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## **“I AM FOR OTHER THAN FOR DANCING MEASURES”: SHAKESPEARE’S SPIRITUAL QUEST IN *AS YOU LIKE IT***

### **Abstract**

The critical insights of Ted Hughes (his understanding of ‘active ritual drama’ and vision of the ‘Mother Forest’), Northrop Frye (his perception of the Forest of Arden as the green world originating in the bygone Golden Age) and Riane Eisler (her recognition of the partnership model necessary for the playwright’s recreation of the mythic domain based on the matriarchal principles of equality) are combined in the paper in order to explore the spiritual quest Shakespeare embarked on in *As You Like It*. Special attention here is given to Melancholy Jacques, whose decision to devote himself to a solitary life in search of the causes for the existence of the hostility and rivalry between brothers reflects Shakespeare’s professional decision to dedicate himself to the resolution of this issue throughout his writing career.

**Key words:** active/passive ritual drama, Mother Forest, green world, partnership model

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## **1. Introduction: Spiritual Quest as a Transition from the Realistic to Mythic Domain**

The paper aims to explore the spiritual quest Shakespeare embarked on while writing the popular pastoral comedy *As You Like It* in 1599. Although the story of the play was not originally devised by him (as is the case with a great number of Shakespeare's plays), but was to a large degree inspired by Thomas Lodge's romantic prose work *Rosalind*, it can be rightfully asserted that Shakespeare's version of the story contains certain elements that contribute to the play's originality and uniqueness (the aforementioned spiritual quest of the author certainly being one of them). In order to clarify the spiritual quest in question here, we have to resort to Ted Hughes' reading of *As You Like It* as a valid illustration of "active ritual drama" (Hughes 1992: 107).

Namely, in his influential study *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992) Ted Hughes differentiates between two types of ritual drama relevant for the interpretation of Shakespeare's opus: passive and active. Both kinds of ritual drama start with the same premise – "a human being is only half alive if their life on the realistic, outer plane does not have the full assent and cooperation of their life on the mythic plane" whereby "the whole business of art... is to reopen the negotiations with the mythic plane" (Hughes 1992: 106). Whereas passive ritual drama's function is to contribute to "communally organized social bonding" and to present a "natural form of deep therapy, where the mythic plane holds the keys to health, vitality, meaningfulness and psychic freedom on the outer plane" (Hughes 1992: 106), active ritual drama goes a step further:

Active ritual drama always begins with a psychic malaise, usually a failure in the link between the personality on the realistic plane and the spiritual self or soul on the mythic plane. This breakdown of communications between ego and soul is always brought about by a 'sin' – usually some more or less extreme form of the ego's neglect or injury to the soul. The result is like the primitive's loss of the soul. In this sense, active ritual drama begins where the traditional shaman's healing drama begins and its purpose is the same: to recover the soul and reconnect it to the ego (Hughes 1992: 107-108).

It is precisely on this level that Hughes perceives *As You Like It*: the dispossessed Orlando becomes the epitome of Shakespeare's "ailing ego" that gradually becomes "illuminated and transfigured by new spiritual understanding and in harmony with the universe – of which the elemental soul is an emanation" (Hughes 1992: 108). As a matter of fact, both variants of ritual drama are offered here at the same time: one for the audience and/or readers who want to enjoy the romantic pastoral comedy and be entertained with the numerous amusing obstacles on the way to the lovers' happy ending, and the other for those who can perceive the significance of the process of the main protagonist's recuperation on the realistic plane, and, more importantly, his commitment to the spiritual quest on the mythic plane, the issue Shakespeare deemed crucial for his artistic vision.

The duality of the play's setting – a duchy in France and the Forest of Arden – actually constitutes the frame for the coexistence of the realistic and mythic realm previously mentioned. Thus, a certain transition, mostly represented through the physical suffering and extreme danger that the main characters undergo, can be traced in the action of the play: from the court, a place that belongs to the realistic domain governed by corruption, political ambition and strife, to the forest, a place belonging to the mythic domain symbolically implying moral healing, personal growth and renewal.<sup>1</sup>

There are certainly many ways of interpreting the transition from the corrupt court to the idyllic Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* (quite symbolically the movement from the domain of experience to that of innocence), but one legitimate reading is to see in it an indirect reply to Baltazare Castiglione's *Courtier* (1528). For Castiglione the court represented the new secular setting for the cultivation of genuinely courteous or virtuous men. Unconscious of any irony, he praised *sprezzatura* – a manner that has the appearance of ease and spontaneity but is in fact carefully calculated and studied – as the chief asset of the ideal courtier (Castiglione 1953).

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<sup>1</sup> This binary opposition in the play evokes Northrop Frye's distinction between two worlds (the contrasted worlds of objective reality and inner desire) in his study *The Educated Imagination* (1963) in the first chapter entitled *The Motive for Metaphor*, whereby the transformation of reality, influenced by the inner desire to recapture the lost harmony with the natural world and transform necessity into freedom, finally results in the creation of the third world, the one created by man, e.g. in this case, the visionary artist: "This third level is a vision or model in your mind of what you want to construct... So we begin to see where the imagination belongs in the scheme of human affairs. It's the power of constructing possible models of human experience." (Frye 1993: 9)

However, Shakespeare was interested in the truth behind the appearances. At the court of the usurping Duke Frederick, dominated by his power games and crafty intrigues, *sprezzatura* conceals a cynical strategy of tragic self-betrayal (here optimistically leading to the sincere repentance of both villains, Duke Frederick and Oliver, unlike in *Hamlet*, for instance, where this strategy ultimately results in madness and death). Shakespeare's goal was to show that far from cultivating independent and free-thinking individuals, courts produced ruthless tyrants and hypocritical Machiavellians.

In accord with this idea, it is important to emphasize that Shakespeare was rather aware of the fact so vividly discussed later by Riane Eisler in her internationally known bestseller *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1989) about the existence of two alternatives in the historical development of our civilization – the first based on the partnership model, the second on the dominator model – the latter implying a high degree of fear and violence, and an authoritarian social structure and hierarchy of domination, all of which perfectly portray the Renaissance courts Shakespeare realistically described and directly criticized in his plays. The partnership model, on the other hand, corresponds to the mythic plane Shakespeare was set on reincarnating in his artistic vision, the spiritual domain of the Forest of Arden, whereby man lived in harmony with natural laws and was committed to the principles of sharing and caring:

The old love for life and nature and the old ways of sharing rather than taking away, of caring rather than oppressing, and the view of power as responsibility rather than domination did not die out... the old roots of civilization were never eradicated. But, like women and qualities associated with femininity, they were relegated to a secondary place. Neither did the human yearning for beauty, truth, justice and peace disappear (Eisler 1989: xvii).

The old roots of civilization are symbolically represented in *As You Like It* through the voices of socially lower classes, underprivileged and inferior at the court of Duke Frederick, but rather potent and compelling in the Forest of Arden; furthermore, the wisdom of ordinary peasants, shepherds and shepherdesses, as well as the court jesters and fools, is appreciated and presented as more humane, lifelike and overwhelming than the Machiavellian court practice. However, in the realistic domain of the court, their life-approving philosophy was not even considered as a valid alternative – there was no place for the humanistic values of sharing, harmony, equality and peace, and, as Riane Eisler comments, this tragic

event occurred at the moment of transition from the matriarchal to the patriarchal system of values:

But there was no such place left in their new world. For this was now a world where, having violently deprived the Goddess and the female half of humanity of all power, gods and men of war ruled. It was a world in which the Blade, and not the Chalice, would henceforth be supreme, a world in which peace and harmony would be found only in the myths and legends of a long lost past (Eisler 1989: xviii).

This idea is quite analogous to Hughes' view of the tragic error our humanity suffers from, described in detail through the myth of Venus and Adonis, in which, by alluding to Shakespeare's version of this myth (1593), the ungrateful young hero rejects the love of the Goddess, puritanically disgusted with it since he perceives it as "sweating lust", "blotted with blame", "full of gorged lies", totally contrasted to his rather deficient vision of true love which "to Heaven is fled" and "comforts like sunshine after rain" (2007: 146-148). This episode that Hughes notices in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* actually reflects the transitional moment whereby matriarchy was succeeded by patriarchy, the moment Eisler refers to as the symbolic downfall of the life-giving Chalice and the rise of the power-centered Blade. According to Ted Hughes, Western history would henceforth be generated, as the rejected Venus in Shakespeare's poem prophesied, by "power-crazy men" (Hughes 1992: 43). Thus, due to the overthrow of the system of values and actual dominance of the male over the female sphere, Shakespeare's visionary heroes are purposefully set on a quest to recreate the long-gone mythic unity and, on their way, experience numerous, extraordinary, significantly revealing ordeals.

## **2. The Rival Brothers: Reconnection with the Lost Soul (Rosalind)**

In his remarkable study *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), Northrop Frye claims that the underlying myth in literature is that of a quest, whereby comedy is perceived as the mythos of spring. Comic vision is based on the triumph of the main character over the blocking forces (natural or human) and generally implies a movement from one kind of society to another (from tyranny to freedom, from the old to the young, from winter

to spring) resulting in the society at the end of the comedy as a projection of our desires (see Frye 1957: 163-186).

A valid illustration of this idea can be easily noticed in *As You Like It*: from the beginning of the play, the audience and/or readers are presented with the conflict between the usurping society, on the one hand, and the vision of the desirable society, on the other. Thus, Duke Frederick symbolically represents, as Frye terms it, a cruel, absurd or irrational law (since he acts on his whim and forces the characters to partake in his obsessions) that will finally be evaded. The movement of the play revolves around a society controlled by habit, arbitrary law and the older characters, and ultimately results in a society governed by youth and freedom, thus quite literally putting into practice Frye's notion of comedy as a movement from winter to spring. Throughout the comedy, the audience and/or readers witness unlikely conversions, miraculous transformations, and acts of providence so that the desirable ending logically follows. The desirable society achieved at the end of the comedy actually represents a return to the Golden Age that existed in the past (before the action of the play commenced), the domain corresponding to Eisler's vision of the partnership model of society symbolically represented through the life-giving Chalice (Eisler 1989), reflecting a stable and harmonious order (represented through the rule of Duke Senior and Sir Rowland), disrupted by folly and obsession (of Duke Frederick and Oliver) and then finally restored (through the characters of Orlando and Rosalind):

...the hero's society rebels against the society of the *senex* and triumphs, but the hero's society is a Saturnalia, a reversal of social standards which recalls a Golden Age in the past before the main action of the play begins. Thus we have a stable and harmonious order disrupted by folly, obsession, forgetfulness, "pride and prejudice", or events not understood by the characters themselves, and then restored (Frye 1957: 171).

Shakespeare's romantic comedy focuses on the final reconciliation or conversion of the blocking characters rather than their punishment (in *As You Like It*: the rival brothers Oliver and Orlando are reconciled, Duke Frederick is miraculously converted), which was a theme present in the medieval tradition of the seasonal ritual play, as Frye notices and claims that "we may call it the drama of the green world, its plot being assimilated to the ritual theme of the triumph of life and love over the waste land... Thus the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal

world, moves into the green world, goes into metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world" (Frye 1957: 182). The Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* represents an emanation of Frye's "green world", which is analogous to the dream world, the world of our desires. In this symbolical victory of summer over winter, we have an illustration of "the archetypal function of literature in visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from 'reality', but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate" (Frye 1957: 184).

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare portrays Hughes' idea of a psychic malaise that originates in the clash between the realistic and mythic plane whose ultimate result is the injury of the soul, through the theme of the rival brothers (Orlando vs. Oliver, Duke Senior vs. Duke Frederick), whereby the respect for the patriarchal principle of the right of the firstborn represents the cause of the major conflict; namely, it implies a sort of competition between the brothers that should be regarded as equals, ultimately resulting in the insatiable craving for dominance and supremacy over the weak (second-born) brother, whereas the matriarchal egalitarian principles are simply discarded and/or not given enough attention.

Both Hughes and Frye explore the reasons for Shakespeare's description of the overthrow of the good and moral ruling principle by the immoral impulse of the brother who at the beginning of the play unjustly gets the throne for himself. The implication of the possible reason for the weakness of both Duke Senior and Orlando that both critics offer in their respective studies can perhaps be best summarized and paraphrased through the idea that they lack a deeper connection with their 'soul' or as T.S. Eliot would put it, they suffer from 'the dissociation of sensibility'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot employs this term in order to glorify the quality of 'unified sensibility' typical of the English metaphysical poets, who were able to combine totally disparate aspects of human experience in their portrayal of the complexity of life, a quality that was later lost in the poetry of Milton and Dryden, with the emphasis on decorum and versification rather than the emotional content and personal involvement in their verses:

"A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes... sometimes we are told 'to look into our hearts and write'. But that is not looking deep enough. Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts" (Eliot 1921: 64).

From this point of view, *As You Like It* can be interpreted as a play in which the hero symbolically reunites with his soul. For instance, Orlando's soul is significantly represented through Rosalind. When he finally reunites with her, he simultaneously reconciles with his vicious brother Oliver:

She is the feminine aspect of Orlando's mythic self... She is what Orlando was lacking at the beginning of the play. The two recognize each other automatically, on first sight. The end of the play and the mending of all other fractures will come when Orlando and Rosalind are betrothed (Hughes 1992: 112).

In addition, it is no coincidence that the marriage between Orlando and Rosalind takes place in the Forest of Arden. This is Shakespeare's vision of the final unity and healing only to be accomplished in the 'Mother' Forest, as Hughes terms it (1992: 110), which ultimately represents a symbol of the totality of nature and men's psychic completeness. In Frye's reading of Shakespeare's green world, an identical idea of the heroine as the lost soul is expressed: "In the rituals and myths the earth that produces the rebirth is generally a female figure, and the death and revival, or disappearance and withdrawal of human figures in romantic comedy generally involves the heroine" (Frye 1957: 183). Thus, Rosalind represents the epitome of the matriarchal earth goddess who revives the hero and at the same time brings about the comic resolution by disguising herself as a boy (for those members of the audience and/or readers who regard the play as an instance of Hughes' passive ritual drama and thus primarily enjoy the process of the young lovers' overcoming various impediments on the way to a desirable end to the play).

### **3. Melancholy Jacques: a Self-Portrait of the Author?**

However, apart from the rival brothers in the realistic domain of the court, Shakespeare also introduces another idea, equally relevant for the spiritual

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Although in this study T.S. Eliot does not mention Shakespeare, this idea can be metaphorically applied to the interpretation of his plays in the sense of the author's constant reminder of the destructive alternative that the majority of his ambitious protagonists opt for – the one based not on cherishing the totality of life's experience, but on the sole aiming towards power and ambition, through the systematic abuse of the intellect, at the expense of the deeper connection with their soul, as previously stated in Hughes' and Frye's reading of *As You Like It*.



quest discussed here, through the confusing insertion of two characters with the same name – Jacques (a name that does not appear again in any of his plays and here, within the same play, refers to two characters). The symbolic bond between Melancholy Jacques (an allusion to Shakespeare himself according to Hughes (1992: 115)) and Jacques de Boys (the middle of the Boys' brothers) alludes to the idea of the idyllic forest brotherhood: namely, they are both scholars, one is a student of the ways of the world and the other is a student of books, thus symbolically representing the playwright's wishful unity of the realistic and mythic domain. Hence, whereas Jacques de Boys represents the mythic intelligence that is the unifying, healing intelligence of the Mother Forest, creative intelligence or spiritual intellect, Melancholy Jacques represents the unifying intelligence of rational consciousness (Hughes 1992: 113).

The chief role of Melancholy Jacques becomes to investigate the role of fraternal crime. Although the play ends with a note of reconciliation, Jacques does not join in. He decides to join Duke Frederick in his exile in order to understand his guilty conscience and repentance, as well as the cause for the existence of the hostility between the two brothers:

If I heard you rightly,  
The Duke has put on a religious life,  
And thrown into neglect the pompous court?  
To him will I: out of these convertites  
There is much matter to be heard and learned...  
I am for other than for dancing measures. (V, iv, 195-200)

"In other words", as Hughes claims, "Shakespeare commits himself to the quest on which his irrational self has already decided. Melancholy Jacques dismisses the pursuit of social happiness... and [he] is Shakespeare himself, thirty-five years old, awake in the depth of the 'Mother' Forest, about to enter his *Divina Commedia*" (Hughes 1992: 115-116). The ideas that Hughes suggests here seem to be rather plausible and trustworthy and can be taken as a well-founded explanation of Shakespeare's spiritual quest initially proposed for discussion in this paper. Namely, if we accept the idea of Melancholy Jacques as the emanation of the playwright himself, that fact would account for Shakespeare's persistent treatment of the theme of rival brothers in his entire dramatic opus. Of course, the author's interest in this theme was rather prevalent in other plays written before *As You Like*

*It* (1599), but it is in this play that the audience and/or readers can finally witness Shakespeare's conscious decision to dedicate his complex artistic vision to the exploration of the patriarchal competition, rivalry and craving for power between brothers, their crucial motifs, motivation, reasons and ultimate result, as well as his creative condemnation and warning against this common practice.

It is no wonder then that parallel with his work on *As You Like It* (1599), Shakespeare was writing *Hamlet* (namely, he probably started writing it in 1599, but according to the history records the final date of its completion is quite uncertain and mostly refers to the period of 1599-1601, quite significantly for the argument presented in this paper). Perhaps the best illustration of the relevance of this theme for the playwright himself can be seen in the famous Closet Scene in *Hamlet* (Act III, scene iv), when the young, almost deranged Danish prince imposes what seems to him an obvious difference between the two rival brothers in the play, his father (the late king Hamlet) and his uncle Claudius (the usurping brother) on his mother, queen Gertrude:

Look here, upon this picture and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
See, what a grace was seated on this brow –  
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,  
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;  
A combination and a form indeed  
Where every god did seem to set his seal,  
To give the world assurance of a man.  
This was your husband. Look you know, what follows:  
Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear,  
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes? (III, iv, 54-66)

The young idealist Hamlet is profoundly disgusted and disillusioned with a glimpse into the reality of the Danish court, where the relevant memory of the glories of the past (created by his godlike father) is ultimately erased and replaced with the opportunist's practice of wearing masks that conceal obedient servants of the system (claiming allegiance to his beastly uncle), the masks worn by his friends, servants, acquaintances, relatives (including

even his own mother). Hence, the essence of this tragedy represents the main protagonist's revelation of the meaninglessness, chaos, enigma and mystery behind what seemed to be meaning, order and certainty: quite symbolically, the movement from the domain of innocence (from Hamlet's University of Wittenberg, an ideal, almost mythic, realm of books, learning, knowledge and answers provided) to experience (the court of Elsinore, a realistic realm revealing the political reality of strife, ambition and crime), finally resulting in the tragic self-betrayal, leading to madness and death. This movement is thus thoroughly contrasted to the transition previously described in *As You Like It* – from the corrupt court to the ideal Forest of Arden, from innocence to experience.

Although Shakespeare showed the tragic consequences of self-betrayal (that could be closely associated with the rejection of the mythic or spiritual sphere previously discussed in the paper) as a sort of sincere warning in *Hamlet*, this pessimistic vision was ultimately not an option for the resolution of the spiritual quest undertaken in *As You Like It* that the playwright himself favoured. It is perhaps in the romance *The Tempest* (1610-1611), usually regarded as the last play Shakespeare wrote without collaboration with other authors, that we could search for the ultimate realization of his artistic vision. The theme of the rival brothers is present here as well; however, whereas in *Hamlet* the hostility between the brothers is hopelessly portrayed through the tragic death of the main characters, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare places emphasis on acts of mercy and forgiveness as a more valid option for the resolution of the discussed antagonism. Thus, Prospero, the unjustly banished brother, the rightful Duke of Milan, who, with the help of his magic, induces a storm to entice his usurping brother Antonio and his accomplice King Alonso of Naples to his solitary place of exile, finally gives up on his plans for revenge and states:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason against my fury  
Do I take part: the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. (V, i, 25-31)

The storm that Shakespeare masterfully depicts here actually represents a symbolic rebellion against any kind of false authority, so that the audience

and/or readers are found in the domain of the mythic once again. The authorities in the realistic realm are exposed here as utterly powerless and helpless revealingly showing Shakespeare's attitude that the forces of nature, instigated by self-conscious individuals, eventually destroy the corrupt human order. Thus, Prospero, the benevolent magician who on his banished island rediscovers the significance of the harmonious (mythic!) bond between man and nature, the brother unjustly discarded from the realistic domain of secular power, (and, according to Ted Hughes, another character that alludes to the self-portrait of the author (Hughes 1992: 99)), acts here as an agent of moral reawakening who decides to terminate the bloody brothers' feud and restore the long-lost mythic unity by setting an example for the future generations to follow – by practicing mercy and forgiveness.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Hence, the spiritual journey that Shakespeare purposefully undertook in *As You Like It*, reflecting Melancholy Jacques' conscious decision to dispense with his old way of life by announcing that he is "for other than for dancing measures" (V, iv, 200), is, according to Ted Hughes, successfully completed in *The Tempest*, where the tragic fraternal crime is finally accounted for:

While in *The Tempest*, as Prospero, this figure judges, repairs and redeems the tragic fraternal crime that has spoiled his life, in *As You Like It*, as Jacques, he resolves to search, i.e. to investigate, 'through and through' man's tragic crime against himself and his brothers (Hughes 1992: 99).

In conclusion, Shakespeare's ultimate decision to revert to the long-forgotten values of mercy and forgiveness in his dramatic opus is completely analogous to Riane Eisler's emphasis of the recognition of the validity of the matriarchal partnership model as opposed to the patriarchal dominator model, whereby the necessary reconnection with the mythic sphere would be finally achieved in Shakespeare's idyllic Forest of Arden, which corresponds to Hughes' vision of the 'Mother Forest' (Hughes 1992: 110) and Frye's vision of the green world (Frye 1957: 182). This is definitely one of the reasons why the passionate admirers and enthusiastic interpreters of Shakespeare's work should regard the pastoral comedy *As You Like It* as a

key element in the attempt to resolve the spiritual riddle that the greatest English Renaissance bard posed for us.

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Received: 22 July 2014

Accepted for publication: 1 December 2014

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„ЗА ДРУГО САМ ЈА, НЕ ЗА ПЛЕСНЕ ИГРЕ ТЕ”: ШЕКСПИРОВА ДУХОВНА  
ПОТРАГА У КОМЕДИЈИ КАКО ВАМ ДРАГО

**Сажетак**

Сврха рада јесте да се истражи тема духовног трагања коју је Шекспир започео у комедији *Како вам драго*, комбиновањем критичких увида Хјуза (његове интерпретације „активне ритуалне драме” и „мајке шуме”), Фраја (његове перцепције Арденске шуме као зеленог света који потиче из давног Златног доба) и Ајслерове (значаја који придаје моделу партнерства неопходном у Шекспировом поновном успостављању митског домена заснованог на матријархалним принципима једнакости). Посебна пажња у раду посвећује се лику меланхоличног Џејквиза, чија одлука да се посвети усамљеничком животу како би истражио узроке ривалитета међу браћом осликава Шекспирову тежњу да се током целокупне своје каријере драмског писца бави решавањем овог проблема.

**Кључне речи:** активна/пасивна ритуална драма, „мајка шума”, зелени свет, модел партнерства