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Masque and A Midsummer Night's Dream

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ABSTRACT

Although it originated in Italy, the masque was a type of joyful courtly entertainment. To present a subservient allegory flattering to the patron, a masque included music, dance, singing, and acting inside an elaborate stage design. The artifice was a component of the Grand dance, and masque imagery typically came from Classical sources rather than Christian ones.The masque included a stage, lyric, scenic, and dramatic framework with song and dance. Depending on the size and splendour of the show, a troop of dancers—which could number eight to 16 —was always present throughout the court masque. As court masques were prestige performances, all of the dancers were typically noble and titled courtiers.Shakespeare`s play ***A Midsummer Night***`s ***Dream*** is among his most well-known and well-liked works. In ***A Midsummer Night`s Dream***, little is seen of the masque tradition; its presence is minuscule and the work contains far less spectacle than is expected of a masque. The text gravitates towards a more accessible style, offering more "low brow" sensibilities that make it more "popular" in terms of supporting commoners. This essay would bring out and discuss the masque elements in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***.

Keywords- Masque, AMND, Giulio Romano, Inigo Jones, Mannerism.

Introduction

Although it originated in Italy and became popular there before spreading to Europe in the 16th and early 17th centuries, the masque was a type of joyful courtly entertainment (a public version of the masque was the pageant). To present a subservient allegory flattering to the patron, a masque included music, dance, singing, and acting inside an elaborate stage design. The architectural framing and costumes may have been constructed by a renowned architect. For the speaking and singing parts, experts in acting and music were hired. The masque has its roots in a folk custom in which masked actors would unexpectedly visit a lord in his hall on particular nights of the year or to celebrate dynastic occasions, dancing and delivering presents. The grandiose pageants and courtly displays of ducal Burgundy in the late Middle Ages gave rise to the masque tradition. Masques, which might incorporate pastoral settings, mythological legends, and the theatrical elements of ethical debate, were often a gratis offering to the prince from among his guests. The allegory would inevitably have some political and social application. Such pageants generally concluded with a tableau of happiness and harmony and frequently commemorated a birth, marriage, change of ruler, or a Royal Entry. The artifice was a component of the Grand dance, and masque imagery typically came from Classical sources rather than Christian ones. In the hands of expert designers like Giulio Romano or Inigo Jones, masque thus adapted itself to Mannerism.

Typically, a masque included a stage, lyric, scenic, and dramatic framework with song and dance. Depending on the size and splendour of the show, a troop of dancers—which could number eight to sixteen—was always present throughout the court masque. As court masques were prestige performances, all of the dancers were typically noble and titled courtiers whose purpose was to inspire a sense of grandeur with their presence and lavish costuming rather than to sing or speak. It was anticipated that the artistic styling of the professional entertainers, who gave both vocal and instrumental performances and therefore made a cohesive spectacle, would enhance their finery among the extravagant surroundings.Certain conventions were present in masques' performances. The first dance or a march from the masquers' seating posture signaled their entrance. These deliberate acts of homage were frequently used by Ben Jonson's masques to honour the royal family. The torchbearers and dancers in the performance of Jonson's Masque of Queens used the main dance performance for such a purpose, forming the letters of Prince Charles' name—James' eldest son and heir—as they went. Over twenty of Jonson's masques were written during James' reign, and they were all characterized by such dexterity and precise performances. The use of classical ideas, imagery, and references was one of the masque genre's many traditions, as was the grandiosity of presentation.The masque, which is frequently portrayed as the most elaborate part of the spectacle, incorporates mythological, allegorical, and historical figures(Schelling 93-138).The big entrances and a few dances were specifically designed to spotlight the monarch, the honoree. The most often utilized figures come from classical Greece and Rome and can be seen in numerous Renaissance paintings. Some have perceived it as an attempt to flatter the king by including him or her among the most venerated deities of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.

Shakespeare always includes a play-within-the-play when there will be an aristocratic wedding. ***The Tempest***, ***As You Like It***, ***Love's Labour's Lost***, and ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** are the only four plays in which a marriage tie between aristocrats appears, despite the playwright dealing with marital concerns in many of his works, whether in comedy or tragedy, despite the fact that each one's scheme is unique. The magical masque of Ceres, Juno, and Iris in The Tempest to announce the engagement of Miranda and Ferdinand, and a wedding masque in ***As You Like It*** when Hymen enters to bless Rosalind, the legitimate Duke's daughter, to the knight Orlando de Boys, are the first two examples in which we find a masque.A dancing masque,

a pageant, and a dialogued final poem are all included in ***Love's Labour's Lost***. Additionally, ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is a comedic play performed by rural artisans in honour of the royal pair Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, on their wedding day. The play exhibits a masque-like element as a whole. It ends with the blessing from the fairy world, a lovely epithalamic melody.(HERNÁNDEZ 4)

Shakespeare's play ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is among his most well-known and well-liked works. Although the exact date of the play's debut is still unknown, it is assumed that it took place between 1594 and 1596. One of two aristocratic weddings is supposed to have hosted the initial performances. It was either first done at the Greenwich Palace wedding of Elizabeth Vere, the granddaughter of Lord Burghley, to William Earl of Derby in 1595, or at the Blackfriars home of the bride's father, Sir George Carey, in 1596, when Elizabeth Carey married Thomas, the son of Lord Berkeley. Nobody, however, can be certain.(***The British Library)***The bridal couple of the play, drawn from classical antiquity, serves excellently as the stage counterparts of the real bridal couple. The lines spoken by Oberon, the fairy king, express the traditional - compliment to Elizabeth who was present for the wedding:

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took
At a fair vestal throned by the west,
And loosed his love shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
But might I see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free,
(II. i. 154-64)

From the entrance of the wedding group in the first scene to the virtual epithalamium at the end, the play is eminently suited to a nuptial occasion and lends itself easily to masque influence and structure.

A ***Midsummer Night's Dream*** theme of reality versus illusion makes the play resemble a masque because many of the characters are not who they initially appear to be. It contrasts the youthful illusions of Lysander and Hermia and Demetrius and Helena with the noble, mature love of Theseus and Hippolyta. Shakespeare's development towards the ideal "romantic comedy," in which the fortunes of love and the humour of character are deftly merged, may be seen in this play.

The fairy figures' masque-like qualities are ingrained in their very nature. In the scenarios of the masques itself, they embody the fantastical far-off images. They also perform the masque dances at the play's conclusion. The fairy figures' masque-like qualities are ingrained in their very nature. They embody the fantasy and make-believe that permeate the entire performance. They represent the fantastical far-off images in the masque's sceneries. They also perform the masque dances at the play's conclusion. Then, almost every masque component in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** belongs to or depends on these creative spirits.All the scenes that take place in the woods are directed by Puck, affectionately known as "sweet Puck." When he requests a scene change, it happens. He is entirely innocent and conscienceless, full of joke and mirth, and driven by the instinct for pleasure. Any dream request that he manages to manipulate and play out gets realized.

In ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, Peter Quince presents the Pyramus and Thisbe anti-masque:

This man is Pyramus, if you would know.
This beauteous lady Thisby is certain.
This man with lime and roughcast, doth present
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder,
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
To whisper. At which let no man wonder.(Act V, sc I, 537)

One can wonder if the author was making fun of himself for the amusement of his audience because the tragical mirth's progression mimics the actual plot and bears such amazing similarities to ***Romeo and Juliet*** from Shakespeare. The gruff villagers stumble through the language while clod-hopping around the stage and making loud gestures.Theseus finds the prepared epilogue to be too much, so the antimasque concludes with a "Bergomask," a rude rustic dance.This antimasque passage makes sense when ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is viewed as a whole because it comes right afore the main masque dances. The abstraction of everyone on stage at the conclusion of the antimasque would pave the way for the stately measures intended to accolade the Queen and the betrothed pair if, as has been betokened earlier, the final masque dances were performed by members of the court.Bottom the Weaver's figure can be viewed as an antimasque figure because he embodies the traits or dramatic purposes typically associated with a traditional antimasque. He is the sole mortal who enters the fairy realm unhindered. Bottom may love fairies and see them, but he never loses sight of reality. Thus, he is present, the "shallowest thickskin" of them all, a sizable chunk of reality in the centre of the illusionary world.

Shakespeare's adept usage of anti-masque characters is illustrated by Enid Welsford using Bottom as an example. She makes the point that while Shakespeare was well aware that the greatest beauty is acquired through contrast when the difference is evident and startling but grows out of a deep though inconspicuous resemblance, the antimasque-masque contrast in the masque convention was total(Welsford, 333).

Puck is the director of both the masque and the antimasque in A Midsummer Night's Dream, and as such, he needs to have antimasque-like features in his makeup. His aptitude for inventive mischief reveals this quality:

And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In the very likeness of a roasted crab;
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.

The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale,
Sometimes for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she.
(II. i. 47-53)

Puck is best described as "laughter holding both his sides" when he is truly enjoying such tricks. The duality of Puck is possibly what inspired Jonson to create Robin Goodfellow, Puck's alternate name, in his masque ***Love Restored***.

In the words of Paul A. Olson:

> The opinion that ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is largely a shimmering fabric of “moonlight witha touch of moonshine” has become stock among students of Shakespeare. One rephrases habitual insights concerning gossamer and magicwhenever one treats of the work. But there is more to the play than a dream. The efforts of historical scholars to place this comedy in the setting of its dramatic tradition to see it as "sui generis, a 'symbolical' or masque-like play” suggest that we ought to revise our romantic preconceptionsof its structureand theme. Elizabethan masques usually afforded pleasures more serious than those of moonshine and ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is not unlike them in this respect. It was created for the solemn nuptials of a noble house, perhaps for those of the Earl of Derby or the Earl of Essex. For our purposes, the specific families involved matter little. Rather it is important that the significance of the play's symbolism and the raison d'etre of its pageantry can come clear through an examination of the occasion of its presentation.(Olson, 95)

Shakespeare uses certain fundamental elements of the masque despite the less-than-flattering depiction of aristocracy and court acts. Shakespeare makes only passing allusions to the spectacle of the genre, despite the fact that ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** does not utilize the element of nature in the same manner as The Tempest. Shakespeare acknowledges the traditions by utilizing mythological characters, sound effects, and verse inside the text, as is prevalent with masques. The fairies are the component that most resembles classic court masques. Fairies were frequently featured as mythical creatures in the court masques of the time(Schelling 93-138).

When Elizabethans went to the forests to collect fragrant, protective plants for decking their homes, a symbol of spring entering inside the people along with the transformation of Nature and its seasonal cycles, they were performing the love rites that were proper to various spring celebrations, such as Saint Valentin Day, May Day, and Midsummer. This is how ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** combines these rites. Like the lovers in AMND, they also spend the night in the "green world," which gives the Puritanical blazing with rage some justification.There were many traditions surrounding love during those feasts, including the divination of the future partner in the person dreamed of on St. John's Night, the first person one meets on St. Valentine's Day morning, and a sort of lottery of love (echoed in Puck's wanton error that led to the change of the loved ones or Titania from Bottom's zoophilic, crazy love).The decision to marry was made by the father, not the bride, in the upper classes, which occasionally resulted in shame, as in the stories of Romeo and Juliet and Othello, where the rebellious daughters cut off marriages that were intended to be based on ancestry and fortune. Undoubtedly, a hot topic in Shakespeare's day was the free election of a couple. In ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, when Hermia is sentenced to death for breaking the Law of the Father, the author pushed the issue to the breaking point of absurdity (using a well-known reasoning rule to rationally illustrate a truth)(HERNÁNDEZ, 19).

Shakespeare distributes a convivial commentary on the class structure of the affluent while still acknowledging the norms of the court masque in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***. ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, in contrast to ***The Tempest***, does not proximately resemble a masque in terms of performance, spectacle, or conventions, but it does challenge many of them. One requisite for a court masque was that courtiers and other nobles, not commoners, should perform it for monarchs. Shakespeare utilizes this conception and plays with it in Pyramus and Thisbee's performance in Act 5 scene 1. Shakespeare includes every day, working-class guys acting in court masques even though courtiers were denoted to perform them.The astronomically ornate and opulent court performances seem to be ridiculed by this ostensible misuse of tradition. This kind of self-indulgence is entirely disrupted by the performance of Pyramus and Thisbee, which is in opposition to the traditional aesthetic of royal plays. Traditionally, court performances were designated to be luxurious and sumptuous. Shakespeare engenders a masque for the mundane man, engendering a low brow, approachable variety of a masque presented by working class men, as opposed to the spectacular spectacle of other masques.Shakespeare dissects the masque's principles in this little performance and turns them into a travesty of what the masque represented to the court. Shakespeare's portrayal of courtly excess in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** represents a fulmination to the traditions of the monarchy, in contrast to other court plays that accolade and please rulers.

The play's final scene is where the most overt masque structure is present. As the play ends, the "hardheaded men" having performed their entertainment, the order at the court of Theseus has once more been established, and as night falls, the couples parade off the stage in unison. At this point, the fairies retake their spots on the stage, and their dance and Puck's epilogue serve as the play's climax. This closing dance may have been left out when this play was originally performed, but it's more likely that it was added for the audience's entertainment and that Puck's request to "Give me your hands" served as the standard call for applause. But when a play was the entertainment at a noble party, this concluding scene became the masque's curtain call. After the antimasque was done, the fairies—who were now being portrayed by the court audience—performed some elaborate dance routines that had been choreographed especially for the event. The masquers might choose from one of two responses to Puck's command, "Give me your hands." They might have followed Puck's lead and joined him for the "going to state" or the honouring and blessing of the distinguished guests. On the other side, Puck might have been speaking to every guest and urging them to accept the masquers as partners in the fun. In either situation, the sentence has thematic meaning as a call for the listener, whether private or public, to enter the world of the imagination where peace and reconciliation may be discovered.

Conclusion

The natural world was frequently highlighted in masques, and legendary figures were frequently elevated to the status of natural gods. Ben Jonson's Masque of Blackness made extensive use of nature in both the characters and the spectacle. The Masque of Blackness begins with a stormy sea populated by six tritons that resemble blue-haired mermen, much like the opening scene of ***The Tempest***. The twelve daughters of Niger and the twelve

nymphs of Oceanus rode into the scene riding in hollow seashells immediately after the entrance of the gods Oceanus and Niger on enormous seahorses. Shakespeare acknowledges the tradition but never truly embraces it as a genuine masque, paying respect to it by including characters from the faery world. In contrast to many of the classic masques, nature is considerably more broadly represented in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***. Despite being a constant and a major plot point, it does not obligatorily increase the spectacle of the piece. Shakespeare's play is different from other Renaissance masques in that it does not utilize nature to maintain a classical aesthetic or heighten the majesty of the performances. In his inscription, nature takes on a central role as both a plot contrivance and a convenient conveyance for conveying the fairy folk's nefarious antics. Albeit the spectacle of the masque had not yet plenarily composed in his work at this time in his vocation, the inclusion of nature made a spectacle relish to a masque possible.***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is marginally subdued in comparison to the works of other well-kenned authors of the era, such as Ben Jonson, whose works were filled with spectacle and ornate exhibits. The drama does not require the same level of decadence that performing a masque requires, despite the utilization of masque-inspired themes.

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