)

It is true that the symbolic entrance of the god marks the end of the transitional experience, with its cross-dressing, confusion of role genders and identities. The stage direction is as follows: "*Enter* HYMEN [*god of marriage*,] ROSALIND, *and* CELIA [*as themselves*] (emphasis mine). But the return to their

real gender identities, in the case of Rosalind, is only partial, as Shakespeare continues playing with the confusion of sexes. In V.iv.94-101 Hymen says:

Then is there mirth in heaven
When earthly things, made even,
Atone together.
Good duke, receive thy daughter;
Hymen from heaven brought her-
Yea, brought her hither
That thou might´st join his hand with his,
Whose heart within his bosom is. (Emphasis added)

And, above all, more traces of the problem can be found in the metatheatrical *Epilogue* in which Rosalind´s character appears duplicitous, as herself and as the boy actor impersonating her role: "If I were a woman…" (13-14).

Marilyn Williamson (1968: 255) considers the masque a coherent artistic device according to the pastoral mode: Arcadia is timeless, the golden age had not seasons. The entrance of the symbolic person of Hymen in the human setting of the forest creates distance, so we become aware that we are watching a play. For her this metatheatrical device allows Shakespeare to deal with the fundamental questions of time and permanence in a love comedy. In this sense she quotes (1968:257) an important remark on the part of Frank Kermode: "Unless we see that these mature comedies are thematically serious, we shall never get them right". This encourages to make the additional effort of interpretation that I intend to develop in this work.

David Bevington (ibid.) states that Rosalind is in playful control of the plot (at least till the god enters), as a surrogate for the author himself. Then, if the god does not put an end to the duplicity of genders and if Rosalind dominates the situation until the very end, what is the reason for the masque? And, can we properly call it a wedding masque? The answer must be affirmative, to the extent that there is instrumental music and chant, dance and an epithalamic song in which Hymen and Juno are praised in the course of the bridal procession which leads to the ceremony out of stage:

Duke Senior: Proceed, proceed! We ´ll begin these rites,

As we do trust they´ll end in true delights. (V.iv.183-4)

The highlighted line, the last one of the play before the *Epilogue*, is the cornerstone of the scene as it expresses its meaning: the magical apparition of the god and the blessing bestowed upon the royal couple guarantee their happiness, in the same form in which the masque inside the play makes sure that the audience keeps the pace with the emphasized message. Thus, it is a protective ritual for the characters and, besides, a dramatic cue for the playgoers.

Paul Innes (2007) adds an interesting reflection: Hymen is an androgynous god who, according to his/her nature, ritualistically reincorporates men and women into a physical whole. In my opinion, this could be an evident reference to Plato´s myth about the sex split that Aristophanes develops in *Symposium*: in their origin man and woman formed a spherical, perfect being, the androgynous, who indelibly united both sexes. Zeus, fearful of the power of that protean being, with Apollo´s help, cut them in two. Since then, they have longed for their reunion:

> For in my opinion humanity has entirely failed to perceive the power of Love: if men did perceive it, they would have provided him with splendid temples and altars, and would splendidly honour him with sacrifice. (…) What I mean is—and this applies to the whole world of men and women—that the way to bring happiness to our race is to give our love its true fulfilment: let every one find his own favourite, and so revert to his primal estate. (189.c and 193.c)

They are the philosophical reasons to present and honour Hymen, who ritually performs the reunion of the lovers by joining their hands, starting with the legitimate royal heir, Rosalind, and her bridegroom (the justification of the masque), and then the rest (V. iv. 100, 114-121). Notwithstanding, N. C. Leonard (2013) poses a truly pertinent question: if Shakespeare was to avoid censorship, why did he not perform the civic rites which were not banned on stage? For me, the response is that they completely lack of the emotional, ritual qualities that Elizabethans would associate to religious ceremonies, being their mythological substitutes an appealing mode of transposition.

Masque: music, dance and harmony

When analysing the musical aspects of the scene, the god enters onstage accompanied with "still music", then the wedlock hymn is sung under the

accustomed protocol of honouring the two gods that protect lovers (V.127-132), and Duke Senior encourages:

> Play music, and you brides and bridegrooms all,
> With measure heaped in joy to th´ measures fall. (V.iv.164-5)

The word “measure” has a more apparent meaning of order and harmony thematically coherent with the play´s resolution. However, as Alan Brissenden (2001) explains, the measure is a typical courtly dance to be executed by four couples. Significantly, “measure” is constantly repeated in the scene, thus becoming the criterion to complete what is implied in it: as the god enters on stage, the four couples should start dancing and this could be one of the possible explanations by which Rosalind repeats the phrase “To you I give myself, for I am yours” (V.4.102-3), first turning her head to her father, then to Orlando as she dances. And Hymen seems to be honoured firstly by Rosalind and Orlando, secondly by Celia and Oliver, thirdly by Phoebe and Silvio, and finally by Touchstone and Audrey, to whom he admonishes (V.iv.117-121). After then, the melancholic Jacques repeats the schema in the same order and he finishes saying “I am for other than for dancing measures” (V. iv.174-9). The stage direction before the Epilogue is: [*Dancing, then exeunt all but* ROSALIND]. In Brissenden´ s numerological interpretation, there are eight tones in the musical scale and the pattern of movement of the eight dancers reinforces that, in the end, all will be right.

In conclusion, far from being a *deus ex machina* (as in John Gray, 1924), an artificial device, like in C.L. Barber´s opinion (1951) or merely an ideological instrument to make sure the social order and the normative heterosexuality (F. Laroque, 1991), the masque of Hymen inserted in the play is relevant not only as being the adequate form to represent and celebrate the desired success for the royal wedlock but also as the best way to transmit this idea to the audience. Without it, the text would be incomplete. Notwithstanding, in Paul Czinner´ s cinematographic version of 1936 the masque is completely neglected. Rosalind only recites the lines in V. iv. 97-8:

> Good duke, receive thy daughter;
> Hymen from heaven brought her-

In Kenneth Branagh ´s film of 2006, the text of the masque is basically respected but not its mythological aspects. Hymen is vaguely depicted as an Anglican pastor, dressed in black with a white scarf resembling a collar though he does not perform any wedding rite. Far from his solemn presence in the play, he even jumps and dances while all happily sing the song in V.iii.14-31. This clearly denotes that, not being in force the prohibition of staging the nuptial ceremony and lacking the contemporary audiences of information about the magic and dramatic force that the masque represented for Elizabethans, this transcendental scene has now lost all its weight.

Ben Johnson's *The Masque of Hymen* (1606)

Before going ahead, it is worth analysing Jonson ´s text as a bridge between *AYLI* and *The Tempest*. It is also a perfect instance to illustrate practically the structure and evolution of the Jacobean masque.

Hymenaei was a wedding masque written for the marriage of the Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, to Lady Frances Howard which took place in the magic Twelfth Night, 5 January 1606. The astounding scenography was designed by Inigo Jones and the famous composer Alfonso Ferrabosco contributed with his music to the magnificent spectacle and its elaborate dances.

The masque starts with the bridal procession in which the newlyweds, themselves seated within the audience, were represented by actors, the bride dressed in white and her waist fastened with the Herculean knot, meaning a protective charm for her virginity. We will have the opportunity to deepen in this key aspect in the masque of Ceres and Juno in *The Tempest*.

Hymen enters dressed in a saffroned robe, preceded and followed by pages and, mimicking a Roman procession, it also includes the auspices (as we constantly see, good luck and predictions were always at the centre of these wedding ceremonies), a chorus and the musicians. They chant allusive songs and then Hymen presents himself in a formal allocution.

The first masque is danced by eight men impersonating the four Humours and the four Affections. This scene is important as it represented the first step

into the formal definition of the anti-masque, since the untempered humours and the wild affections try to disturb the ceremony. This obliges Reason, an allegoric character, to intervene. She appears sitting on the top of a globe, like the brain in the human body, her garments in blue adorned with arithmetical figures. She reprimands the rebellious and disordered emotions, after which they retire defeated. When she asks Hymen to bless the couple, the upper part of the scenario opens and Juno appears in her throne supported by two peacocks, with Jupiter and the rainbow Iris, descending in the middle of two great clouds. This kind of luxurious machinery was only at the court´s disposal and, among the public theatres, in *The Rose* since 1592. This is why Hymen modestly enters on stage on foot in *AYLI*. On the contrary, by the time *The Tempest* was performed, the situation should be different, given that the indication (in IV. 1) for the entrance of Jupiter ´s wife is: "JUNO *descends*". (My emphasis)

While the machinery crosses the scenic space, the masquers chant and dance accompanied by a consort of twelve lutes directed by Order, another allegorical character servant of Reason. She lauds Juno and Hymen while the ladies pair with the men in eight couples, engaging themselves in a measure whose choreography forms the letters of the bridegroom´s name. Then other courtiers dance measures, galliards and courants. Finally, as they are leaving, the whole scene is covered with clouds of the night (a stark reminder that the time for the consummation of the marriage has come). There is one more song and a dance, and then Reason pronounces her last discourse:

> Come, Hymen, make an inner ring,
> And let the sacrificers sing;
> Cheer up the faint and trembling bride,
> That quakes to touch her bridegroom's side:
> Tell her what Juno is to Jove,
> The same shall she be to her love;
> His wife: which we do rather measure
> A name of dignity than pleasure.

The masquers, in couples and accompanied with soft music, pay honour to the state and go down led by Hymen, meanwhile the going-out-song is performed. Jonson took this piece as the first stanza for an epithalamion. In the

fourth one he mentions the bride´s change of name and, in the fifth, the apotropaic lifting rite:

> And lift your golden feet
> Above the threshold high,
> With prosperous augury.

2. ***The Tempest***

> What the wedding masque presents is the meeting of earth and heaven under the rainbow, the symbol of Noah´s new-washed world, after the tempest and flood had receded, and when it was promised that springtime and harvest would not cease… out of the cycle of time in ordinary natural we have reached a paradise (Ferdinand's word) where there is a *ver perpetuum*, where spring and autumn exist together. (Northrop Frye, quoted by Ernest B. Gilman, 1980:222)

The play, classified as a romance, was probably written in 1610-1611. It was performed on 1 November 1611 (in the Hallowmas Night), at Whitehall, to please James I and it was also part of the magnificent feasts for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick the Elector Palatine in 1612-1613. There are no clear sources for it but only multiple threads concurrent in the play, among them William Strachey ´s *Reportory* of the shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* in 1609 on Bermuda when sailing to Virginia; Montaigne's essay “Of the Caniballes”, translated by John Florio in 1603; Seneca ´s *Medea*; the *Commedia dell´ arte* and its grotesque characters similar to Stephano and Trinculo; the royal progress at Elvetham (1592) which included the pageant of Ceres crowned of wheat ears who welcomed Queen Elizabeth with a gift…

Different interpretations

This complex play has been scrutinized in search of sometimes contradictory interpretations: a mirror of the dynastic alliances sought by James I; the king´s divine power on earth, as in John Mucciolo (2013); the English colonial ventures in the “brave new world” (V. i.182) like in John Gillies ´s “Shakespeare´s Virginian Masque” (1986) or the Mediterranean affairs of that period in Barbara Fuchs´s “Conquering Islands: Contextualizing *The Tempest*” (1997), just to mention a few examples. Here we are going to comment the masque of Juno and Ceres in IV. i, as well as the tableau in V.i.172-4 and the concordant lines, following

the criteria already exposed, an anthropological vision alongside the analysis of the playwright´s dramaturgical manipulation of the cultural beliefs of his era.

Act IV starts with Prospero, the deposed Duke of Milan, revealing the young prince Ferdinand, son of his enemy the King of Naples, that the trials he had imposed on him were destined to check his true love for Miranda, the magician´s daughter. Prospero grants Ferdinand her hand on the condition of not breaking

> (…) her virgin-knot before
> All sanctimonious ceremonies may
> With full and holy rite be ministered. (IV.i.15-7)

The reason of that emphasis is, as I have argued before, that the betrothal might be interpreted as a valid nuptial contract that *per se* would legitimate the marital consummation without needing a religious ceremony. In III.ii.83-90 we read:

> Miranda: I am your wife if you´ll marry me;
> (…)
> Ferdinand: My mistress, dearest,
> And I thus humble ever.
> Miranda: My husband, then?
> Ferdinand: Ay, with a heart as willing
> As bondage e´er of freedom. Here´s my hand.
> Miranda: [*Taking his hand*]
> And mine, with my heart in´t. And now farewell.

But by doing like this, the couple would not receive the holy blessing and all the protective magical gestures associated to it:

> No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
> To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
> Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew
> The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
> That you shall hate it both. Therefore, take heed,
> As Hymen ´s lamps shall light you. (IV. i.18-23)

In this excerpt the superstitious mind of the Elizabethans may be easily detected. It makes reference to some rites already mentioned: the sprinkling of the bridal bed with holy water by the priest, the chamber adorned with protective,

symbolic flowers and plants (the reverse of those hateful “weeds”) and the taper lit with the fire of Hymen ´s lamp, that is, the torches carried in the bridal procession. According to a widespread custom, with this fire they only lit one taper to illuminate the bridal chamber and it should burn till the next day. This symbolic unique candle can be seen in the wedding context of Van Eyck ´s *The Arnolfini Portrait*. Significantly, as David Wiles (1993) comments, the lustful Othello disrupts this wedding rite by turning off the conjugal taper (“Put out the light, V. ii.7), which would have been understood by the theatregoers a sign of bad augury, an announcement of the impending marital disaster.

Regarding the “virgin-knot” mentioned in IV. i. 15, it is equally a kind of magic, the indestructible Herculean knot which came from the girdle of Diana, virgin goddess who gave this amulet to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, and it was stolen by the Greek hero as a part of his Twelve Labours. As any other symbol, its nature is ambiguous: at the same time it was a sign associated to fertility but they also charged it with making the labour more difficult.

Ferdinand commits himself to respect Miranda´s chastity until

> The edge of that day ´s celebration,
> When I shall think of Phoebus´ steeds are foundered
> Or night kept chained below. (IV.i.29-31)

They are powerful metaphors for the slowly passage of hours until the end of the wedding day, a troubling question for Elizabethans as we have already seen in Spenser´s *Epithalamion* and it is the dramatic excuse for *AMND*: the wedding night never seems to arrive, as if it were imprisoned and, conversely, the day prolongs itself as if the sun never set.

The masque proper

After this covenant Prospero, in a film director´s style, commands Ariel to display the masque:

> Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple
> Some vanity of mine art. (…) (IV.i.41-2)

The masque commences with soft music while Iris, messenger of the gods, enters and invokes the presence of Ceres with a superabundant lexicon of plants and flowers, as it is proper of the god of fertility:

Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats and peas. (IV.i.60-61)

Iris informs Ceres that she has been summoned due to

A contract of true love to celebrate,
And some donation freely to estate
On the blessed lovers. (IV.i.84-6)

As a metaphor for the dangerous sexual desire, Ceres worries about Venus and Cupid tricks. Fortunately the lustful Venus is occupied in her adulterous love with Mars and the enraged Cupid has broken his perilous darts:

Cutting the clouds towards Paphos, and her son
Dove-drawn with her. Here thought they to have done
Some wanton charm upon this man and maid, (IV.i.93-5)

Nevertheless Ceres is submitted to a more powerful goddess, her sister Juno. The stage indication before the previous dialogue between lines 74 and 101 is: [JUNO´ *s chariot appears above the stage*.] as Ceres enters on stage. It could be deduced that, in this short time, the scenic machinery was able to descend the chariot. Juno invites Ceres:

(…) Go with me
To bless this twain, that they may prosperous be,
And honored in their issue.

Juno sings:

Honor, riches, marriage-blessing,
Long continuance, and increasing,
Hourly joys be still upon you,
Juno sings her blessing on you.

Ceres also sings her song of eternal spring and infinite abundance:

Earth´s increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty.
Vines with clustering bunches growing,
Plants with goodly burden bowing
Spring come to you at the farthest,
In the very end of harvest.
Scarcity and want shall shun you,

Ceres´ blessing so is on you. (IV.i.103-117)

It is supposed that in this precise moment of the court performance the boy actors impersonating the goddesses would deliver some gift to the betrothed royal couple, seated on the stage in parallel to the scene of Ferdinand and Miranda contemplating the magical masque. For me, that compliment takes place before the interruption caused by the stunned Ferdinand, who wants to live for ever within that heavenly vision. Then Prospero requires silence and orders that the masque goes on:

Iris: (…)
Come, temperate nymphs, and help to celebrate
A contract of true love. Be not too late.
You sunburned sicklemen, of August weary,
Come hither from the furrow and be merry,
Make holiday! Your rye-straw hats put on,
And this fresh nymphs encounter everyone
In country footing. (IV.i.132-8)

The reapers join the nymphs in a rustic dance which finishes abruptly when Prospero recalls Caliban ´s conspiracy, so those spirits, after a strange, hollow and confused noise, “heavily vanish”.

The anti-masque

The line “Our revels now are ended” might be or not a reflection about Shakespeare ´s farewell to his art but, undoubtedly, it is a clear reference to the dances of the masque. The fainted pageant opens the path to some lines (IV. i. 149-158) of a tremendous philosophical weight about the dreamy nature of our lives but they are completely out of the scope of this work. There are also political questions at stake: the plot has been provoked by Prospero himself via Ariel and he has been in control of the situation in every moment: although Ariel never gets to inform his master about the plot, Prospero already knows about it. This is an emblematic example of the subversion-and-containment movement analysed by Stephen Greenblatt. Nonetheless the intriguing question to be solved now is to identify and locate the anti-masque:

- The first possibility is the storm scene in I. I, when Prospero attracts his enemies to an island in the middle of nowhere, both as a penalty for their treason

and with the aim of resolving the disharmony through a dynastic union. As it is proper of the anti-masque, there is a tempestuous noise in tune with the strong emotions of loss and defeat aroused. But despite the magical nature of this scene, it is not immediately followed by the epiphanic intervention of the mythological or allegorical characters to impose order. This reason should lead to reject this scene as embodying the anti-masque.

-A second candidate can be found in III.3 when Ariel reprimands King Alonso, his brother Sebastian and Antonio, Prospero ´s brother, usurper of the throne and, in the form of a harpy, he deprives them of their food in a vision that terrifies the men. Shakespeare recalls here the penalty that the Harpies (who were sisters to Iris) imposed to King Phineus of Thrace in response to his cruelty. If this were the case, the anti-masque would start with the soft music indicated by the stage direction and the masque proper would come after it.

-The third possible situation is described in IV. i.176- 184, when Ariel describes how he bullied the wicked Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano:

> (…)Then I beat my tabor,
> At which like unbacked colts they pricked their ears,
> Advanced their eyelids, lifted up their noses
> As they smelt music. So I charmed their ears
> That calf-like they my lowing followed through
> Toothed briars, sharp furzes, pricking gorse, and thorns,
> Which entered their frail shins. At last I left them
> I´th´filthy-mantled feel pool beyond your cell,
> There dancing up to th´ chins, that the foul lake
> O´erstunk their feet. (IV. i. 175-183)

That is the prototypical depiction of the usual pandemonium in the anti-masque but, in this case, as the scene comes after the celebration of the conjugal harmony and fertility, the canonical distribution of the masque ´s structure (the evil punished and submitted by the forces of order) would be inverted. In reality, though, Ariel recalls what has already happened before, in III. ii. In this sense it must be remembered that, after line 123, Ariel plays the tune preceding that episode. In conclusion, from my point of view the anti-masque in *The Tempest* has two consecutive sequences: one in III. ii but retold in IV. i., starting the punishment

with the low characters, and the following in III. iii, involving the treacherous Lords. Whatever the case, as Stephen Orgel (1975) reminds, *The Tempest* is not a masque but the dramatic representation of a masque. It can be asserted, then, that this allowed Shakespeare to share with popular audiences the glamour of the courtly entertainments as well as it let him play with the different dramatic possibilities within the limits imposed by the scarcity of staging means at hand. For that reason, in this play it cannot be found an exact parallel to the masque but a plausible recreation of this marvellous, integral art.

The tableau in *The Tempest*

The tableau in V. i.172-174 is an interesting example of the way in which Shakespeare recycled dramatic elements of medieval origin, which in this case he used as an additional vehicle to show Prospero ´s most powerful art, forgiveness. As a final surprise for his enemies, the legitimate Duke of Milan, after ironizing about the fact that he has also lost his daughter in the last tempest, reveals that Alonso´s heir is alive:

> My dukedom since you have given me again,
> I will requite you with as good a thing,
> At least bring a wonder to content ye
> As much as me my dukedom. (V.i.168-171)

The stage direction is: *Here Prospero discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess.*

> Miranda: Sweet Lord, you play me false.
> Ferdinand: No, my dearest love,
> I would not for the world.
> Miranda: Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,
> And I would call it fair play. (…)
> Sebastian: A most high miracle!

The note to line 171 in the Arden edition (2017:296) points out that this is the only spectacle that Prospero produces without the aid of his magic. For me the scene is an allegory of the perfect marital love, an anticipated vision of the divine blessing come true. Chess, an aristocratic game, stands for the managing of the day-to-day royal couple disputes with patience and comprehension (in the courtly

performances, serving as a mirror for princes and generating the action of the sympathetic magic). But apart from that meaning, it is interesting to pay attention to the theatrical device itself. According to Alice Venezki (1951) the tableaux, reminiscent from medieval entertainments, are always visually appealing. They permitted both to stress a particular scene and to represent an important political or moral issue. Some tableaux were neither processions nor scenes but they were presented through a sudden, striking revelation. Such a dramatic effect was achieved by dropping the arch of the stage upon which the tableau was mounted and unveiling (or "discovering") the show when the king arrived, as in the happy ending of *The Tempest* occurs. However, the device could be also used to produce horror, like in Webster´s *The Duchess of Malfi*. Prospero would probably presented Ferdinand and Miranda in the inner stage, being that vision an adequate allegory of the final reconciliation and redemption of the characters after the trials experienced in the liminal island. Significantly the scene appears in "The Book of Games" in the baroque Prospero's Books by Peter Greenaway (1991). In the fascinating version of Taymor (2011), a black volcanic island is the scenery for the events. Amazing special effects present Ariel as a protean, terrifying monster but the masque of Ceres and Juno (in "The Book of Mythologies" in the previous film) is replaced by a symbolic cosmology composed of concentric interlocking circles and numbers. In the Royal Shakespeare Company production (2017) the anti-masques are produced through phantasmagoric lighting technology.

3. ***Love´s Labour´s Lost***

> Moth [*to Costard*]: They have been at a great feast
> of languages and stolen the scraps. (V. i. 35-6)

> Berowne: Young blood do not obey an old decree. (IV. iii. 213)
> For revels, dances, masques and merry hours
> Forerun fair Love, strewing her way with flowers. (IV. iii.353-4)

It is not known the exact date of its composition although the most accepted possibility is 1594-95, thus being a relatively early comedy in Shakespeare's literary career. It is a play of multi-layered meanings: a reflection about the use and abuse of language (wit, conceit, pedantry…), fame and death, shame and grace

(or *grazia*, an essential requisite for a courtier according to Baldassare di Castiglione). As Montrose states (1977) the low characters, as Armado, echo the pretentious aspirations of the Lords:

> Comfort me, boy. What great men have been in love? (I. ii.63)

The play contains many allusions to contemporary events and historical personalities whose referents are now somewhat obscure. Austin Gray (1924) lists among them: the King Henry of Navarre and France, the great continental champion in favour of Protestantism; the Marshall de Biron; Henry de Dunois, Duc de Longeville; the Duc de Mercade; the Duc de Mayenne... The aforementioned author considers that the first performance of the play, written for a courtly occasion, took place in 1591 in the park at Southampton ´s estate. This could explain that the action develops mainly outside and that the long second scene in Act V (no less than 919 lines) lacks separations between the successive episodes. From another point of view, Sophie Chiari (2015) detects innumerable legal details that would point to a performance in the Inns of Court. Whatever the case, like in *The Tempest*, the low characters correspond to the prototypes of the *Commedia dell' arte*: the Braggart, the Pedant, the Curate, the Clown... All the same, it has a masque-like quality, with is rich costumes, music and courtly dances.

The dramatic advancement of the play is short-circuited by continuous interruptions: no soon the King and his Lords commit themselves in an oath of celibacy and retirement to study during three years, in order to acquire wisdom and immortality, that their promise is broken by the visit of a French female embassy; the masque of the Muscovites is sabotaged when the disdainful ladies refuse to dance and chat; the pageant of the Nine Worthies is boycotted firstly by the abusive Lords, then for the news of life (Jacquenetta ´s pregnancy) and death (the Princess´s father loss); or the expected weddings are delayed due to the Princess´ mourning and the conditions imposed by the Ladies upon their inconstant, perjured wooers. The sudden departure of the Ladies also interrupts the French political and economic demands.

Following the custom of the royal entertainments offered to the Queen in her summer tours, Navarre asks the Spanish Armado to congratulate the Princess "with some delightful ostentation, or show, or pageant, or antic, or firework"

(V.i.102-5), the usual series of spectacles for those festivities. The pedantic schoolmaster Holofernes elaborates a piece, the pageant of the Nine Worthies, rooted in the medieval tradition. It dated back to 14th century and it could show the Vices, Hercules´s Labours or the Triumph of Fame, one of the key concepts in the play. The Nine Worthies Show, which had been the favourite entertainment for the city entries, as Venezki (1951) explains, was already overused in Shakespeare´s times. For this reason he mocks it by exposing the inflated discourse and archaic style of that pageant.

The canonical Nine Worthies were three biblical Patriarchs (Joshua, David and Judas Maccabeus), three Greek-Roman heroes (Hector of Troy, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar), and three medieval knights (Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon) although they might change according to the circumstances. As a novelty, Holofernes includes Pompey (a pun on the rampant pomposity of the characters) and Hercules (maybe an allusion to the play's title). As the commoners are less in number, they convene to play more than a part each one and the Pedant writes a part for Hercules child to be played by Moth. Dull would accompany the show playing the tabor so as to the Worthies could dance the hay, as it was customary.

The Princess and her ladies-in-waiting receive costly gifts and verses from the Lords as a part of the wooing game. Making fun of the Petrarchan conventions, in which the lady was the passive idealized object of the male desire, Shakespeare reverses the topic by depicting the Ladies as aggressive Amazons able to submit the men. They are disposed to victoriously engage themselves with the King and his companions in “a civil war of wits” (II.i.225). Using a semantic field full of references to sharp weapons, Boyet says:

> The tongues of mocking wenches are as keen
> As in the razor' s edge invisible,
> Cutting a smaller hair than maybe seen;
> Above the sense of sense, so sensible
> Seemeth their conference. Their conceits have wings
> Fleeter than arrows, bullets, wind, thought, swifter things.

The Muscovite Masque

The “foreign embassy” arrives masked and disguised, preceded by the page Moth as a herald and accompanied with a group of Blackamoors performing music. Moth delivers the praise to the Ladies so disastrously that it foreshadows the failure of the flirting game. The Lords pretend to be strangers in order to save appearances, that is, apparently respect their vows of celibacy. The fake Russians beg the dames to dance a measure, whose name was indebted to its slow pace, but they refuse the invitation:

> Rosaline (as the Princess): Since you are strangers and come here by chance
>
> We´ll not be nice. Take hands. We will not dance.
>
> King: Why take hands them?
>
> Rosaline: Only to part friends.
>
> Curtsy, sweet hearts, and so the measure ends [*Music stops*]. (V.ii.217-21)

Thus, the intended masque is abruptly interrupted. The defeated soldiers of Saint Cupid abandon the battle camp:

> King: Farewell, mad wenches. You have simple wits.
>
> Princess: Twenty adieus, my frozen Muscovites. (V. ii.264-5)

There are many references to be explained in this scene in relation to the subject matter under research. About the Russian attire, it has been established some kind of connection with the incidents in the celebration of the Twelfth Night, 1595, in Gray ´s Inn, in whose extravagant revels appeared an embassy from the Emperor of Russia and Muscovy. It is also known, through Hall ´s *Chronicle*, reprinted in 1587, that in a feast celebrated at Westminster in 1510, in times of Henry VIII, two Lords appeared dressed as Russians with fur hats, a hatchet in their hands and boots with pikes turned up, accompanied by “Moreskos” with blacked faces. This could be Shakespeare's source of inspiration for the nobles´ disguise and of their servants as Blackamoors, according to Fred Sorensen (1935).

Ladan Niayesh (2015) highlights the commercial connections between England and Russia. If the East Indian Company was founded in 1600, the Muscovy Company was the oldest one, having been chartered in 1555. The links between both countries where so tight that Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584) dared to ask Elizabeth in marriage. But more importantly, the question to solve is the

dramatic reason for the Lords in that habit, which is to be found in the origins of the masque. Barber (1990) affirms that conventionally the masquers were considered strangers asking for hospitality. This crucial anthropological concept has been neglected by scholarship. For Elizabethans it would have been unthinkable that a princess like their Queen herself did not receive a warm reception on her annual progresses. In the play the King of Navarre, under the pretext of their oath destined to gain fame, infringes a more basic, sacred obligation: to receive and welcome the foreign dames arrived in a diplomatic mission. Instead, he only lets the French ladies install themselves and by their own means in the open-air. The Princess ironizes about such a cold reception:

> King: Fair Princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.
>
> Princess: "Fair" I give you back again, and "welcome" I have not yet. The roof of this court is too high to be yours, and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine.
>
> King: You shall be welcome, madam, to my court.
>
> Princess: I will be welcome then. Conduct me thither.
>
> King: Hear me, dear lady: I have sworn an oath. (II.i.90-7)

So when the men arrive pretending to be foreigners, the ladies retaliate. The scornful refusal of the latter is embodied in the breakdown of the masque conventions: the Lords invite them to dance, for which they would have had to join hands (V. ii.219-20). As the men depart, the Ladies, suspecting their quick return, decide to mask themselves and exchange their suitors´ tokens of love to ridicule them "in mockery merriment" (V. ii.139). In order to hide their disgraceful performance, Navarre and his men make a sudden reappearance pretexting ignorance of what has just happened. But they soon discover that the Ladies are totally aware of it, so they cannot save their face:

> King: O, you have lived in desolation here,
>
> Unseen, unvisited, much to our shame.
>
> Princess: Not so, my lord. It is not so, I swear.
>
> We have had pastimes here and pleasant game:
>
> A mess of Russians left us but of late. (V.ii.357-361)

The King fears even more shameful consequences of the show in course, so he tries to abort it but Berowne thinks that they can make profit of the

commoners´ predictably clumsy execution. The Clowns end up being a scapegoat for the Lords´ mistakes:

> We are shamed-proof, my lord; and ´tis same policy
> To have one show worse than the King and his company. (V.ii.510-1)

The Pageant of the Nine Worthies

It is important to note that this show was not a mere entertainment to please the Ladies but a part of the Lords ´ display of gifts and honours to court them. The proof is that, during the mocked wooing, the King swore Rosaline-as-the-Princess that "he would wed me, or else die my lover" (V.2.445-6).

In the end Berowne and Boyet, former enemies, make friends in criticising Costard´ s errors. When Nathaniel acts as Alexander the Great, both repeat their bullying. Holofernes as Judas Maccabaeus presents Moth as a baby Hercules strangling a snake. Berowne joins the other gentlemen in their cruel mockery. The schoolmaster complains: "This is not generous, not gentle, not humble" (V.ii.623). And when Armado enters as Hector, even the King mistreats him. His acting is definitively interrupted when the "cuckoo" Costard accuses him of Jacquenetta ´s pregnancy. The pageant is abruptly frustrated in the same vein than the masque of the Muscovites. The Lords are incapable of seeing their pompous vacuity and pretences mirrored in the show. For this reason, having not yet learned the things that really matter, the respect towards the dignity in every human being whatever his/her social class, and the need of loving a real person better than loving the Platonic Idea of Love (Auden, 2003), they have to pay a year and a day of penalty.

On the other hand, the analogy between this show and the 'Rude Mechanicals' ´s one lies in that both are performed by amateur actors to please their better. Probably Shakespeare documented the bustling ambience in public theatres and street entertainments, with their vociferous audience interrupting the actors. On the contrary, the French Princess shows the same courtesy that Queen Elizabeth exhibited when she received the compliment from her subjects:

> That sport best pleases that doth least know how-
> Where zeal strives to content and the contents
> Dies in the zeal of that which it presents; (V.ii.514-6)

The Princess also encourages the improvised actors: “Great thanks, great Pompey” (line 553) or “Speak, brave Hector; we are much delighted” (line 661).

The Princess ´mourning for her father´s demise opens a twelve month of liminality but, under the double condition of time and repentance, she accepts to marry the King of Navarre and so do her ladies to their wooers.

Berowne resorts to the customary, final self- referentiality when he affirms:

> Our wooing doth not end like an old play:
> Jack hath not Jill. These ladies´ courtesy
> Might well have made our sport a comedy.
> King: Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day,
> And then ´twill end.
> Berowne: That's too long for a play. (V.ii.862-7)

<u>The song of the Owl and the Cuckoo</u>

Before the royal entourage´s departs and as a conclusion for the interrupted pageant, Armado announces a third entertainment. The stage direction says: [*Enter all*]. The characters are presented: Hiems, winter, maintained by the Owl, and Ver, the spring, by the Cuckoo, which comes first. The beauty of nature is depicted like an idyllic landscape full of colour:

> When daisies pied and violets blue
> And lady-smocks all silver-white
> And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
> Do paint the meadows with delight. (882-885)

In the middle of such a beautiful scenario, though, fear grows:

> The cuckoo then on every tree
> Mocks married men. (886-7)

Then it is the Owl ´s turn to sing: in winter, when the weather is icy

> Then nightly sings the staring owl:
> “Tu- whit, Tu-whoo!”
> A merry note,
> While greasy Joan doth keel the pot. (905-8)

After that, Armado pronounces his farewell to the audience: “You that way, we this way”. This statement has been interpreted as referred to the masquers going out of the stage by one side, and the mummers by the other.

Firstly, about its historical origins, the debate or contest is a literary genre that comes from the ninth century, when Alcuin of York wrote *Conflictus Veris et Hiems*. It could confront plants, religions, historical personalities, seasons, allegorical characters in a combat in which not always the winner was easily identifiable. In Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls,* the Owl and the Nightingale discussed which one was more useful for human beings. In the contest every bird charges the contrary with accusations. John Clanvowe, contemporary to Shakespeare, wrote the poem *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and Shakespeare mixed both possibilities. Nevertheless, the problem is the gendering of that birds: whereas the nightingale was considered female, the cuckoo and the owl were both male birds.

Secondly, regarding the diverse interpretations of the Song, although it is a very short piece (only 36 verses), it has provoked an impressive amount of studies since there are many aspects to recall in it. Anne Barton (quoted by Schütz, 2015) considers that this final song recapitulates the entire development of the play, whose symmetries reflects in its treatment of the themes of youth and age, life and death, fact and fancy. For Catherine McLay (1967) it belonged to the 1597 additions. The song-contest reproduces the contraposition between art and nature. She convincingly affirms that spring is described in artificial terms: “pied meadows” and “painted with flowers” that hide the menacing cuckoo. On the contrary, there is no trace of double-entendre in winter. The movement from that seasons parallel the one from youth to adulthood (for me a clear reference, again, to the rites of passage), infidelity to fidelity and wisdom. This is why the chant of the Owl is a merry note against the unpleasing one of the cuckoo.

In M. Green (1971) the wonderful artifice of wit in the characters ´ wooing is to be tried by the rigours of winter, that is, the hardships of the real world. Laroque (1991) also states that the song is an echo in miniature of the themes of the play but, for him, that reflects the struggle between Carnival love-making and Lenten meditation and study. For Auden (2000) the songs represent the contraposition between true and false love, a problem also present in *AMND*.

Finally, Barber (1990) reminds that pageants and songs were a finale that could be inserted instead of a wedding dance or a masque, not as an afterthought or epilogue but as a last and full expression of the feeling for community and season. After the festival of conceits and polysyllables in the play, he says that we are told a series of simple facts in simple words.

From my viewpoint, the contest, built up on paradoxes, must be interpreted in line with the rest of the play: the King and the Princess have already established an oral wedding contract under a *verba de futuro* and the passing of the time for mourning. This period of trial/threshold/transition will lead to the marriage announced by the masque, the pageant and the contest in which, as Frye (2020) asserts, the Owl has the last word. Also in *As You Like It* Rosalind affirms: “Men are April when they woo, December when they wed; maids are May when they are maids, but the sky change when they are wives”. (IV.i.121-4). Being in possession of all those calendrical references, the theatregoers would have been easily anticipated a happy resolution of the plot in *LLL* whereas, for us, lacking all those cultural references, that seems only a remote possibility.

4. A Midsummer Night´s Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream was most likely composed between 1595 and 1596. It is a highly controversial matter if it was written for a wedding occasion and which one could have been. However, those issues are not of interest for this research and the method applied in it only sheds light in favour of the marriage theory. In this sense the grammatical and thematic aspects related to nuptials are overwhelming, starting from the narrative framework of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta´s wedding that opens and closes the play.

> I wolde have toold yow fully the manere
>
> How wonnen was the regne of Femenye
>
> By Theseus, and by his chivalry, (…)
>
> **And of the feste that was at hir weddynge**, (emphasis added)
>
> (G. Chaucer, *The Knight ´s Tale*, 18-25)

Shakespeare starts where Chaucer stopped and this mythical nuptial ceremony would have been a suitable pretext to mirror the real newlyweds of

mighty bloodlines. This suggests two fundamental problems related to the subject matter. To begin with, the different social strata of the characters in *AMND* and their divergent ways of choosing a partner. After Theseus´s overruling, free choice is possible in the play for the bourgeois but the nobility still adheres to the old norms: Queen Hippolyta (the real bride´s dramatic reflect) is won by military conquest.

> Theseus: 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 revelling. (I. i.16-19)

Hippolyta herself is the spokesperson for the transcendence of love born from a respectful attitude in conjugal life:

> Hippolyta: And grows to something of great constancy,
> But, howsoever, strange and admirable.
> Theseus: Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth. (V. i.26-8)

Regarding the lower classes, Theseus alludes to the popular customs of St Valentine's Day and May Day already mentioned, in which young men and maids met in the greenwood:

> Theseus: No doubt they rose up early to observe
> The rite of May (…) (IV. i. 129-30);
>
> Theseus: Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine is past.
> Begin these wood-birds but to couple now? (IV. i.136-7)

Secondly, the problem of marital disharmony in the world of fairies leads to disastrous consequences and this might be a counsel for the newlyweds. In this sense *AMND,* with its happy resolution of the dramatic conflicts, would have been regarded as a proper play to be staged in a wedding party. The appropriateness, as in the wedding masques, was a crucial requirement. Theseus asks his Master of Revels Philostrate (in a funny wink, his name is also taken from Chaucer ´s tale) about the shows to be played:

> Theseus: Come now: what masques, what dances shall we have,
> To wear away this long age of three hours
> Between our after-supper and bed-time?

Where is our usual manager of mirth?

What revels are in hand? Is there no play

To ease the anguish of a torturing hour? (V.i.32-7)

The Duke studies the different possibilities, choosing a play of marital resonances:

Theseus: "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death

Of Learning, late deceased in beggary."

That is some satire, keen and critical,

Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony.

[*reads*] "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth."

Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?

That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.

How shall we find the concord of this discord? (V. i.52-60)

The latter is the paradox in which both the play and marriage are sustained: the harmony of the opposites and, again, it would be a piece of advice for the real couple watching *AMND*:

Oberon: Now thou and I are new in amity,

And will tomorrow midnight solemnly

Dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly,

And bless it to all fair prosperity.

There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be

Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity. (IV. i. 84-9)

There are also allusions to the poetry ´s ability to arouse love, and to the wooing:

Egeus: This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child. —

Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes

And interchanged love tokens with my child. (…)

With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,

Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats—messengers (I.1.27-9, 32-4)

The mythical time

In *AMND* Shakespeare intriguingly plays with different, sometimes contradictory periods and conceptions of time. It possibly reveals his intention to

locate the setting in a mythical past, even within a sacred time, as it is proper of initiating ceremonies which determine the entrance in a liminal space-time context. He thus mentions:

-A fortnight of revels:

> A fortnight hold we this solemnity,
> In nightly revels and new jollity. (V. i. 355-6)

-Four days between (supposedly) the marriage contract and the wedding night. The reason invoked is that they are waiting for the new moon due to its propitiatory meaning of fertility:

> 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 step-dame or a dowager
> Long withering out a young man's revenue.
> 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. (I. i.1-10)

But then another riddle is proposed: the royal couple awaits the new moon but the 'Rude Mechanicals' stage a play in which the full moon shines. They even check the calendar to verify it:

> Quince: Yes, it doth shine that night. (III. i. 46)

On the other hand, despite the repeated references to four days, the moon phases last fourteen days, in that way connecting with the mentioned fortnight. It is also worth considering the characters ´ different psychological perception of time. Related to their respective marital rights and duties, the fiery Theseus is willing to consummate their carnal union as soon as possible while Hippolyta feels that those four days pass too quickly, a characteristic topic in epithalamic poetry.

-For the young couples, only one night goes by after which the triple wedding ceremony is held (IV. ii.15-6).

- The real time for *AMND* as a wedding play actually performed: three hours are mentioned in V. i.33. Within the play, the *Tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe* covers, in theory, the same lapse but, according to Philostrate, in fact it should be a shorter show:

> Philostrate: A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
> Which is as brief as I have known a play.
> But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
> Which makes it tedious; for in all the play
> There is not one word apt, one player fitted. (V. i. 61-5)

-In the fairy world time is eternal: disease, aging and death do not exist.

-Finally, the play ´s title refers to St John´s Night but an explicit reference is made to May Day in IV. i. 129- 130. As David Wiles (1993) insists, it seems clear that Shakespeare tried to merge those popular feasts. For me, in doing so he created a rich imaginary world of dreamy possibilities, including the astounding avant-garde intuition that the oneiric time operates under different speeds.

The 'Rude Mechanicals' and the vanishing world of the amateur actors

> A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,
> That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,
> Were met together to rehearse a play
> Intended for Theseus´ nuptial-day (II.ii.9-12)

Shakespeare wonderfully takes advantage of the theatrical customs associated to wedding celebrations, echoed in the play-within-the-play, to meditate on and depict the transitional situation of his art, also ironizing about the social and professional origins of his fellow mates in the Chamberlain ´s Men. Theseus inquires to his Master of Revels who are going to entertain them and his response is similar to Puck´s one:

> Philostrate: Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
> Which never labor'd in their minds till now,
> And now have toiled their unbreathed memories
> With this same play against your nuptial. (V.i.72-5)

This is a reference to the medieval world of the mystery plays organized by the guilds before they were forbidden by the Reformation laws; and to the people acting in Queen Elizabeth ´s summer progresses. For Louis Montrose

(1996) there is an exact temporal coincidence between the institutionalization of the public theatres and the death certification of amateurism on stage. *AMND* is packed with allusions to aspects related to amateur acting:

- The plays were short, badly written and worse performed (V. i.61-65; and V. i. 124-5:

> Theseus: His speech, was like a tangled chain, nothing
> Impaired, but all disordered.

-They were plagued with a tediously literal denotation which lets no room for dramatic imagination:

> Bottom: (…) Write me
> a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no
> harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed,
> and, for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus,
> am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them
> out of fear. (III.i.14-19)

In the same vein Shakespeare mocks the unnecessary indications in pageants in which even the most obvious things were underlined by the presenter:

> Quince: This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,
> Presenteth Moonshine; (V. i. 134-5)

-The modest possibilities for staging that these non-professional actors had to overcome:

> Bottom: the duke hath dined. Get your apparel together, good strings to
> your beards, new ribbons to your pumps. Meet presently at
> the palace; every man look o'er his part; for the short and the
> long is, our play is preferred. (…) And, most dear
> actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet
> breath; and I do not doubt but to hear them say, it is a sweet
> comedy. No more words. Away! Go, away! (IV. ii.30-8)

- There is an ironic contrast between Theseus´s belief that the Athenian subjects want to compliment to their sovereigns on their wedding day, and the economic expectations of the workers-actors who aspire to gain a lifetime allowance thanks to their (inexistent) acting abilities:

> Flute: sixpence a day in Pyramus, or nothing. (IV. ii. 22)

After such a hilarious tragedy, Theseus rejects the Epilogue and, instead, he accepts as a coda the Bergomask, a popular dance of Italian provenance that mimicked the peasant´s movements:

> Theseus: No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs no
> excuse. (…) But come, your Bergomask: let your epilogue
> alone. (V. i. 338-348)

In conclusion, Shakespeare lived in a liminal era for the dramatic art: he envisioned the world of his childhood and youth with an affectionate remembrance but also with the certainty that the future of its art was a complete professionalization in which his company was fully committed.

The Ovidian tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe

> Hippolyta: This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard. (V. i.205)

Ovid narrated the metamorphosis of the tragic young lovers whose union was forbidden by their families, and the misunderstanding leading to their double suicide. This seems to be the first version of the sad story of Romeo and Juliet. In *AMND* it operates, in the first place, as a mirror of the unlawful love between Hermia and Lysander, as Egeus, Hermia ´s father, has chosen another suitor for her. He demands the application of Athenian law condemning a daughter to death if she refuses to marry in accordance with the paternal ´s will. Theseus initially endorses the applicability of such a draconian law but, after the lovers´ initiating experience in the liminal forest of Athens, the Duke renders that rule null and void and he orders the troubled youngsters to marry that very day in a synchronic multiple ceremony, a veritable toast for fertility:

> Theseus: Egeus, I will overbear your will,
> For in the temple by and by with us
> These couples shall eternally be knit, (…)
> Away with us to Athens: three and three,
> We'll hold a feast in great solemnity. (IV. i. 176-182)

As usual, the marriage ceremony is held off stage:

> Snug: Masters, the Duke is coming from the temple, and
> there is two or three lords and ladies more married. (IV. ii. 15-6)

Curiously enough, *Two Noble Kinsmen,* a play considered to be a collaboration between John Fletcher and Shakespeare, stages the moment of that self- censored rite. By resorting to the mythological setting, the playwrights were able to explore the theatrical possibilities of the showy bridal procession led by Hymen and the Nymphs, with ancient queens honouring Theseus and Hippolyta, the epithalamial songs and the magic spells:

> The Crow, the slaundrous Cuckoe, nor
>
> The boding Raven, nor Chough hore
>
> Nor chattring Pie,
>
> May on our Bridehouse pearch or sing,
>
> Or with them any discord bring,
>
> But from it fly. (I. i)

In *AMND* there is also an unmistakable sexual allusion to the physical menace for the bride´s physical integrity in the wedding night to come: Theseus/ the real bridegroom is embodied in the emblem of the deflowering lion:

> Bottom as Pyramus: Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear,
>
> Which is—no, no—which was the fairest dame
>
> That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer. (V. i. 281-3)

The links between *Romeo and Juliet* and *AMND* are evident. Scholarship has read the play-within-the-play as a Shakespearian comic recreation of his own work. Yet, not only humour and meta-theatrical ideas are behind it. As in a Gestalt image, there may also be a hidden reference to marriage as a sacrament. The widespread belief was that all the sacraments were instituted at the Crucifixion, connecting to them Christ ´s wounds and blood, which was collected in the chalice for the Eucharistic wine. Following Christine Peters (2000: 75):

> This shift in the foundation of marriage theology from the Creation to Crucifixion meant that by the fifteenth century marriage was more clearly associated with the proper life of redeemed Christians living under the new law, and was less obviously tainted with the failure of the first married couple at the Fall.

We can conclude then that the message possibly implicit in this story would be theological as well.

<u>**The epithalamial song**</u>

The play does not lack neither a closing epithalamium full of blessings and wishes of good fortune, joy and prosperity, nor music, dances, protective plants

and charms, a good summary of many of the anthropological aspects that we have been analysing up to now, and the means to acceptably substitute the religious rites, aspects that are emphasized bellow:

> The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve:
> Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time.
> I fear we shall out-sleep the coming morn
> As much as we this night have overwatched.
> This palpable-gross play hath well beguiled
> The heavy gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed. (V.i.349-354)
> Titania: Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
> Will we sing, and bless this place.
> *Song and dance*
> Oberon: 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, (…)
> 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. (V. ii. 385-406)

Puck performs the prescribed apotropaic rite for keeping the witches away (V. i.374-5, quoted in Chapter III.2) and, in the Epilogue, he unfolds himself into the actor and the character to say good bye to the audience. Or, perhaps, we should consider that *AMND* has another unforgettable farewell, "Bottom´s Dream", anticipated in IV. ii. 206 -211:

> Bottom: The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen,
> man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his
> heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to
> write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called "Bottom's Dream",

because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of

a play, before the Duke (…)

Through its Russian doll box structure, *AMND* skilfully combines the wedding play, the masque (with its mythological subject matter, dance and music), the epithalamium, metatheatrical devices…Like a *bricoleur* (a well-known metaphor by anthropologist Lévi Strauss which explains the working of the mythical thought, which is also evoked by Laroque, 1991), Shakespeare assembles all these pieces and inserts them in a rich tapestry of intertextual references, offering a delightful experience for the audience and a fascinating puzzle for scholars.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

> Without the work of William Shakespeare, our knowledge of the vestigia of the pre-Christian traditions with their semi-magical *bric à brac* would not be what it is. (…) All the same, Shakespeare may be considered an anthropologist of sorts fascinated with liminality and the preposterous (…). Shakespeare certainly contributed to document these darker sides of man often accompanied by the performance of ancient rites and customs (…) while he also insists on their being the obsolescent remnants of a bygone era. (…) So, I can only close by saying that Shakespearian anthropology remains as mysterious as it is deeply ambivalent since the playwright keeps us in a double bind, now speaking in favour of the continuation of these customs, now criticizing them as responsible for superstition and alienation. (F. Laroque, 2015: paragraphs 36, 39-40)

> Is it any wonder that in the ambiguous and pervasively occult mental world shared by most Elizabethans, theatrical performances should have affinities with religious services and magical rites? (L. Montrose, quoted in L. Woodbridge, 1994: 29)

After all those twists and turns throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean customs, beliefs and literary world, my thesis might be considered proved. Taking as a point of departure the incommensurable work done by the literary criticism based on social history and anthropology, such as in C.L. Barber, David Wiles, François Laroque, Linda Woodbridge, Juliet Dusinberre, Alice Venazki, Jane Dubrow, Louis Montrose or Stephen Orgel, my contribution, due to its specific scope, takes a step forward in relation to the place where those scholars stop: firstly, that the wedding masques were part, unconsciously though it may had been, of the magical rituals aimed to secure the good fortune and fertility of the aristocratic unions, taking into account that they were destined to improve lineage and richness. And, secondly, that the wedding or betrothal masques and the other kinds of play-within-the play in Shakespeare's comedies were the dramatic representation of the intended magical force attributed to those theatrical events in the real life of noble households, as well as an acceptable surrogate for the religious ceremonies in order to avoid censorship. Certainly Shakespeare put weddings on stage in plays different from those studied. On the one hand, in tragedies like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, had he introduced a masque, the audience would have wrongly understood this as foreshadowing a happy ending, thus distorting the intended meaning. On the other hand, there are also weddings in the comedies *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew* but the couples were not of royal ascendency, so the playgoers would not have expected them to be celebrated with luxurious courtly masques. This reasoning is for me

the litmus test that my arguments are well founded. In order to reach such a hermeneutic conclusion the use of anthropological concepts and tools has been needed and, besides, a profound study of the customs, legal prescriptions and the akin literary genres on the Shakespearian era. The plays have been approached in their wholeness and trying to highlight their common aspects and the weight of music and dance which establish a continuum with the masques and the *Intermedii*. With those objectives in mind, the metatheatrical devices have been studied not as isolated items but as a functional part of the plays that contributes to their meaning. Equally, it has been sought to establish connections with coetaneous literary genres, like courtly spectacles and Spenserian epithalamia, aimed to see Shakespeare´s dramaturgical experiments in an overarching vision: synchronic, in his very time and in other theatrical genres and countries, and diachronic, as he was heir to a long theatrical tradition. The transitional aspects in the Early Modern England and their mirroring in the playwright´s works have been analysed as well as his ambiguous response to magical practices and acting amateurism. The comedies studied cover the wide spectrum of love: the wooing in *LLL*, the betrothal in *TT*, the wedding ceremony in *AYL*, and the consummation of marriage in *AMND*. An effort has been made to connect them with previous and coetaneous literary texts in an intertextual reading. And through all of them we have had the opportunity of better understanding the rich tissue of historical fact and cultural beliefs behind them.

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