



# The Carnival of his World and the Subversion of Patriarchal Society—On the Duality of a Midsummer Night’s Dream

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**Abstract.** Drama is inseparable from characters, drama has duality, Shakespeare’s plays like to use the dual world, forming a kind of mirror image. In Shakespeare’s comedy masterpiece *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the fairy world and the mortal world form a mirror image, and the king of the fairy world, O’Brown, and the duke of Athens, Theseus, the fairy titania and The fiancée of Theseus, Hippolyte, the attendant of the fairy king, and the craftsman of the mortal world, Bolton, form three pairs of double characters. The setting of the binary world makes the profound ideas contained in Shakespeare’s comedy multi-dimensional. This paper uses a literature research method to explore the existence of the binary world in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The author found that by cleverly manipulating this relationship, Shakespeare highlighted the dichotomy of the forest and the court, the sensual and the sensual. In the play, where the cold rationality is attacked and traditional authority is subverted, he expresses affirmation and desire for qualities such as sensibility, madness, and fantasy.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare · *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* · Carnival · opposition

## 1 Introduction

As a comedy masterpiece of Shakespeare’s mid-term period, “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” is loved by audiences and readers for its romantic spirit of whimsy, the theme of ideas in pursuit of free love, and the gorgeous and colorful language expression. In this play, Shakespeare expresses his humanistic feelings through the depiction of love, friendship, and marriage, and compared with the works of his contemporaries, it seems that there is no difference in the theme interpretation or plot planning of the “Zhong” drama, which is nothing more than that the young people’s love is hindered by some traditional forces, and after experiencing many tribulations, it is difficult to find that it is full of binary opposing concepts as the basic paradigm of Western thought. This article aims to study the significance of the dualistic world in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, first through the analysis of two physical worlds, namely the world of Senri and the world of the court, to explain why Shakespeare deliberately set up these two environments. Secondly, the above-mentioned court and senri worlds are elevated into two opposing spiritual worlds, that is, the spiritual qualities they symbolize, and the antagonistic relationship between rationality and madness in this play is analyzed.

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## 2 The World of Senri and the World of the Court

A feature of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the transformation of the forest world and the Athenian court. The forests on the outskirts of Athens are the sites where young lovers escape patriarchal society in pursuit of true love. Here, gods, elves, craftsmen, and lovers, have appeared, and they have temporarily lost their original identities and become characters in this farce. If so, the state and behavior of the characters in the play are closely related to the nature of their environment. As seats of royal power, cities and courts often symbolized order and order, while the barren suburbs and jungles without power represented chaos and vanity, where lovers faced the punishment and threat of patriarchy and royal power, and their legitimate desires were hindered and trampled. This also promotes the plot of the play, where lovers flee to the illusion of chaos and emptiness, where all the shackles of rules are gone, and there is only the desire and recourse of love and desire, and the indulgence and pleasure embodied therefrom.

In fact, in addition to the opposition between freedom and informality and strict hierarchy, there is another, the less noticeable difference between the two places, that is, the subtle changes in gender relations. Athens was a typical patriarchal society, where male patriarchs had absolute authority over the entire family, even the power to kill and kill. As the plot unfolds, the nobleman Iggis comes to see Theseus and asks the duke to punish his daughter Hemia according to the laws of Athens. Hermia, unwilling to marry Her father's chosen Dimitrius for her, secretly fell in love with a young man named Caisander. According to the laws of Athens:

Hemia must obey her father's will or be executed, or she will swear at Diana's altar to keep her vows and never marry for life. As ruler of the city of Athens, Theseus was very supportive of the law, but he gave Heemia a few days to consider that if she could not obey her father's will, she would have to "never again touch men from now on." In this place, the father's position was supreme, the Duke said to Heemia:

"What say you, Hermia? be advis'd, fair maid:  
To you your father should be as a god;  
One that compos'd your beauties: yea, and one  
To whom you are but as a form in wax,  
By him imprinted, and within his power  
To leave the figure, or disfigure it.  
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman."(I,i,371) [1].

In the play "Zhong", the Duke of Theseus conquered the Amazon by force and returned HIPPOLYTA back to Athens as a couple, and this narrative discourse also highlights the male power and power of Athens.

"Hippolyta, I woo'd 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, 370) [1].

From the Duke's confession, we know that the love between Theseus and Hippolyte was not based on mutual respect and mutual love, and that the bride Hippolyte was won by Theseus with "sword" and "armed aggression". Moreover, there was no emotion of joy or excitement to be discerned from the bride's side, and she simply used "our solemn

ceremony” to refer to future weddings. The solemnity, harsh atmosphere and tone of a patriarchal society were established from the very beginning.

In contrast, the fairy king OBERON and the fairy queen TITANIA in the jungle are completely equal, even in emotional indulgence, the limelight is not compromising to each other: a shepherd dressed as a shepherd, flirting with the windy shepherd; A little prince who stole Indians was extremely spoiled, and when the husband and wife met, they insulted and attacked each other in front of their subordinates, completely without the style and dignity that an empress should have. The reason for this is simple: if the deep forest is a world of free pursuit of love, why should they keep their faces like the dukes and ladies of the court and obey the so-called rules? It also explains why Shakespeare arranged the appearance of Greek immortals rather than Christian gods when choosing the scenes of the story outside the palace—because as the two great streams of Western culture, the Greek spirit of recourse to sensual pleasure is more representative of the strong desires gathered in the jungle, while the Christian doctrine of intellectual rigor is more like a reproduction of court laws and abstinence.

As Bakhtin argues, all these carnivalized ceremonial forms of performance differ in principle from official sacrifices and celebrations, namely, the humor of the former. For “official holidays sometimes go against the idea of festivals and affirm the existing world order as a whole, i.e., the fixedness, immutability and eternity of existing hierarchies, existing religious, political and moral values, norms, prohibitions.” The festival becomes a celebration of ready-made, victorious, dominant truths that emerge in the form of eternal, unchanging and indisputable truths. Therefore, the tone atmosphere of the official festival can only be rigid and serious, and the harmonious factor is incompatible with its original character [2]. On the contrary, the carnival celebrates the temporary liberation from official hierarchical relations, privileges, norms, and prohibitions, and it ridicules and ridicules all things with all inevitable freedom, so that all carnival rituals are characterized by this harmony.

### 3 Rational Logic and Crazy Fantasy

The above-mentioned court/senri world dualistic structure and the inheritance of the greek and Christian civilizations can be said to be the antithesis of reason and madness when viewed from another dimension (i.e., the spiritual qualities they symbolize). It is clear that the city and court, which represent reason, are a hierarchical society full of discipline and punishment, and the authority, tradition, reason, and various laws and regulations are serious and powerful, and they penetrate into all aspects of social life, and even private love cannot escape its constraints; In stark contrast, people in a state of madness are very cute, and they temporarily put aside the shackles of the Law and play freely or even frolic freely.

According to Bakhtin’s theory of “carnival”, the basic criterion of carnival is “degradation”, that is, “degrading” all things that are sublime, spiritual, idealized and abstract [3]. On the surface, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a majestic, noble romantic comedy, but on the inside it is subversive and deconstructive, dissolving all existing value systems. It not only realizes the subversion and deconstruction of male power, but also dissolves the sanctity of love.

As far as dreams are concerned, the title of the play shows the importance of “dreams” in it. Whether in Elizabethan times or in modern times, dreams are invariably associated with cognitive patterns, such as fantasy, imagination, magic, etc., which contain real values in their illusory forms [4]. So it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between dreams and reality. For example, the nightmare that Kuromi Xia had in the forest when she was entangled in a snake and her lover Lesante stood by and watched, was really happening in the form of a variant.

As for imagination, in a sense it is a kind of “daydream,” and its significance has been very clearly stated by Freud in “Creative Writers and Daydreams”: “Creative writers write like children’s games, he is seriously creating an imaginary world, pouring out a lot of emotions, and at the same time distinguishing it from reality.” [5]. So we can say that the lovers of the jungle, like the childhood of human creation, construct and write their own stories in real and illusory adventures (or games), whose storylines may be crazy and absurd, but full of emotion and poetry.

When Duke Theseus returned to the palace, commenting on the forest adventures told by the young man he once said the following:

“These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact”.

The above remarks were originally a rather dismissive remark made by the Duke when questioning the veracity of the story, but if we look at it from another angle, it is not difficult to find that his comparison of a madman with a lover and poet is in essence precisely defining the characteristics of madness, that is, full of passion, poetry and imagination, and that the “calm reason” he reveres here really deserves to be denounced by us as synonymous with “ruthlessness” and “rigidity”.

Elf Puck, in order to help the two lovers, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, decided to administer flower juice to them. But he mistakenly dropped the juice that should have dripped on Demetrius’s eyelids onto Lysander’s eyes. In this way, the two people wake up and see Helena at the same time, so they fall in love with Helena at the same time and compete to show her love. HERMI, which was originally cherished by Lysander, was ruthlessly abandoned by Lysander. Although this is a farce, Shakespeare’s intentions are profound. The illusion and unreliability of love are on display here. Helena commented on love this way: “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind; And therefore is wing’d Cupid painted blind.” Lovers always have a variety of reveries about the object of their love—in fact, they love the image they have created in their own minds [6]. This is the truth of “just like the seven blind mice”. Puck, as a bystander, is the soberest, arguing that so-called “romantic love” is extremely accidental and illusory. Although he used the wrong flower juice, he did not think that he was wrong, he felt that all men in “Athenian costumes” were the same, and mortals all had the same commonality of “disloyalty”: “Then fate o’er-rules, that, one man holding troth, A million fail, confounding oath on oath.” (III., i1, 386) [1] Puck of “bystanders” is indeed right. “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” illuminates the “watery poplar” side of human

nature through Puck's flower juice. Lysander and Demetrius' disloyalty impresses the reader very deeply, in this green forest closest to nature, they all reveal a deep side that is usually hidden.

## 4 Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that Shakespeare is precisely through this unity of opposites to highlight the difference between the first two sets of opposites, subverting authority and ridiculing reason, while advocating for dreams, madness and sensibility, supplemented by his ingenious plot setting and charming language wording, so that we can be immersed in love and beauty in the dreams of this midsummer night.

From the above analysis, we can see that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a comedy full of opposing and unified carnival characteristics, and its carnival characteristics are mainly manifested in: subverting authority and ridiculing reason while advocating for dreams, madness, and sensibility, supplemented by its ingenious plot setting and charming language wording. In the play, the forest on the outskirts of Athens has formed a unique mythological and fantastic "forest space-time body" due to its characteristics in time and space. In this space-time body, there is a strong carnival of plots and characters. In this forest, you can see gods and elves, the most elegant nobles and the most stupid commoners also meet here, and there are fairy flowers with powerful magic, so all kinds of strange things can happen here, a person can suddenly become a donkey, a donkey can fall in love with the beautiful fairy queen, and the direction of love can turn back and forth several times in a night's time. Underpinning this carnivalized world is a carnivalized worldview steeped in the spirit of alternation and renewal, duality and relativity. This worldview emphasizes the breaking of a single, serious ideology of dominance. The carnivalized worldview is a bold questioning of the concept of official rule from a folk standpoint. If this questioning is only the first sign of A Midsummer Night's Dream, it is deepened and developed in Shakespeare's tragedy. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" points out the one-sidedness and narrowness of reason, while "Hamlet" uses madness to question reason, mock reason, and torture in an imaginary way: "After the disintegration of the world meaning supported by Christian divinity, can human reason support life, and whether death can defeat reason, release madness, and expose the world's nothingness and suffering." [7]. In King Lear, "the whole system of official goodness, truth, piety, love, friendship, etc. has collapsed." [8]. The insults in A Midsummer Night's Dream are simply degrading the other person to irrationality, whereas in Othello and Macbeth, the insults point directly to the flesh, the lower image, and the language is more square and has a profound topographic significance.

Shakespeare's plays have a strong carnival character, always floating between two positions, two worldviews, that is, with the endless blood connection with the folk culture. This connection has created the richness, profundity, and ambiguity of Shakespeare's plays, which is perhaps an important reason for the achievement of "inexhaustible Shakespeare".

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