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“A FORTNIGHT HOLD WE THIS SOLEMNITY”: THE ELIZABETHAN ANNUAL CYCLE IN SHAKESPEARE’S MAJOR COMEDIES

Abstract

In *Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* François Laroque analyses festivity and its literary and imaginary representation in Shakespeare’s England. He holds that the Elizabethan year is essentially simple and logical as it is divided into two halves. The first half starts on the winter solstice of 24 December and ends on the summer solstice of 24 June, including the twelve days of Christmas celebrations and a group of moveable feasts such as Easter and Whitsun and Laroque adopts for it the name of the ritualistic half of the year. The second half, which begins on 25 June and ends on 24 December, is marked by a lack of important religious festivals, the presence of a few fixed festivals and a greater number of working days over holidays, so it is known as the secular half of the year. Based on Laroque’s insights, this paper argues that Shakespeare’s major comedies – *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* – bring to life the secular half of the Elizabethan year in such a way that each play seems to evoke its particular period and a set of activities peculiar to it.

Key words: Shakespeare, festivity, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*

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1. Introduction

In his influential study *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* François Laroque analyses festivity, “a social manifestation linked with natural and seasonal cycles and rooted in a so-called archaic vision of time and the cosmos” (Laroque 1991: 3), and its literary and imaginary representation in Shakespeare’s England. He has limited the scope of his book to the period of Shakespeare’s dramatic activity, that is, to the time span between 1590 and 1613, as he has detected “the close relationship between festivity and literature during this period” (Laroque 1991: 5). Laroque’s study is divided into two parts: the first provides a detailed survey of the festive calendar of Shakespeare’s time while the second deals with festive motifs and images in Shakespeare’s plays.

It is held in *Shakespeare's Festive World* that the festivity in Shakespeare’s England is a complex phenomenon, considerably different from the medieval times from which it originates. The difference predominantly stems from the Reformation and the changes it brought about, changes which seriously impaired the area of festivity and dramatic performances as its integral part. The Tudor monarchy and its officials saw to a general anglicanization and simplification of the liturgy, services and ceremonies of the Church and a reduction in the number of the feast days. Consequently, the two feast days most closely related to dramatic performances and processions, Corpus Christi and Saint John’s Day (the Midsummer Watch), were among those abolished during the first half of the sixteenth century (Laroque 1991: 7). The truth is, however, that the celebrations of Corpus Christi and Saint John did not disappear the moment they were banned, that the opposition to such bans was strong, particularly in the remote parts of the country, and that it took several decades for the new regulations to be fully adopted. Together with imposing prohibitions on what had hitherto constituted people’s annual experiences, the Tudor authorities took care to offer their subjects new celebratory occasions by inaugurating new holidays. The two best-known are the celebration of the anniversary of Queen Elizabeth’s accession to the throne on 17 November and the commemoration of the Gunpowder Plot on Guy Fawkes’ Day, 5 November (Laroque 1991: 8). It is also important to note that not all the holidays from the pre-Reformation period were irrevocably abolished – some were transformed into new ones and celebrated on different dates in the calendar. The Midsummer Watch,

for example, was replaced by the Lord Mayor's Show and celebrated on 28 November instead of 23 June.

It should be mentioned here how Laroque takes good care to point out that his work has nothing to do with new historicism from which he implicitly distances himself and how, at the same time, some of his shrewdest observations are reminiscent of Stephen Greenblatt. Writing, for example, about the decline of medieval festival pageants in Tudor England and the consequent disappearance of "the guilds and corporations that used to be responsible for financing and organizing religious festivals and performances", Laroque astutely observes that "it was at this juncture that, thanks to aristocratic or royal protectors [...], permanent troupes of players and professional artists sprang up and began to cater for a paying public by putting on daily performances which took the place of the erstwhile seasonal religious spectacles" (Laroque 1991: 10). In other words, that which was no longer acceptable in reality, particularly the Catholic festivities, their paraphernalia and symbolism, moved under the auspices of professional players and the then emerging theatre. This remark is in accordance with and similar to Greenblatt's ideas about another kind of remnant from the Catholic times – the ghosts – which, he argues, moved to the theatre after they had been evicted from reality: "The theater", writes Greenblatt "is the place, as Shakespeare understood, where those things are permitted that the authorities have ruled illicit and have tried to banish from everyday reality" (Greenblatt 2001: 203). It can be rightfully said that Laroque's understanding of festivity by and large coincides with Greenblatt's views on the theatre. This affinity can be detected throughout his study and a good illustration would be the point he makes discussing different kinds of festivals and their manifold meanings: "This provides us with a particularly striking illustration of the ambivalence of the festival: sometimes it served as a solemn ratification of boundaries, points of reference and dividing lines; at other times, it gave a community licence to transgress those boundaries and abolish those dividing lines" (Laroque 1991: 14). This is very similar to Greenblatt's notion of the theatre which he sees at once as a subversion of the dominant order and a safety valve indispensable for the sustainability of that same order.

Laroque points out that regardless of a large number of different local festivals, the Elizabethan year is essentially simple and logical as it is divided into two halves. The first half starts on the winter solstice of 24 December and ends on the summer solstice of 24 June (Saint John's or

Midsummer's Day). It includes the twelve days of Christmas celebrations and a group of moveable feasts – Candlemas, Shrove Tuesday, Easter, Saint George's Day, Whitsun and Corpus Christi – and Laroque adopts for it the name of the ritualistic half of the year (Laroque 1991: 81). The second half, which begins on 25 June and ends on 24 December, is marked by a lack of important religious festivals, the presence of a few fixed festivals and a greater number of working days over holidays, so it is known as the secular half of the year. It should be mentioned, though, that the second half was invariably marked by local festivals such as the sheep-shearing festival, the rush-bearing festival, the harvest festivals and parish festivals, celebrating the completion of certain agricultural works (Laroque 1991: 82). The only big parade in this half of the year was the Lord Mayor's Show, while smaller-scale ceremonies were organized by the guilds upon election of the new masters.

It follows from Laroque's study that the Elizabethan year was a firmly established and dynamic sequence of working days and festivity, equally observed by the court circles and ordinary people. As has been already mentioned, Christmas festivities at the court lasted for twelve days and included entertainments such as music, dancing and theatrical performances. When the celebrations were over the court would move from the palace of Whitehall to Hampton Court, Greenwich or Richmond and stay there during the time of Lent. Saint George's Day would be celebrated at Windsor where the Queen would receive the knights of the Order of the Garter. The secular part of the year seems to have been famous for the summer visits the Queen paid to the countryside and her most prominent subjects there at whose houses she would stay for a few weeks. Her notable hosts would do their best to make each of the Queen's stays a memorable occasion by taking care to organize "mythological and pastoral entertainments, fireworks, water pageants, banquets followed by Masques, hunting and other rural pastimes" (Laroque 1991: 69). For ordinary people the secular part of the year meant hard work as this was the time of major agricultural tasks in the fields, the completion of which they would celebrate in their local communities. Laroque points out that the great annual fairs such as the fairs of Saint Bartholomew, Saint Luke and Saint Giles were also held in the summer or early autumn, the period without many festivals (Laroque 1991: 83). He sums up his discussion on the Elizabethan annual cycle by arguing that the ritualistic half of the year is characterized by festivals involving fire (Christmas candles,

the bonfires of Saint John's Day) and by prohibitions, dietary and sexual (which were preceded and followed by periods of indulgence) and adds that "[I]f the first half of the year was marked by behaviour and symbolism that belonged to a ritualistic and sacred concept of the world, the secular half was devoted to the economic side of life as opposed to the religious, the private as opposed to the public and the rational as opposed to the mystical" (Laroque 1991: 83-84).

Laroque's task in the second part of his study, as he defines it, is "to see how our findings on the place and functions of festivity apply to an artistic production as highly elaborated as Shakespeare's plays" (Laroque 1991: 179). He holds that a play never represents reality exactly and that none of the concrete forms of festivity such as a Morris dance or a May game is transposed to a dramatic text. What Shakespeare's plays do contain, however, is an air of festivity shaped for dramatic purposes. On a concrete level this kind of festivity may manifest itself as singing, dancing and music, but there is more to it than that. The atmosphere of rejoicing, confusion and role-switching, surprising turns in the course of events, moonlight, leisure, freedom, noise and frivolity are images of festivity echoing traditional celebrations, both those still vividly present and those not any more acceptable in Shakespeare's England.

Taking into account Laroque's findings on the Elizabethan calendar I would like to argue that four of Shakespeare's plays known as the major comedies – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* – bring to life the secular half of the Elizabethan year. They do it in such a way that each play seems to evoke its particular period and a set of activities peculiar to it. Thus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be said to recall its beginning, usually marked by weddings and the Queen's visits to aristocratic homes in the countryside; *As You Like It*, with nature as its predominant setting, appears to be related to agricultural labour in the fields and celebrations of its completion in high summer; *The Merchant of Venice* with a serious topic and dark colours in which Venice is depicted seems to refer to autumn and the economic side of life, and *Twelfth Night* to the winter festival itself, which marks the end of the secular and the beginning of the ritualistic half of the year.¹

¹ For that reason the order in which the comedies will be analysed in this paper differs slightly from the accepted chronological order in which they were written and staged. Namely, *As You Like It* will be dealt with before *The Merchant of Venice* because the kind

2. The Major Comedies

Laroque labels *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a comedy whose major theme is festivity (Laroque 1991: 198). The Midsummer Night from the title and the prospect of Theseus' and Hippolyta's royal wedding signify a joyful, clamorous and passionate beginning of the secular half of the year. Theseus is impatient as he has to wait for another four days before "our solemnities" (1.1.11) and assures his future wife that the grandiose celebration the preparations for which are well underway will be a unique event in his otherwise warrior-like life:

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.
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.1.16-19)

Theseus wants all Athenians, especially the young, to take part in merriment and revelry. At the same time he takes good care to get rid of any disposition inappropriate to the festive moment, when he orders Philostrate, his Master of Revels: "Turn melancholy forth to funerals: / The pale companion is not for our pomp" (1.1.14-15). Theseus' words illustrate in the best possible way Laroque's attitude that "[I]n the world of comedy, the ceremonies for weddings and those for funerals are placed in a mutually exclusive relationship" (Laroque 1991: 236). And truly, Theseus not only wishes all his subjects to enjoy themselves, but he casts away the very thought of sadness. Thus, when worried Egeus comes in front of the Duke and presents him with his trouble – his daughter Hermia's disobedience in regard to Demetrius, whom Egeus has chosen for her husband – Theseus is authoritative but somehow meek and gentle at the same time while he explains to Hermia what awaits her if she ignores her father's will. As is well-known from the storyline, Hermia and Lysander are in love and want to get married, but as Egeus refuses to bless their love they decide to elope from Athens, to the place where Lysander's aunt lives and where Athenian laws do not apply, in order to get married. Hermia reports their secret to her best friend Helena who ardently loves Demetrius and hopes

of festivity it evokes seems to take place in high summer, whereas *The Merchant of Venice* is more of an "autumnal play".

to win back his love. Helena decides to reveal Hermia's and Lysander's plan to Demetrius and when he leaves Athens to pursue Hermia, to follow him. When the four lovers enter the forest outside Athens, the action starts unrolling at a faster pace. The forest is the "green world" of Northrop Frye but it also resembles the forest of medieval romance, a "limitless, uncultivated space" packed with "hidden menaces" and the "atmosphere of mystery and fear" (Whitaker 1984: 54-55).

Oberon and Titania, the King and Queen of fairies, with their respective attendants are to be met there, as well as a group of amateur actors rehearsing the play on Pyramus and Thisbe they want to show on Theseus' wedding day. Oberon's and Titania's quarrel over the Indian boy is a serious matter as it causes commotion in the natural world, but Oberon's way of resolving it, although ironic and not so flattering for the Queen, is essentially harmless and benevolent as the King is well versed in magic and aptly controls its use. His skill is equally unquestionable when a mistake such as the one Puck has made occurs and causes frenzy among the enchanted lovers. Oberon easily corrects it and, having been handed over the Indian boy, releases Titania's eyesight of foolish affection as well, thus bringing back peace and pleasure both to the fairies' world and to that of the mortals. It is hardly necessary to point out to the benevolence and kind-heartedness of the simple Athenian craftsmen who enthusiastically engage their modest acting skills in order to contribute to the happy occasion. Their poignantly naïve, meticulous care not to frighten anyone by staging a tragic love story adds up to the general air of wishing well that permeates the comedy.

It is generally agreed among Shakespeare scholars (for example, Wilson 1962: 194; Greenblatt 2004: 47) that Oberon's remark about "a fair vestal thronèd by the west" (2.1.158) whom Cupidon's shaft has missed refers to Queen Elizabeth and her visit to the Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth in July 1575 during which, among many kinds of entertainment, the Queen watched a spectacular water pageant with "a mermaid on a dolphin's back" (2.1.150). In his happiest festive comedy Shakespeare seems to have alluded to a contemporary festivity he might have even witnessed himself as a boy of eleven (Greenblatt 2004: 43). The implications of the Queen's famous three-week stay at Kenilworth relate to the royal wedding as the principal topic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in that the Earl of Leicester is known to have courted the Queen, albeit unsuccessfully, at the time.

The festive, harmless, light-hearted atmosphere which implies that Shakespeare's aim in this comedy is what J.D. Wilson calls "consummation in happiness" (Wilson 1962: 186) is best summarized in the famous words of Oberon's blessing:

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,
And the blots of nature's hand
Shall not in their issue stand
Never mole, harelip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despisèd in nativity,
Shall upon their children 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 blessed
Ever shall in safety rest.
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.379-398)

Speaking of festivity as a prominent theme of Shakespeare's comedies, Laroque defines *As You Like It* as the play "at a kind of crossroads", between those comedies in which festivity is a major theme and those in which it is a minor one (Laroque 1991: 198). Its major part, as is well-known, takes place in the Forest of Arden, to which Duke Senior flees with his attendants after being overthrown and banished by his brother, the usurper Duke Frederick, and to which arrive other decent and benevolent people such as Rosalynd, Celia, Orlando and Adam when Duke Frederick's malice and murderous intentions make it impossible for them to survive at his court. Laroque quotes Janet Spens' argument that *As You Like It* "reflect[s] the traditions and amusements of the summer period" (Laroque 1991:

192), while Agnes Latham similarly holds that the play discloses "a good deal of the holiday spirit" and "the very real joy of summer days in the country" (Latham 1975: lxix, lxxxvi).

Logically enough, from times immemorial, the "joy of summer days in the country" has been connected to the bounteous harvest season and the completion of the various phases of agricultural activities which would be marked by large communal celebrations. The atmosphere at Duke Senior's banquet deep in the Forest of Arden (2.7) seems to mirror such lavish celebrations, as the meal is set out, the host is there with his lords and attendants, the air is festive and those present at the feast are high-spirited and willing to listen to Jaques' reflections on his meeting "a worthy fool". Free from obligations of courtly life, they are relaxed and easy-going because "...this our life, exempt from public haunt, / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything" (2.1.15-17). When Orlando shows up with a drawn sword, ready to fight for food in order to save old Adam's life, the Duke ignores the potential threat and greets him saying: "Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table" (2.1.105). The air of hospitality which permeates the Forest of Arden points to an all-encompassing sense of community typical of summer celebrations in the country, celebrations to which everyone is welcome and entitled to basic provisions. A refugee from the oppressor's world, Orlando can hardly believe he has met generous and caring people who even promise not to start eating until he returns with old Adam. Although much older and better experienced in human indecency, the Duke himself seems surprised on meeting Orlando, as he says to Jaques:

Thou seest, we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.
(*As You Like It*, 2.7.136-139)

The first shepherds to be met in the Forest of Arden are Corin and Silvius. Rosalind disguised as Ganymede and Celia as Aliena run into them as they enter the forest, hungry and exhausted. Silvius is a young shepherd in love with Phoebe who refuses his advances and he, obsessed with his passion, is slightly alienated from the outside world. Older and wiser Corin, on the other hand, can be of some help to the banished girls who ask him where

they can find food and lodging “in this desert place”. From his answer we get a glimpse of a simple life of a good man and his hard work for an ungenerous master:

Fair sir, I pity her,
And wish, for her sake more than for mine own,
My fortunes were more able to relieve her;
But I am shepherd to another man,
And do not shear the fleeces that I graze
My master is of churlish disposition,
And little recks to find the way to heaven
By doing deeds of hospitality.
(*As You like It*, 2.4.73-80)

Corin’s conversation with Touchstone shows in more detail the shepherd’s decent, modest and unpretentious view of the world: “Sir, I am a true labourer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man’s happiness; glad of other man’s good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck” (3.2.71-75). These two examples of Corin’s speech make a powerful image of the annual cycle in the life of Elizabethan shepherds, an image which cannot be discerned either from Silvius’ and Phoebe’s artificial and exaggerated reflections on love or from William and Audrey whose utter simplicity makes them caricatures (Latham 1975: lxxvii).

The very end of the play, albeit often criticised for lack of plausibility and an abrupt resolution of the many entangled storyline ends, is another clear example of the festive occasion in the countryside. Having undergone a harsh and potentially baleful ordeal, Duke Senior invites those present in the Forest of Arden who have also experienced their share of trouble consequently gaining love, wisdom, knowledge and awareness, to take part in the merrymaking:

Meantime forget this new-fall’n dignity,
And fall into our *rustic revelry*.²
Play music, and you brides and bridegrooms all,
With measure heap’d in joy, to th’measures fall.
(*As You Like It*, 5.4.175-178)

² Emphasis mine.

The forest celebration in high summer, with the sun shining on the four couples soon to be joined in wedlock and the table rich in nature's ripest produce remains a potent picture of the secular part of the year's zenith.

Laroque considers *The Merchant of Venice* a comedy in which festivity is a minor theme (Laroque 1991: 198). Its two principal venues – Venice and Belmont – stand in stark opposition to the very notion of festivity. Venice is the city of capital, commerce, interests and usury, a place where people like Shylock are hostile towards festivity, while others, like the young Venetians, consider it not just an occasion for a harmful disguise and revelry but also for robbery (Laroque 1991: 257). Shylock famously orders Jessica to lock up the doors and close the windows of his house when the "masques" begin and strictly prohibits her to take part in the entertainment by watching it:

What are the masques? Hear you me Jessica,
Lock up my doors, and when you hear the drum
And the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife
Clamber not you up to the casements then
Nor thrust your head into the public street
To gaze on Christian fools with varnish'd faces:
But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements,
Let not the sound of shallow fopp'ry enter
My sober house. By Jacob's staff I swear
I have no mind of feasting forth to-night.
(*The Merchant of Venice*, 2.5.28-37)

The pressure on the part of her father and the love she feels for Lorenzo spur Jessica's decision to elope with her beloved who comes to her house disguised in the midst of the festival, with Bassanio and Gratiano, and takes her away. But Jessica is not his only reward, as she robs her father upon leaving the house and brings ample revenue to her future husband. While in Venice we witness an opposition to festivity and its inversion into a theft, Belmont seems like the archetypal centre of festivity.³ Not much is known about what Belmont looks like, but it must be a spacious and beautiful manor far enough from the corrupt and cruel Venice. It is the

³ This idea is inspired by Muriel Whitaker's remark on Camelot as the archetypal center of the chivalric milieu (Whitaker 1984: 41).

home to charming and witty Portia where she feels utterly happy only when Bassanio chooses the right casket and marries her. At that very moment Belmont becomes the place of mirth and joy, whereas before Bassanio it was more like a prison to Portia where she welcomed and saw off the suitors coming to try their luck according to the provision of her father's will. When its mistress achieves love and happiness Belmont turns into a *locus amoenus* of the comedy, the place where Bassanio's Venetian friends are also welcome, where generosity and good humour rule and where moonlit nights are the most beautiful in the world, just like in Lorenzo's words:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears – soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony:
Sit Jessica, – look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold,
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins;
(*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.54-62)

It should be noted though that *The Merchant of Venice* predominantly deals with the economic side of life and that “[L]ove and festivity are both circumscribed by economics” (Laroque 1991: 258). In order to go to Belmont and try to win Portia, Bassanio needs Antonio's money. As Antonio does not have ready money he borrows it from Shylock and agrees to sign a monstrous bond by which the Jewish usurer is entitled to cut a pound of Antonio's flesh if the latter cannot pay him back the debt in due time. The scenes that happen in Venice resound in economic terms – merchandise, fortunes, credit, money, bond, usurer, lend, borrow – and are fraught with utmost tension. As the play unfolds it becomes evident that there is much more to the conflict between Antonio and Shylock than mere money lending. Their hostility is not private but overwhelming and spread across their two communities – Christian and Jewish – which become belligerent parties. The exciting court trial scene resolves the conflict which has brought *The Merchant of Venice* to the very verge of tragedy – the famous drop of Christian blood which is not to be found in the bond saves Antonio's life

and makes it possible for the Venetians to punish and humiliate Shylock. Victorious Christians and defeated Shylock who leaves the stage never to show up again until the play's closure make such a grim and distressing impression that Venice becomes an unbearable place to stay in. From the distorted and venal world of trade and economy the action moves to the enchanted Belmont and there reaches its end in a joyful and festive place whose charm is breathtaking. The fact that *The Merchant of Venice* ends with its characters' *departure* to the green world and not *return* from it as is the case in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* seems to imply that conflicts between parents and children as well as sibling rivalry can be settled once and for all if people are willing to change and mature, whereas in the stressful world of business and conflicting interests one has to have a peaceful resort to regularly return to and relax before going back to the economic side of life which owes its existence to unpredictability and pressure. It further points out to the necessity of an age old, dynamic sequence of working days and festivity.

According to Laroque, the major theme in *Twelfth Night* is festivity (Laroque 1991: 198); he claims that both its title and contents suggest it functions itself as a festival (Laroque 1991: 196). In the Elizabethan annual cycle the Twelfth Night marked the end of the winter festival which started at Christmas, so Shakespeare scholars generally agree that the play's title, which does not reveal anything about its contents, conveys the prevailing air of festivity typical of this time of the year.

Shakespeare's last major comedy takes place in Illyria, a strange, lethargic country whose Duke Orsino is "lover of Love" and his beloved Olivia is "lover of Sorrow" (Wilson 1962: 169). Orsino dreams about Olivia in his palace, apparently enjoying music, poetry and the notion of love more than trying to win Olivia, while she spends time cloistered in *her* house, having vowed to a seven-year period of mourning for her recently dead brother. The shipwreck which has separated Viola and Sebastian, twins closely resembling each other, brings them both to Illyria but neither of them knows the other one has survived. Viola arrives first in a boat with sailors and Sebastian reaches the shore later with Antonio, the captain of the ship. Viola, disguised as a boy called Cesario, becomes Duke Orsino's page and causes the action to move at a faster pace. She visits Olivia on behalf of Orsino, courts her for him and provokes confusion as Olivia, fascinated with the gentle and well-mannered "boy", falls in love with Viola. Sebastian's arrival resolves the situation on the verge of chaos as Olivia

takes him for Cesario and marries him immediately while disappointed Orsino turns his affection to Viola who has fallen in love with him the moment she took service as his page.

Twelfth Night, with its famous sub-plot, can also be said to show festivity in extremity as the revelry at Olivia's house never ends and is an aim to itself. The revellers are Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, his friend, and her clown Feste. Maria, Olivia's waiting woman, keeps them company but also scolds them on behalf of her mistress when their noise becomes unbearable. Malvolio, Olivia's steward, is a strong enemy of festivity who tries to make her house a cosy and quiet place in line with his mistress' vow to seven years of mourning and seclusion. He considers himself entitled to teach the revellers a lesson:

My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?

(*Twelfth Night*, 2.3.75-79)

Malvolio's haughty bearing is so humiliating and irritating that Maria decides to take revenge on him while Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and the clown eagerly join her. She writes a letter imitating Olivia's handwriting with hints of Olivia's affection for Malvolio and drops it in his way. The moment Malvolio discovers it his already extant ambition increases dramatically as it occurs to him that by marrying Olivia *he* could become the master of her property. In order to please her he starts behaving in such a foolish and presumptuous way (allegedly demanded by Olivia) that he is eventually imprisoned as a madman. When the joke is explained to Olivia, she has him released but Malvolio is so resentful that he leaves the stage in fury, promising to retaliate against them all.

It should be noted, however, that the air of festivity which undoubtedly dominates the play does not entail a perfectly joyous atmosphere. Apart from the tender but vivid and energetic Viola, the main plot is also remembered for the melancholic characters – Duke Orsino and Olivia – and Feste's melancholic songs which introduce a note of sadness into the Illyrian setting:

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fie away, fie away, breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid;
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it.
My part of death no one so true
Did share it.
Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strawn;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown:
A thousand thousand sighs to save
Lay me, O where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there.
(*Twelfth Night*, 2.4.49-64)

Such an example of *memento mori* is not to be found in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, where happiness is complete and sadness non-existent because officially banished by Duke Theseus. If *Twelve Night* functions itself as a festival, the note of sadness it certainly possesses may be explained as either coming out of the surplus of leisure and lethargy or of an awareness that the festival must eventually come to an end. The sub-plot and its rollicking characters also testify to the impossibility of an everlasting festival because unbridled festivity inevitably turns into disorder and violence.

3. Conclusion

In the first three analysed comedies – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* – festivity is a wished for occasion, a reward to be gained after an effort has been made. It can also be perceived as an objective of the dramatic plot and the destination the characters head for. Duke Theseus' wedding, Duke Senior's forest celebration and Portia's festivity in Belmont all take place after wisdom has been achieved, intricate situations resolved and reconciliations made. In such happy

moments festivity comes as a deserved relaxation and real pleasure just because everybody knows it is a get together of limited duration after which life will resume its everyday course. In *Twelfth Night*, on the other hand, notably in its sub-plot, life *is* festivity. The revellers eat and drink, crack jokes, sing to the music and make noise. Every single day is the same as they are parasites without obligations and a sense of duty, people who have nowhere to go because they are stuck in the festive setting. Although it does not seem to be the case at first sight, Duke Orsino and Olivia also appear to be stuck in a kind of an everlasting holiday in *their* respective surroundings, a holiday marked by leisure, longing and contemplation, which would have lasted forever if it had not been for the shipwreck and Viola's arrival in Illyria. Both the sub-plot and the main plot seem to suggest that ceaseless festivity eventually results in a dead end.

If Shakespeare's four major comedies can be said to bring to life the secular half of the Elizabethan year, to evoke its particular periods and the activities peculiar to them, the question of why Shakespeare chose to depict its secular and not ritualistic part remains to be answered. In line with Laroque's remark that the secular part of the year lacked important religious festivals, Shakespeare's festive comedies can be understood as his *addenda* to that half of the Elizabethan festive calendar which was not already packed with celebrations. Festivities in themselves, Shakespeare's major comedies have the significance comparable to that of the new holidays inaugurated by the Tudor authorities. And what is more, although they are new events in the Elizabethan culture, they also reintroduce, albeit in a displaced form, and preserve, those older, forgotten, silenced or prohibited traditions which would otherwise have been irrevocably lost.

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„ПЕТНАЕСТ ДАНА СЛАВЉА И НЕМИРА”: ЕЛИЗАБЕТИНСКИ ГОДИШЊИ
ЦИКЛУС У ШЕКСПИРОВИМ ВЕЛИКИМ КОМЕДИЈАМА

Сажетак

У студији *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* аутор Франсоа Ларок анализира светковине и њихово књижев-но и имаголошко представљање у Шекспировој Енглеској. Он сматра да је елизабетинска година била суштински једноставна и логична, будући подељена на две половине. Прва половина је почињала на дан зимске краткодневице, 24 децембра, и завршавала се на дан летње краткодневице, 24 јуна. Укључивла је дванаест дана празновања Божића и важне покретне празнике, попут Ускрса и Духова, те је Ларок назива ритуалистичком половином године. Другу половину, која почиње 25. јуна и завршава се 24. децембра, одликују мањак великих верских празника, неколико фиксних светковина и већи број радних од празничних дана, те је позната као секуларна половина године. Ослањајући се на Ларокове увиде, овај рад поставља тезу да Шекспирове велике комедије – *Сан летње ноћи*, *Како вам драго*, *Млетачки трговац* и *Богојављенска ноћ* – оживљавају секуларни део елизабетинске године тако што се свака односи на одређени период у њој и активности карактеристичне за њега.

Кључне речи: Шекспир, светковине, *Сан летње ноћи*, *Како вам драго*, *Млетачки трговац*, *Богојављенска ноћ*