THE EMBODIMENT AND EFFECTS OF IMAGINATION IN "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM" *BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND* "THE MARVELLOUS PUPPET SHOW" *BY MIGUEL DE CERVANTES SAAVEDRA*

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***Abstract*:** *Imagination represents the ability to conceptualize the surreal, the unusual, the power to transcend into the world of fantastic elements. The importance of imagination for stage conventions that allow the action of the play to unfold is given special attention in these two plays,* A Midsummer Night`s Dream *by William Shakespeare and* The Marvellous Puppet Show *by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. In the case of the first play, by using the power of imagination, Shakespeare explores what people believed in his time about dreams, fairies and transformations, whereas Cervantes exposes the nature of the prejudice in society, both racial and ethnic, by presenting two charlatans who succeed in tricking an entire village by claiming that only the old Christians of pure blood, untainted by Jewish or Muslim origin, can see a puppet show which in fact did not exist, it was only in their imagination.*

***Keywords*:** *imagination, dream, deceit.*

Imagination is understood as "the capacity for creative association facilitated by the collaboration of reasoning, emotional and remembering activities" (Armstrong, 1946: 178) and in the case of William Shakespeare, the foundation of his imaginative thought is, in general, the realisation and expression of life`s dualism: riches and poverty, palace and prison, life and death, pride and degradation.

The writer states in *Love's Labour's Lost*, through the words of his character, Holofernes, that:

> This is a gift I have... full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions: these are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourisht in the womb of pia mater, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion. But the gift is good in those in whom it is acute, and I am thankful for it.

The unique setting of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a complex, imaginative world, which can also be characterized by dualism. The waking mode, which represents the rational, analytical and practical attitude, is compensated by a dreaming mode which represents the irrational and invisible forces. Rational things are combined with irrational things and one sees how one is incomplete without the other. The play owes its strength to its dualism, to its paradoxical field of meaning, formed out of elements as reality and dream, culture and nature, history and mystery, intellect and instincts, life and art, masculine and feminine.

In this play within a play Shakespeare expands on the themes of love, art, imagination and dreaming to portray the relationship between the audience and the performers on stage.

Imagination can perceive and art reveal an unseen reality just beyond the range of the senses and of the rational mind. In the *Dream*, art is no longer defined only by its ability to shape and transform an obstinate reality, as in [*The Taming of the] Shrew* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, but

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is shown to have an ability to penetrate the screen of the immediate world and reveal an imaginative truth that lies behind it. (Bloom, 1987:49)

Obviously, the woods represent the metaphysical world of the poet's imagination and Athens represents the physically grounded world of facts. Taking into account this dualism, the writer emphasizes such aspects of Theseus' character to contrast him and his world of facts to the world of the poet, the world of creativity and dreams.

Theseus reveals, in the first scene of Act V, that he does not believe in the fantasy world of the woods and that he does not trust in the tales of the lovers, rejecting all notions of magic in the woods: "I never may believe / These antique fables, nor these fairy toys." (5.1.2-3). Theseus does so because he considers that they misrepresent or fail to fall in line with the so-called rules of his factual world. He finds himself completely unable to comprehend the woods, the realm of imagination and dreams.

Shakespeare illustrates, throughout the play, how the experience of love seems like a dreamlike experience and cannot be proven, with facts and arguments, as the rational Theseus would like. An example in this regard is the relationship between Hermia and Lysander, lovers which escape to the woods to secretly elope, but also the newly formed relationship between Helena and Demetrius resembles the ideal of a romantic love.

Real life becomes a dream for at least one character in the play: Titania. When she first observers Bottom, even in his transformed shape, she exclaims, "Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note; / So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape; And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me / On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee." (3.1.122-125). Shakespeare points out the poetic qualities of the language of love in Tatania's flowing and poetic manner of expressing herself. He also exaggerates the dream-like nature of love in the fact that she fell in love immediately after awakening. Even Bottom initially doubts her instantaneous love but eventually admits that "reason and love keep little company together nowadays" (3.1.127-128).

Bottom advocates that reason and love cannot exist together. Therefore, Theseus' world of reason and facts cannot coexist with the dreamlike and poetic world of love in the woods.

In connection to the dualism between the waking and the dreaming mode there is also the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta, a relationship that is in contrast to any of the other lovers in the play is the. Their marriage exhibits inequality as Theseus assumes a domineering role, admitting at the beginning of the play that he "wooed thee [Hippolyta] with the sword" (1.1.16), not with the poetic language of love.

In contrast, Hippolyta expresses a desire for the romantic love which Hermia and Helena experience. She wants to believe the stories of the lovers and, in response to Theseus' comment concerning his disbelief in the lovers' stories, Hippolyta argues, "But all the story of the night told over, / And all their minds transfigured so together, / More witnesseth than fancy's image, / And grows to something of great constancy." (5.1.23-26).

Hippolyta uses the rational argument that because all the lovers experience the same transforming power, their experiences are not figments of the imagination. Instead, they prove to be factual in nature. Actually, the only reason she uses the rational argument is because she considers that, in this manner, she shall be successful in supplicating her husband, a man of reason.

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Theseus unknowingly tells a truth at the beginning of Act V, when he ironically gives a description of the poet: “The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, / And as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen / Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation.” (5.1.12-17). Theseus describes the ability of the poet to surpass material boundaries and to give substance to the abstract although he later condemns the imaginative notions of the poet as “tricks”.

In fact, at the end of his play, Shakespeare warns the audience to accept the play as just a dream, through the character of Robin. Robin poetically explains, “If we shadows have offended, / Think but this, and all is mended: / That you have but slumbered here, / While these visions did appear.” (5.2.1-5). The author shows the audience one of his dream worlds in the form of this play because he created it from his own imagination, reflections and dreams. As a poet, Shakespeare emphasizes the necessity of dreaming for the creation of art.

> The presence in the imagination of a group of images that are connected by similar emotional tones will strengthen and sharpen the apprehension of images that are or may be connected in their constituents, or that are or may become imbued with like tones. The greater the number of images in such a group, and the greater the intensity of the emotional tone or tones with which the group is suffused, the more likely is any one among the images to enter the stream of conscious thought in connection with old problems or new experiences, or to be recalled in casual meditation, or to occur in dreams. (Paden, 1942:7)

Even though Theseus describes his rejection of imagination immediately after Quince’s prologue, he revises his thoughts on the topic in the middle of the small play. Theseus tells Hippolyta, “If we imagine no worse than they of them-/selves, they may pass for excellent men. Here comes two noble beasts in: a man and a lion.” (5.1.211-213). Therefore, Theseus becomes a part of the imaginative world of the play because he succumbs to its entertainment and leaves his world of reason for a while. Even though he never willingly accepts the “tricks” which imagination plays, he now recognizes the need for imagination in order to believe in the ridiculous actions of the play, if only temporarily.

Therefore, in Shakespeare`s play Theseus and Hippolyta, the ruler of Athens and his warrior bride, represent order and stability and are therefore in contrast with the uncertainty and instability of almost the entire play. In comparison with the dream mode where one is not in control of one’s environment, Theseus and Hippolyta are always entirely in control of theirs.

Shakespeare tries to make the reader to reassess the world of dreams and to eventually believe in the strength of the imagination. He uses Quince’s prologue to revisit the concepts of imagination and dreaming, especially because they apply to the creation of art and to romantic love. Theseus and the audience are bound to recognize the transforming characteristics of imagination.

In trying to do so, William Shakespeare uses symbolism and imagery to develop the motif of the *night* in combination with the related symbols of the play to demonstrate the power of night and its correlation with love and vision. He also makes extensive use of the night forest which helps one of the main plots of the play, the situation of the four young lovers.

At first glance, it might seem strange that Shakespeare chose a forest at night as the main setting for a comedy but the dark forest serves as the centre of the play’s world, in contrast with Athens, a city that was perceived as the centre of ancient Greek

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civilization. The darkness of the night is intensified in the forest, reason for which the characters fear to be alone. In Act 2 Helena cries out to Demetrius not to abandon her in the dark and when Lysander abandons Hermia, she is convinced that being alone in the dark could lead her to death: "Speak, of all loves; I swoon almost with fear. / No? Then I will perceive you are not nigh. / Either death or you I'll find immediately." (2.2.153-155).

The night symbolizes darkness and a state of blindness, mischief and madness, fairies and magic. The night forest also provides a setting for dangerous and daring acts such as Hermia and Lysander's plan to escape Athens, the lovers planning to implement their plan and meet at "deep midnight" (1.1.223).

The only source of light at night which allows the lovers the see each other in this dark forest is the moon, which has been said all throughout the play to affect human behaviour. The moon is actually associated with love. In the opening scene of the play, Theseus is anxious to marry Hippolyta and he complains "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" (1.1.2-5). The moon is also compared to a bow which is associated with Cupid, the Roman god of love, who carries a bow to shoot arrows of love. "And then the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven, shall behold the night / Of our solemnities."(1.1.9-11)

In the prologue of his Ph.D. thesis, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Shakespeare's Syzygy of Meaning*, Muhammad Ismail Wali states that Purdon reads the mythological associations of the play including those of the moon, omitting its ominous ones (Purdon, 1974:178-203). He says that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has not received the appreciative attention it deserves compared to other works of Shakespeare, stating that:

> But in Shakespeare, the whole relationship between appearance and reality, reason and imagination, play and truth is probed much more deeply, particularly by the imagination of a marriage-play which parodies the main action. (*ibidem*)

Also, Geoffrey Steer concludes that:

> William Shakespeare establishes effective use of technique and setting that not only gain access to the dreams and desires of his characters, but also his audience. Although *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is comedic in nature, it provides serious insight into the importance of fantasy and desire to humanity - especially amidst certain intellectual thought in advancing civilization. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* demonstrates that fantasy is inseparably interconnected with desire, existent both within the imagination, and within the unconscious.

The Marvellous Puppet Show (*El Retablo de las Maravillas*) shows how the deceitful Chanfalla and Chirinos trick an entire town by showing his audience an empty stage but previously announcing that only those who are bastards or heretics would not see the performance.

As in *A Midsummer Night`s Dream*, we also encounter in *El Retablo de las Maravillas* two modes: the one corresponding to the *entremes*[1] (that of reality) and the one corresponding to the show, to the *retablo* (that of fiction), becoming a play within a play.

In order to help them in their new scheme, Chanfalla and Chirinos have hired a Rabelín, a musician, whose exceeding stupidity drives Chirinos to exclaim "The real

[1] interlude which is designed to be performed between the acts of more serious drama

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marvel will be if they don't stone him on sight! I've never seen such a miserable-looking creature in my life."

As the town council, the Governor, Mayor, Administrator and Scribe, approach, Chanfalla introduces himself as Montiel and convinces them to let him put on a show in celebration of a wedding. He calls his show *El Retablo de las Maravillas*, which he claims was created by the great and wise Tontonelo, a fictitious character made up by Chanfalla himself. Actually, *tonto* is Spanish for *fool*. But Chirinos states that first they have to be paid because the audience would no longer want to pay after already seeing the show.

The actual performance consists of the evocation by the charlatans of a succession of astonishing appearances. The people have been warned that in order to see the wonders one must have been born within the bounds of marriage and be an Old Christian therefore one must have no trace of Jewish or Muslim blood in his veins.

All are of course supremely confident that the announced disqualification could not possibly apply to them. And then, when it appears to each that indeed it does, all in this audience are desperate to conceal their presumed disability from their neighbours.

After being paid six *ducados*, Chanfalla begins the show by pretending to evoke Samson in the act of demolishing the temple. Doubtful at first, the villagers stare at each other, waiting to see if anyone reacts to Samson, who, of course, is not really there. The first moments are crucial because, if some say that they truly see the puppet show, then the rest of the villagers would follow.

The first reaction is of Benito Repollo who even begs Samson to spare him: "Spare me, you brute! We come here to enjoy ourselves and end up as pancakes!? Spare me, Sir Samson, in spite of my sins. Heed the prayers of these honest folk!".

Even though at the beginning some have doubts concerning the show "This is an amazing business. I can no more see Samson than I can see the Great Turk. Yet, there's no doubt that I'm legitimate and a true Christian.", "Do you see him, Castrato? / See him? Why wouldn't I see him? Are my eyes in the back of my head?", in the end all the villagers state that they see the puppet show, for the sake of honour.

They continue to pretend they see the wonders as a bull appears, followed by mice, reacting accordingly: "That bull has the devil in him. He has a fierce and horny look. I'd better take care or he might toss me.", "It'll take me three days to get over it. I could just see myself on those horns...they look as sharp as a cobbler's spike.", "Help me! Mice! Oh, woe is me! Cousin, pull your skirts tight about your legs and take care they don't bite! My, there are a lot of them!", "They're climbing all over me. A little brown mouse has me fast by the knee."

A "drenching rain that's pouring down from the source of the River Jordan" and "a bunch of rampant lions and honey bears" follow and, towards the end of the show, Chirinos produces a woman, who is mistakenly called Herodias but is in reality Salome, Herodias' daughter. As the men dance with the "beautiful Jew" one abruptly interrupts the dance and asks "if she's Jewish, how can she see the show?" An awkward moment of silence is broken by Chanfalla's crafty reply, "Every rule has its exception." Satisfied with his answer, the villagers continue to dance.

As they dance, a quartermaster appears and informs the villagers that there is a legion of soldiers approaching. He orders them to prepare lodging for them and departs. Convinced that the quartermaster is part of Tontonelo's show, the villagers dismiss him. Fearful for his life, Chanfalla tries to explain that the soldier is not part of the show and that they should prepare the lodging before he returns. The mayor, now completely

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convinced that the show is real, exclaims, “I know Tontonelo very well, and this looks like Tontonelo’s work.”

As they speak, the quartermaster returns and asks if the lodging has been prepared. The Administrator calls upon Chanfalla to make Salome appear, hoping that her appearance will make the quartermaster leave them alone. As Chanfalla pretends to evoke Salome, the villagers begin to dance around the “beautiful Jew”. Outraged, the quartermaster exclaims, “Are these people mad? What young lady? What dance? Who is this Tontonelo?”.

In that moment everyone realizes that the quartermaster does not see the wonders. The Scribe interrupts the stunning silence asking “What? Do you mean to say, Mr. Quartermaster, that you don’t see Herod’s girl over there?”. When the quartermaster confesses he does not, the villagers break out in accusations, shouting, “He’s one of them! The quartermaster is one of them. He’s one of them” and “De exillis es!”. Enraged, the quartermaster draws his sword and slaughters all the villagers, after which Chanfalla and Chirinos congratulate each other on the success of their deception, saying “What an extraordinary business this has been! The reputation of the marvellous puppet show remains unchanged; tomorrow we can show it to the town and we ourselves can claim victory in this battle. Long live Chirinos!”, “Long live Chanfalla!”.

Apart from being a social satire, Cervantes’s work brings out a latent appetite for wonder that translates into a willingness to be deceived. Moreover, once expectation is created, an audience can be unwilling to let go, unless it is surpassed by something better, especially by something unexpected.

One distinction should be made between the *fictional* audience, the gullible villagers, and the *real* audience. The play flatters the real audience by assuming its superiority and by letting it in on the joke.

> The *maravillas*, the wonders, are not only those on stage, but miracles, which only true believers are favoured to see. Whether the *retablo* should be understood in its theatrical sense, as a ‘short play’ or whether in its sacral meaning, as the frame, the retablo, behind the altar, or pictures on the altar, suggesting various meanings about true altars, is left to the reader’s imagination. (Stow, 2006:286).

Therefore, *El retablo de las maravillas* deals with two well-known motifs, the world as theatre and the emperor has no clothes. It develops its theme of truth and deception/appearance, illusion and reality, in the context of a particular context and language of Spain, embracing the definition that “art is a lie that tells the truth”[1].

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[1] Pablo Picasso

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