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# William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609): Dialogue Between the Past and the Future

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TO. MY. FRIENDS. WHO. ALWAYS.  
TRUSTED. AND. ENCOURAGED. ME.  
TO. EXPLORE. THE.  
LIMITS. OF. THE. SKY.

TO.  
MY. BELOVED. PARTNER. MARIA. AND.  
MY. SUPERVISOR. CLARA.  
WHO. COMMANDED. THE.  
BOAT. TO. LAND. WHEN.  
I. WAS. LOST. AT. SEA.  
TO. M.L.C.  
THANK. YOU.

N.M.



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Barcelona, a 17 de juny del 2022.

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**TITLE:** William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609): Dialogue Between the Past and the Future

**ABSTRACT:**

The present paper proposes the sonnets and a set of plays by William Shakespeare as texts that allow us to establish a dialogue between the past and the future of the publication of the poetry collection. The paper aims to connect Shakespeare's sonnets and plays to determine if the author may have had some specific plays in mind when writing the poems and some poems in mind when creating the plays. This paper will offer a new vision to the discussion of the sonnets concerning Shakespeare's plays through the literary theory of cultural materialism. An analysis of the selection of sonnets will be followed by a description of the plays to which they may relate. The paper, then, aims to determine how Shakespeare's sonnets and plays establish a dialogue, connecting two different literary genres, and allowing us a deeper approach to the mysteries surrounding Shakespeare's poetry.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, sonnets, dark lady, W.H., fair youth, theatre, cultural materialism.

**RESUM:**

El present treball proposa els sonets i un recull d'obres de teatre de William Shakespeare com a textos que ens permeten establir un diàleg entre el passat i el futur a la publicació de la col·lecció de textos poètics. L'article té com a objectiu connectar els sonets i els textos teatrals per determinar si l'autor tenia en ment algunes obres de teatre quan va escriure els sonets, i si en tenia algun sonet en ment quan va crear algunes de les seves obres. Aquest treball oferirà una nova visió al debat dels sonets pel que fa les obres de teatre de Shakespeare a través de la teoria literària del materialisme cultural. A l'anàlisi d'una selecció de sonets li seguirà una descripció de les obres de teatre a les quals s'hi troba un diàleg comú. El treball, doncs, té com a objectiu determinar com els sonets i les obres de teatre de Shakespeare estableixen un diàleg entre sí, connectant dos gèneres literaris diferents, i apropant-nos als misteris que envolten l'obra poètica de Shakespeare.

**Paraules clau:** Shakespeare, sonets, dona obscura, W.H., justa joventut, teatre, materialisme cultural.

## **Sustainable Development Goals - *Objectius pel Desenvolupament Sostenible***

### **English**

This present paper meets the vision of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals of the #4 Quality Education and #5 Gender Equality.

Universitat de Barcelona is a public university, and its quality standards are demanding. Therefore, this paper is based on quality education, and its methodology reflects that research has been conducted appropriately, thanks to the knowledge and abilities acquired throughout the degree.

Also, this paper applies notions from queer theory to William Shakespeare's work. Briefly, this theory explores a vision of Shakespeare as a queer playwright and author, thereby taking into account themes such as homosexual love, or the attempt at breaking with the rules of Providentialism and the social order of the time.

Consequently, United Nations' logos for quality education and gender equality are introduced in the cover of this *Treball de Final de Grau*.

### **Català**

El present article comparteix la visió dels Objectius pel Desenvolupament Sostenible de Nacions Unides pel que fa l'educació de qualitat (núm. 4) i la igualtat de gènere (núm. 5).

La Universitat de Barcelona és una universitat pública, i els seus estàndards de qualitat són exigents. Per tant, aquest article evidencia aquesta educació de qualitat, doncs la metodologia emprada exemplifica una recerca apropiada, gràcies als coneixements i habilitats adquirits durant el grau.

Aquest article també introdueix idees de la teoria *queer* en relació a l'obra de William Shakespeare, i s'explora la visió *queer* de l'autor, tractant temes com ara l'amor homosexual, que en temps de Shakespeare estava prohibit, però l'autor representava en les seves obres, trencant així amb les normes del Providencialisme i l'ordre social que reglava les societats d'aquella època.

Conseqüentment, els logotips de Nacions Unides per una educació de qualitat i per la igualtat de gènere han estat introduïts en la portada d'aquest Treball de Final de Grau.

## Table of Contents

Declaració d'autoria

Abstracts .....	1
Sustainable Development Goals - <i>Objectius pel Desenvolupament Sostenible</i> .....	2
1. Introduction .....	4
1.1. Origins .....	4
1.2. State of the Question .....	4
1.3. The Shakespearean Sonnet .....	6
1.4. The Addressees of the <i>Sonnets</i> .....	6
1.5. Methodology: Reading Shakespeare Now .....	8
1.6. Dialogue between the <i>Sonnets</i> and Shakespeare's Plays .....	9
2. Before the <i>Sonnets</i> .....	11
2.1. <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> .....	11
2.2. <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .....	15
3. After the <i>Sonnets</i> .....	20
3.1. <i>The Winter's Tale</i> .....	20
3.2. <i>The Tempest</i> .....	24
4. Conclusions .....	29
References .....	31

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Origins**

William Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, first published in 1609, is a work that is often unnoticed. If we ask students about the author, they will relate Shakespeare to plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If we consider the year of publication of the sonnets in contrast with *The First Folio* (1623), the publication of thirty-six Shakespearean plays after the death of the author, we will realise that the poetry collection was published by Thomas Thorpe without Shakespeare's authorisation (Edmondson and Wells, 2004). Also, poetry, traditionally, is a literary genre that, compared to theatre, is minority in Shakespeare's *oeuvre*. Thus, the sonnets have all the ingredients to be dismissed. That was what inspired me to write this paper. Suppose we look at the same libraries and search for articles about the *Sonnets*. In this case, the number of articles we will find will be exaggeratedly inferior, and if we want to find further connections between the sonnets and the plays, finding a paper will be like searching for water in the desert. For these reasons, I thought it would be interesting to analyse some of the sonnets in depth and approach the different mysteries surrounding this work, such as the *unidentified* identities of 'Mr. W.H.', the 'dark lady' or the 'fair youth'. Giving it a final turn, I decided to connect these sonnets to a selection of plays from Shakespeare and see what connections could be identified. From this standpoint, I realised that bidirectional research could be conducted and establish if it could be proven that there indeed exists a dialogue between the poetry collection and his plays.

### **1.2. State of the Question**

Discussions about Shakespeare's works are primarily centred on his plays. Still, it is unavoidable that his sonnets have inspired a multiplicity of controversially biographical readings and interpretations, certainly, more than many other texts in Western literature have (Edmondson and Wells, 2004, p. 22). Due to this controversy, there is a constant attempt to identify the individuals named in the sonnets. However, what we know so far about the sonnets is still unclear. The *Sonnets* as a publication were first printed as a collection in the early seventeenth century, in 1609, by the end of Shakespeare's career as a playwright, and he was about forty-five years old when his poems appeared. One could think that this change of discipline is due to a lack of inspiration to write new plays or that Shakespeare was exploring new ways to let his creativity flow. Both statements are correct if we consider that there are not many plays left to study since the publication



of the sonnets in 1609, but Shakespeare never stopped writing at any point in his life. He wrote the sonnets during his life, and that is why we can find references to both his young and old self in the poems (p. 23).

As mentioned above, researchers have proposed many interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets, since many aspects of them are still unclear. However, Shakespeare is probably the most analysed and discussed author in English literature. Thus, it is possible to consider the *Sonnets* as poems that can easily have connections with the author and his other works. We need to consider two aspects to understand his sonnets: the first is poetry, despite their being written in the rigid, formulaic form of the sonnet, poetry is a literary genre that, to a certain extent, enables the author to show the most vulnerable part of the soul; the second is Shakespeare, and we can expect to find the same topics in the sonnets that are found in his plays, but in a more personal tone. For instance, in sonnet 136, the author presents himself as 'Will'. This self-identification<sup>1</sup> allows us to consider connections between the sonnets and his plays since this means he probably wrote them throughout his life. Moreover, in the poems, there are direct allusions to two characters: the 'dark lady' and 'Mr W.H.'. The 'dark lady' is a mysterious woman that Shakespeare addresses in the sonnets. Due to the mixed feelings and thoughts that the author expresses towards her, it has been claimed that the identity of this lady could be linked to seven different women: Anne Hathaway, Mary Mountjoy, Jane Davenant, Lucy Morgan, Mary Herbert, Mary Fitton and Emilia Lanier. Depending on how Shakespeare describes this lady in the poems, she is seen as a lady of Mediterranean descent, with dark eyes and dark hair, whereas other scholars suggest that the lady's attributed 'darkness' in the sonnets is due to her being of African descent. These suppositions suggest, then, that "none of the many attempts at identifying the dark lady [...] are finally convincing" (Holland, 2004). Furthermore, the identity of the dark lady might be insignificant to understanding the sonnets, and we just need to attentively analyse the figure of the lady herself: "Does it matter who she really was? And what would the readers and scholars gain by pinpointing her identity? Like an avenger who, having finally destroyed the object of his revenge, dies himself because of the emptiness of the heart that follows any

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. stands for 'William Himself'. The dedicatee of the *Sonnets* suggests that he dedicated the poetry collection to himself or someone else. It must be mentioned this is pure speculation from researchers. Still, it allows us to determine that the sonnets might be the only Shakespearean work exploring the author's private life.

revenge, they would be left with a vacant heart in search of a new mystery to solve” (Vlašковиć, 2012, p. 157).

The other mysterious character is the man to whom the *Sonnets* are dedicated. This person is only known by his initials, ‘Mr W.H.’. His identity “has tantalised a generation of biographers and critics, who have generally argued either that W.H. was also the ‘fair youth’ to whom many of the sonnets were addressed or that he was a friend or patron who earned the gratitude of one or both parties by procuring Shakespeare’s manuscript from the printer, Thomas Thorpe” (“Mr. W.H.”, 2015). Again, many different personalities have been claimed to be behind these initials: Henry Wriothesley (with the initials reversed), William Herbert, William Harvey, and William Hatcliffe, among others. These men were, at some point, necessary to Shakespeare’s life since they represent one of the most thematic devices of the sonnets, the ‘fair youth’<sup>2</sup>. Still, again, there is no evidence that the author dedicated the poems to any of them. This is well sustained because Shakespeare barely wrote about his private life or wrote letters about his personal experiences but in the sonnets. That might be why his poems have been interpreted in many different ways, to the extent that controversy is vital when discussing the sonnets.

Since all these interpretations are not based on evidence but on speculation, this paper will seek to shed new light on the existing debate. Shakespeare’s works are connected, and I consider that connecting different texts and literary genres which have been explored in depth separately is necessary since they may further contribute to illuminating Shakespeare’s persona and inner life: “the sonnets do not necessarily have to entertain, advise, or inform other readers, but may rather show the poet struggling to understand himself. In this sense, they may be thought of as an emotional autobiography” (Edmondson and Wells, 2004, p. 27). Arguably, Shakespeare will never be discussed enough because there is no evidence of many critical aspects of his life. Specifically, this paper will take some of Shakespeare’s sonnets and will establish how they may be connected to the plays *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*, to determine if a dialogue is present between the poems and the theatrical texts. I have chosen these texts because they offer different visions of the

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<sup>2</sup> The ‘fair youth’ has also been attributed to W.H. (William Himself), allowing us to consider that the sonnets were the author’s inner thoughts – as long as he was talking to himself –. Queer theory, which considers gender, love, and sexuality in Shakespearean plays, participates in the debate considering W.H. or the ‘fair youth’ as a man Shakespeare loved or admired.

contradictions of Providentialism, a social system that ruled the society of the time, and which Shakespeare questioned, as will be seen through the analysis of the plays and the poems.

### **1.3. The Shakespearean Sonnet**

A sonnet is a composition of fourteen lines that typically has ten syllables per line in English. Shakespeare's sonnets are all conformed to three quatrains followed by a closing couplet. In addition, they are composed in iambic pentameter, a type of metric line used in poetry, in which rhythm is measured in a small aggrupation of syllables called 'feet'. 'Iambic' indicates an unstressed syllable that is followed by a stressed one, and 'pentameter' refers to a line of five feet: (*da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM*). This same metre is used in all his plays. The scheme that the sonnets follow is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Although there are some exceptions to these characteristics, all poems generally follow this pattern, known as the Shakespearean, English or Elizabethan sonnet. In the poems, at the end of the third quatrain, the sonnet's tone shifts, which is known as *volta* or 'turn'.

### **1.4. The Addressees of the *Sonnets***

The sonnets address different personalities, but it is unclear who they are and if they ever were relevant to Shakespeare's life. Thus, interpretations may be very open. In spite of this, it is unclear who the different addressees of the sonnets really were. Considering Edmondson and Wells's (2004) table on classifying the sonnets according to the gender of the addressees (p. 30), several suggest a male addressee. In contrast, others offer a female addressee, but most may reference both genders if they are read independently.

Considering what has been mentioned about both the 'dark lady' and 'Mr W.H.', it is certain that their identities are unclear. The 'dark lady' that appears in the poems is someone Shakespeare addresses by using general invocations, such as 'my mistress', 'my music', 'my love' and 'dear heart'. The denomination of these women as the 'dark lady' is a later imposition attributed to the sonnets, and there is no explicit reference to her as a 'dark lady' in any of the poems. Thus, the term derives from the different references in the sonnets and is a metaphor for both the physical appearance and the thoughts and discourse of the lady. Some of the sonnets that represent this idea are sonnets 127 (*In the old age black was not counted fair*), 130 (*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the Sun*), and

142 (*Love is my sin and thy dear virtue hate*). In these sonnets, there are direct references to her appearance and behaviour.

Regarding W.H., none of the candidates mentioned in this paper has been confirmed to be the identity behind these initials. First, though, we can consider some things from the dedication of the sonnets:

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.  
THESE.INSUING.SONNETS.  
MR.W.H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.  
AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.  
PROMISED.  
BY.  
OUR.EVER-LIVING.POET.  
WISHETH.  
THE.WELL-WISHING.  
ADVENTURER.IN.  
SETTING.  
FORTH.  
T.T.

Many researchers have concluded that ‘begetter’ in the dedication means ‘inspirer’ and that ‘Mr W.H.’ is the young man that is addressed in the sonnets. Others believe that ‘begetter’ can be interpreted as ‘procurer’ (Kathman, 2004). In this case, it would be the person who obtained the manuscript of the sonnets for Thomas Thorpe (T.T.), who published the *Sonnets* with no evidence of a formal authorisation from Shakespeare. The young man in the poems is also known as ‘fair youth’, and many researchers suggest that it is ‘W.H.’, the dedicatee of the sonnets, whose capitals have been attributed to William Himself as well. That said, “[the identity of the ‘fair youth’ related to W.H.] could be a misprint of Shakespeare’s name, which would have usually been printed ‘Mr.W.SH.’” (Smith, 2018). This allows us to speculate if the ‘fair youth’ could also be attributed to the author himself.

Then, there is an interesting triangle to explore in the sonnets formed by the ‘dark lady’, Shakespeare, and ‘Mr W.H.’. This triangle opens the debate on how Shakespeare has been historically read and engages readers to speculate and researchers to investigate how Shakespeare, particularly his sonnets should be read; namely, whether he should be read from an idealist perspective or rather from a cultural materialist perspective, taking gender and sexuality into account.

### **1.5. Methodology: Reading Shakespeare Now**

When we speak of reading Shakespeare ‘now’, we have to bear in mind the two main opposed existing perspectives; namely, liberal humanism or idealist criticism and cultural materialism. Although they have different approaches, both visions convey meaning to

Shakespeare's works and contribute to analysing a never-ending source of meaning and interpretations.

On the one hand, liberal humanism is best exemplified by Harold Bloom's (1998) discussions. In his words, liberal humanism deals with the idea of personality as a Shakespearean invention and asserts that the characters are unique:

The idea of the Western character of the self as a moral agent has many sources: Homer and Plato, Aristotle and Sophocles, the Bible and St. Augustine, Dante and Kant, and all you might care to add. Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness. (p. 4)

On the other hand, cultural materialism is best explored through the critical essays of Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, especially in their book *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1994), but also in Sinfield's *Faultlines* (1992) and Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* (2010), to name but a few of the most relevant cultural materialist texts. They insist on the idea that cultural materialism studies the implication of literary texts in history: "it insists that culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and the political system, but nor can it be independent of it" (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1994, p. viii). Therefore, concerning Shakespeare's plays, cultural materialism approaches tragedies as symptoms of social anxiety occurring at a particular point in time. It focuses on the contradictions of the texts and on how they contribute to generate cultural meanings and to express dissident perspectives. In Shakespeare's plays, cultural materialism analyses the contradictions present in the already questioned but still dominant ideology of providentialism, a doctrine supporting a social system based on the belief that the Christian God controls all events that occur on Earth. This paper will make a cultural materialist analysis of the sonnets and their influence in Shakespeare's plays, thereby taking into account aspects such as Shakespeare's providentialist context, gender, sexuality and desire in his work.

### **1.6. Dialogue between the *Sonnets* and Shakespeare's Plays**

Considering these interpretations of the addressees, and due to the subjects' uncertainty, it is possible to establish a dialogue between Shakespeare's sonnets and the plays if we consider that the poems were written throughout the author's whole life. Thus, the sonnets as a starting point are appropriate for this research, that will be bidirectional. As the poetry

collection was published in 1609, did Shakespeare have the sonnets in mind when he published *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Romeo and Juliet*? Or did the sonnets influence later plays such as *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*? This paper will analyse how some of the sonnets may be closely related to these Shakespearean plays. It will try to determine at which point in the plays the influence of the sonnets can be detected, thereby establishing a connection between the two literary genres, and considering the background of both the poem and the play. Ultimately, this paper's aim is to give a new vision of the sonnets and of Shakespeare's plays and to determine what dialogues can be established.

## 2. Before the *Sonnets*

In this section I will comment two Shakespearean plays that were written before the unauthorised publication of Shakespeare's sonnets as to determine what connections and dialogues are established between both literary genres. The plays that will conform this chapter are *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). These plays show interesting approaches regards to the concept of Providentialist love, and they will be connected to a selection of the poems from the *Sonnets*.

### 2.1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96) is a tragicomedy and one of Shakespeare's most famous plays. The play is about four young lovers from the city of Athens that escape to the forest. They escape to the woods to be 'free', as in Athens, the social hierarchy of the time prevented individuals to marry whoever they wished, so they can follow their instincts and love with no barriers nor restrictions. This is what Helena transmits in her soliloquy<sup>3</sup>. However, as Andino Cossio and Martin Simonson (2020) state, the woods are governed by the fairies, and the rule of this kingdom is similar to the rule in Athens, so the young lovers have sought freedom in the wrong place, but following the Shakespearean idea of the woods and nature:

[The woods and nature are] settings which create an atmosphere of confusion and danger [...] and this certainly adheres to traditional interpretations, but Shakespeare frequently adapts these tropes to his own purposes, occasionally subverting them in the plays. These subversions enable the playwright to explore the contradictions of the fickle human disposition [...] which irrevocably leads to catastrophe. (p. 95)

That said, in the woods, Puck the fairy will make the boys fall in love with the same lady. At the end, Puck reverts the magical spell and the two couples reconcile and finally marry according to their desires. This will lead the young lovers to the failure of both their freedom and their love because both Athens and the woods represent the same, and the woods are precisely an illusion of freedom because it is ruled by patriarchs, like the *polis* (McEvoy, 2000, p. 137-142).

In Act II, scene 2, Puck, a fairy from the fairy kingdom, mistakenly applies the potion of love-in-idleness to Lysander's eyelids instead of to Demetrius's, and he falls in

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<sup>3</sup> Act I, scene 1, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind" (Shakespeare, 1999, 234-235).

love with Helena and stops developing any feelings for Hermia as a consequence of Puck's confusion, who instead of anointing Demetrius's eyes he anoints Lysander's, who was already happily paired with Hermia. Then, he seeks to correct this and also anoints Demetrius's, so both men are now in love with Helena. In Act II, scene 2, Lysander expresses his love for Helena (Shakespeare, 1996, 109-114). His feelings for her are well represented in sonnet 141, *In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes* (2016):

In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,  
 For they in thee a thousand errors note;  
 But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,  
 Who, in despite of view, is pleased to dote;  
 Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted,  
 Nor tender feeling, to base touches prone,  
 Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited  
 To any sensual feast with thee alone:  
 But my five wits nor my five senses can  
 Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,  
 Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,  
 Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be.  
 Only my plague thus far I count my gain,  
 (p. 145)

The literary devices that represent love in the play – instincts, savage lovers, freedom, sexual desire, and blind love – are also present in this sonnet in which Shakespeare expresses his love for a woman. This love goes beyond the physical characteristics of that woman, and she completely enthralls him. He feels like a slave to her, and his love drives him mad. Comparing this to Lysander, we must consider that he was affected by the love potion. Thus, Lysander's love was utterly blind (“I do not love thee with mine eyes”). He follows his heart that is entirely manipulated by Puck's magical abilities (“But my five wits nor my five senses can / dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee”), and he is now a slave of her due to the magical effects (“Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be”).

Another poem to consider concerning the play is sonnet 33, *Full many a glorious morning I have seen* (2016). The poem was likely written in 1590, close to the play's date of writing. The sonnet is about love disillusion. The author expresses that the ‘fair youth’ has betrayed him by using nature and weather metaphors:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
 Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;  
 Anon permit the basest clouds to ride  
 With ugly rack on his celestial face  
 And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
 Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.  
 Even so my sun one early morn did shine  
 With all-triumphant splendour on my brow;  
 But out, alack! he was but one hour mine;  
 The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.  
 Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;  
 Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.  
 (p. 37)



There are many references to the play that we can consider in this sonnet. In lines 1-4, Shakespeare describes the 'fair youth'. This kind of love is very similar to how love is expressed in the play, so the young lovers could themselves be that 'fair youth'. Indeed, the identity of that addressee is pure speculation, and there are no tangible shreds of evidence as to who s/he was. That said, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* they are young lovers that experience love passionately, like Shakespeare experiences it with his mysterious lover. In lines 5-8, there is a complex metaphor that refers to betrayal (Anon permit the basest clouds to ride / with ugly rack on his celestial face) by stating that the clouds shade the face of the addressee of this sonnet. It is a betrayal because, if we take into account what nature signifies in Shakespeare's work, nature's greater 'freedom'<sup>4</sup> is restricting the face of a 'free'<sup>5</sup> love. Related to the play, there is also a betrayal that is due to love. In this case, the love of two beloved friends, Hermia and Helena. Helena, in Act III, scene 2 of the play, considers herself betrayed by her. Finally, the last six lines – a quatrain and a couplet – emphasise the elements of the first two quatrains and do not fault the youth for the betrayal: "The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now. / Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth; / Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth". Was Shakespeare thinking about the play when writing this sonnet? The young characters can't be blamed for love because they are young, and love is as weak as the sun, which the clouds can easily shade. Mistakenly, love is vulnerable to external factors, like Puck's love-in-idleness potion, which he applies to Lysander's eyes. This love, however, is contradictory if we consider what cultural materialism states about nature in Shakespearean plays; namely, that love cannot be pure when the woods are a mirror of the patriarchal society of Athens.

Still, it is possible to find more links within his poetry collection that allow us to see further connections between both works. *A Lover's Complaint* is a long poem that many contemporary collections of sonnets include at the end. Precisely, it is a woman's complaint against her lover, and the theme of blind love in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* is present. This long poem could be considered an alternative ending to the play from Helena's point of view, as it is written in the first person. There are two different natures of the concept of love in the poem. The first is a kind of love that can make individuals blind to the extent that they could go mad: "Love's arms are peace, 'gainst rule, 'gainst

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<sup>4</sup> Nature and the woods are where the young lovers in the play seek freedom.

<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare's idea of free love was quite ahead of his time during Providentialism, and love for him did not include neither arranged marriages nor conventional love.

sense, 'gainst shame, / and sweetens, in the suffering pangs it bears, / the aloes of all forces, shocks and fears" (Gallenzi, 2016, p. 171). This can be related to Helena's feelings when Lysander has been applied the love-in-idleness potion. The second is a kind of cruel love. In the sonnet, the maid was lied to and abandoned by a man. In a metaphorical sense, the same occurs to Helena in the play. Although the play ends with Helena and Demetrius happily married, that love results from a spell rather than true love. Also, the sonnet refers to 'tears' as 'poison': "though our drops this diff'rence bore: / his poisoned me, and mine did him restore" (p. 172). This poison can be connected to the potion because it poisons Lysander. Therefore, Lysander poisons Helena with fake love. With that, it can be said that *A Lover's Complaint* is a summary of the story of Helena. It could be introduced as an outro in the performance of the play, as the maid of the sonnet is a close representation of Helena and her suffering during the play, especially of the mourning she may experience after the play, although she finally gets married.

Having explored these sonnets and analysed the core scenes of the play, the contradictions of the time are present in both texts, and love in the play is not as pure as the fairies demonstrate with the most delicate flower of the kingdom of the woods. In fact, this is the main controversy, that such delicate flower becomes the plot twist that will condition the young lovers until the end of the play. This is how Keith Linley (2016) comments on love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The process of attraction, flirting and all the tactics of love are compelling. Every spectator has a vested interest – wants to know the signs, recognizes what he or she has been through, wants to learn where they went wrong perhaps, wants to laugh at others making fools of themselves. The emotion invested in falling in love and maintaining a relationship is of universal concern. It is one of the most important events in life, which is why getting it right is so crucial and getting it wrong so devastating. All the ways of getting it wrong will be amusing to the spectators. It may be heartbreaking for the victim(s), but a laugh for the audience (p. 196).

Helena is a victim, and Shakespeare did it all for entertainment and spectacle. Love conventions were a rule in providentialism, but they contradicted what individuals felt, which is reflected in the play. Helena's complaint about Lysander's love can be *A Lover's Complaint* because they are two women suffering for a love that they know is not pure nor true and that, in the case of the play, is totally manipulated due to a potion, and in the case of the sonnet, a love that drives individuals mad. In fact, in both texts, love is

dangerous, instinctive, and drives people mad. This social anxiety regarding love allows us to assert that conventional love has affected and negatively conditioned individuals through time until nowadays since it is still current. Arranged marriages are still a reality that Shakespeare denounced in his works. In contrast to the play, the sonnet expresses a more accurate approach to truth regarding the matter of love. It clarifies that love causes mourning, and providentialist love is neither pure nor true.

## **2.2. *Romeo and Juliet***

If the love story that Shakespeare creates in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is problematic, then the love tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) follows the same pattern but in a more idealistic way. In the play, love is the driving force, yet it is influenced by many external factors apart from the lovers: “some regard Shakespeare’s lovers as victims of bad timing or accidental misfortune; others maintain that Romeo and Juliet are in the throes of young love and come to ruin because of their intemperance. But because these accounts reduce the action to a particular circumstance, they do not adequately explain the myth’s ‘universal’ appeal” (Kottman, 2012, p. 1). Following this idea, Romeo and Juliet’s love in the play is a force that confronts society, a challenge on the part of the lovers as individuals that do not accommodate to what was socially prescribed.

As regards the play, I will consider the lovers and their love. Romeo and Juliet experience a passionate love that constitutes supremacy, underrating all other values. In the course of the story, the encouraged lovers must face their families if they want to be free: “Deny thy father and refuse thy name, Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, And I’ll no longer be a Capulet” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2, p. 38). Love is a powerful feeling that sets individuals up against society and the world, but this leads to irreparable consequences and death. Many sonnets by Shakespeare express these tragic ideas about love that are represented in *Romeo and Juliet*. One of them is sonnet 102, ‘*My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming*’ (2016), in which the thematic device of love and the ‘faith youth’<sup>6</sup> is present, and is addressed to a young man whose identity is still unknown:

My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming;  
I love not less, though less the show appear;  
That love is merchandized, whose rich esteeming,  
The owner’s tongue doth publish everywhere.

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed in the previous section, the ‘faith youth’ may express Shakespeare’s nostalgia for the time of his youth; and the author could be talking about his own, younger self. See Introduction for further explanations.

Our love was new, and then but in the spring,  
 When I was wont to greet it with my lays;  
 As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,  
 And stops his pipe in growth of riper days:  
 Not that the summer is less pleasant now  
 Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,  
 But that wild music burthens every bough,  
 And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.  
 Therefore like her, I sometime hold my tongue:  
 Because I would not dull you with my song.  
 (p. 106)

This sonnet expresses the speaker's aim to make his feelings for the addressee, but he chooses to hold his tongue instead rather than manifest his thoughts, otherwise he believes that love will have less value. In the first lines, s/he – but many critics claim the speaker as William Shakespeare himself – try to excuse their silence by showing a loveless feeling that does not imply they do not love the addressee (“My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming; / I love not less, though less the show appear). Then, s/he realise that expressing the feeling could damage love, so it is better to keep it secretly (“That love is merchandized, whose rich esteeming, / The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere”). This feeling of secretness can be connected to the secrecy of the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*. Their love, at first, was restricted to their knowledge<sup>7</sup>, but as the play progresses, it becomes prohibited<sup>8</sup>. Regarding the idea of merchandised love, it is a reference to love being treated as a commodity. Juliet's father makes her marry Paris for status and money in the play. Romeo and Juliet live in a society where love is merchandised, so they must keep their love secretly to avoid it being turned into a commodity, or to prevent their parents from putting a price on it. However, as mentioned, their love seems to be true, and the families they belong to are confronted, so the young lovers will prevent love from being merchandised at all costs. In this sense, the sonnet is connected to how Romeo and Juliet experience love. They love each other passionately but keep it secretly at first because they are aware of the distance in their social status. Although both families are powerful, the *Montecchio* (Montague) family, historically, was a political faction whose fortunes had been fluctuating with the years (Moore, 1930, p. 267), whereas the *Cappelletti*'s (Capulet) fortunes recovered from various attempts of destruction 1267, and succeeded in many sieges, increasing their power (p. 270). In the remaining lines of the sonnet, the speaker states he is in love with the ‘fair youth’, to whom they dedicate the sonnet. It can be said that a dialogue between the sonnet and the

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<sup>7</sup> Act II, scene 2, in Capulet's Orchard. It is the first scene in the play when both lovers meet alone. Later, Romeo admits he is in love with a Capulet but does not reveal her identity and does not love Rosaline anymore.

<sup>8</sup> In act II, scene 5, the secret starts to be unveiled. Juliet is advised of the problems that this love entails.

play can be established in two different levels, in which Juliet expresses love for her Romeo and vice versa. Thus, sonnet 102 is an excellent example of how the poem is related to the play and evidences the problems of love during Providentialism. Moreover, the fact that the sonnet presents a queer perspective<sup>9</sup> allows us to observe further contradictions in the social system of the time, since marriages could only be heterosexual, and we can retrieve that, culturally, Shakespeare was aware of the relations between individuals of the same gender that were not accepted by the society of the time but would be in a future. It is possible that Shakespeare may have been keenly aware of the types of love Providentialism relegated to the shadows<sup>10</sup>. As Joseph Porter (1988) states, this queer approach to *Romeo and Juliet* can be seen in Mercutio:

It is as if Mercutio has a personal investment, or we might say that this is to arrive at a cockeyed conclusion. But there is more. There is the idea of Mercutio's taking Rosaline's place not only as conjurer but also container of Romeo's phallus. Mercutio, that is, points like a roadside herm to herm to a fraternally bonded realm, with its attendant latent misogyny and homosexuality, and with its gratification including strong friendship and celebration of the phallus. (p. 157-58)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the problems of providentialist love are related to social status, which is seen to determine both characters' lives; but this was by no means the only one. The sonnet ends with more allusions to nature and the 'fair youth', two elements connected to the young lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both elements are used in Shakespearean texts to express the freedom, wildness, and innocence of nature related to youth.

Another text from the poetry collection that has love as the main theme is sonnet 138, *When my love swears that she is made of truth* (2016):

When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her though I know she lies,  
That she might think me some untutored youth,  
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.  
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,  
Although she knows my days are past the best,  
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:  
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed:  
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?  
And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
O! love's best habit is in seeming trust,  
And age in love, loves not to have years told:

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<sup>9</sup> The speaker is attributed to William Himself and addresses one of the possible representations of the 'fair youth', a man.

<sup>10</sup> Many critics have seen that Mercutio, Romeo's friend, could be considered a queer character and could therefore represent the queer perspective in Shakespeare's play.

Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,  
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.  
(p. 142)

The sonnet starts with the speaker expressing mixed feelings about the lady's honesty. However, she also has mixed feelings for the speaker, as she does not know if he is inexperienced in love. The speaker is getting older, and she is aware of that ("Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young"). Then, the sonnet proceeds, admitting that both interlocutors should disclose to one another that they are lying and that this is part of their relationship. Still, they prefer to pretend they trust each other and keep going with the lies that become a comfort zone for their love. How can this be related to the young lovers, Romeo and Juliet? They are an excellent example of the inconsistency of love. The mixed feelings about the honesty of the addressee of the sonnet can be connected to Romeo's feelings when he is in love with Juliet. Romeo's position within society – the Montague family – is not as powerful as the dominant position of the Capulet family. Thus, Juliet does not take as many risks as Romeo for their love to succeed. Romeo must face many obstacles, such as laws, friends, family, his fate, and, ultimately, death, just to be with her. Although Juliet is willing to take risks, she is more grounded than Romeo, and she even tries to stop Romeo when he is overly poetic. Juliet, who refuses to tell Romeo how she would describe her love for him (Shakespeare, 2016, 2.6.24-34), demonstrates the inconsistency of love in a play where love seems to be very consistent. Romeo, then, could be related to the speaker of the sonnet who has mixed feelings about the honesty of the addressee.

Another important aspect of this sonnet that can be analysed is the topic of age and its relationship with fate in the play. In the sonnet, the addressee knows that the speaker is getting older ("Although she knows my days are past the best"). However, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the characters are sixteen and thirteen years old, respectively, and there is textual evidence that age is important to their love. Juliet, in the play, is responsible for Romeo's transformation into a man who is in love, and it can be said that she instructs him to be a good lover. At many different points of the play, Romeo's idea of love is also related to death:

**ROMEO.** Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye  
Than twenty of their swords! Look thou but sweet,  
And I am proof against their enmity.

(Shakespeare, 2016, 2.2.75-77)

**ROMEO.** There is no world without Verona walls,  
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.  
Hence banished is banish'd from the world  
And world's exile is death. Then 'banishment'  
Is death misterm'd. Calling death 'banishment',  
Thou cut'st my head off with a golden axe  
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.

(Shakespeare, 2016, 3.3.18-24)

As Romeo expresses, he is aware of death, and he controls his fate, and Juliet tries for Romeo to abandon these kinds of expressions throughout the play. That said, a dialogue is established between the play and the sonnet, in which the addressee is aware of the fate of the speaker, and in both texts, this fate leads to death.

*Romeo and Juliet* along with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are plays that have exemplified how Providentialism was the driving force of Early Modern society. People were not allowed to escape social constraints, and if they tried to outwit the whole system, they were likely to fail, and sometimes life was sacrificed in the attempt to try something new.

### 3. After the *Sonnets*

In this section I will analyse Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (1610-11) and *The Tempest* (1610-11), which were both written after Thomas Thorpe published the *Sonnets* without Shakespeare's consent. In this section, connections between the poems and the plays will be considered with the aim to determine if a dialogue is present between both literary genres, as previously done with the other texts.

#### 3.1. *The Winter's Tale*

*The Winter's Tale* (1610-11) also contains an approach to the theme of love and male jealousy. The play is located in Sicilia. Polixenes, the King of Bohemia, visits Leontes, the King of Sicilia, and asks Leontes to return to his reign, but he finally agrees that he stays because the King of Sicilia's wife, Hermione, is pregnant. Then, Leontes starts to suspect that Polixenes and Hermione may have an affair, so he asks Camillo, a lord of Sicilia, to poison him, but finally, he decides to help him escape instead. In the meantime, Leontes imprisons Hermione, and she gives birth to a girl. Leontes then asks Antigonus to abandon Hermione's daughter Perdita, who will be abandoned in Bohemia. Then, he sends Cleomenes and Dion to the oracle to know if Hermione is innocent or not. Finally, Leontes organises a trial against Hermione for conspiracy against the King of Sicilia with the help of Polixenes, the king of Bohemia. In the trial, the oracle from Delphos manifests that both Hermione and Polixenes are innocent. However, Leontes ignores the oracles' verdict and Hermione faints and later dies. Then, the play jumps forward in time and Hermione, who was died sixteen years ago, miraculously comes to life in the form of a statue. Hermione embraces Leontes and Perdita, and the play culminates in a happy ending<sup>11</sup>.

Regarding the theme of love, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare delivers to us another romantic triangle formed by Hermione, Leontes and Polixenes. According to Polixenes, his love for Hermione is only based on friendship. In a soliloquy, Hermione expresses that his feelings for him are based on friendship as well, and she does so in an act of bravery, confronting her husband and the Gods by admitting it:

**HERMIONE:** [...] For Polixenes,  
With whom I am accus'd, I do confess  
I lov'd him as in honour he requir'd,

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<sup>11</sup> In theatrical representations, Hermione, Polixenes and Perdita reunite, and leave the stage together.



With such a kind of love as might become  
 A lady like me; with a love, even such,  
 So, and no other, as yourself commanded:  
 Which, not to have done, I think have been in me  
 Both disobedience and ingratitude,  
 To you, and toward your friend, whose love had spoke,  
 Even since it could speak, from an infant, freely,  
 That it was yours. Now, for conspiracy,  
 I know not how it tastes, though it be dish'd  
 For me to try how: all I know of it,  
 Is that Camillo was an honest man;  
 And why he left your court, the gods themselves  
 (Wotting no more than I) are ignorant

(Shakespeare, 1966, 3.2.61-76).

The play, however, makes clear that male violence against women is something that does not originate in women's inconstancy, but in men's fears of adultery and in their patriarchal views of women. This sense of betrayal regards love can be seen in sonnet 151, *Love is too young to know what conscience is* (2016):

Love is too young to know what conscience is;  
 Yet who knows not conscience is born of love?  
 Then, gentle cheater, urge not my amiss,  
 Lest guilty of my faults thy sweet less prove;  
 For, thou betraying me, I do betray  
 My noble part to my gross body's treason;  
 My soul doth tell my body that he may  
 Triumph in love; flesh stays no further reason,  
 But rising at thy name doth point out thee  
 As his triumphant prize. Proud of this pride,  
 He is contented thy poor drudge to be,  
 To stand thy affairs, fall by thy side.  
     No want of conscience hold it that I call  
     Her "love" for whose dear love I rise and fall.  
 (p. 155)

The sonnet belongs to the 'dark lady' series and expresses that the speaker cannot control his desire for the addressee ("Love is too young to know what conscience is; / Yet who knows not conscience is born of love") and that the more unfaithful the lady is, the more attracted the speaker is towards her ("For, thou betraying me, I do betray / My noble part to my gross body's treason"). The speaker also admits that his body is prepared to satisfy the lady's needs ("My soul doth tell my body that he may / Triumph in love; flesh stays no further reason"). The sonnet clearly presents the topic of betrayal and unfaithfulness in love and the feelings it awakens in the speaker. These feelings are similar to those of

Leontes, the King of Sicilia, *vis-à-vis* Hermione's supposed infidelity. The speaker of the sonnet admits the lady's unfaithfulness, which he cannot control and drives him mad. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes seeks to possess Hermione. According to researchers, this might be due to his jealousy of his wife and Polixenes: "Leontes' jealousy might be deeply rooted in his fear of women's sexual desires which he cannot control. Traub argues that the "masculine perspective of desire expresses an attitude toward female bodies that [...] is revealingly paranoid" (Kellerman, 2013, p. 57). Plus, it can be said that the sonnet's depiction of unfaithfulness and sexual madness are related to what Leontes feels for Hermione, and the more betrayed he feels, the more he wants to sexually possess his wife, to the extent that he imprisons her to keep her under his control.

Another aspect we can consider in this sonnet is its queer perspective. Daniela Kellerman (2013) follows commenting on the thematic device of jealousy that can be related to Leontes's feelings for Polixenes's as well:

One can also argue that Leontes secretly desires to take Hermione's place beside Polixenes in order to act out the prohibited homosexual role Leontes repudiates in himself. Hermione's lively conversation with Polixenes might have reminded Leontes of the homoerotic memory he and Polixenes share when they "were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk I' th' sun. (p. 56)

Leontes's jealousy regarding Hermione can be related to his homoerotic hidden feelings for Polixenes. As the love between two individuals of the same gender was not possible during Providentialism, Leontes struggles with his feelings and acts through betrayal<sup>12</sup>. This can be connected to the second quatrain of the sonnet: "For, thou betraying me, I do betray / My noble part to my gross body's treason". In these verses, the speaker of the sonnet describes that the infidelity of the addressee drives him mad, to the extent that he will act unfaithfully as well. In the play, Leontes acts irrationally, venting his rage and imprisoning his wife, and ordering Camillo to kill Polixenes while keeping his true feelings under cover. On this matter, in the essay *Postured like a whore? Misreading Hermione's statue* Eric Langley (2013) states how Leontes manipulates Hermione's image in the play:

Leontes presents only a degrading portrait of the misrepresented Hermione, morphing her into this eroticized 'Image', viewing her with the aggression of what David McCandless identifies as a pornographic consumer: 'Leontes' fatal

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<sup>12</sup> According to the queer perspective, Leontes's attitude in the play would be an example of his own frustration with regards to his sexual orientation.

delusion', he argues, is 'a kind of pornographic fantasy, in which he degrades Hermione in order to punish her for having afflicted him with a shaming sexual knowledge'. (p. 328)

According to this, Leontes transgresses Hermione's image in the play from an ancient Greece woman to a unfaithful whore, and the punishment that he condemns her is mere based on sexual eroticism and possession.

Another sonnet that can be connected to the play is sonnet 55, *Nor marble, nor the gilded monuments* (2016). The sonnet expresses that someone's memory and honour are more valuable than monuments that are at risk of collapsing through the passing of time:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;  
But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.  
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,  
And broils root out the work of masonry,  
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn  
The living record of your memory.  
'Gainst death, and all oblivious enmity  
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room  
Even in the eyes of all posterity  
That wear this world out to the ending doom.  
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,  
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.  
(p. 59)

The first quatrain expresses the essential idea of the sonnet that an individual's memory is more valuable than stone, marble or gilded edifications. It is interesting to point out the verse "Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time", in which 'sluttish', which is a slang word for prostitute, returns to the idea of women not being faithful to men, comparing women with a monument that will collapse with the passing of time<sup>13</sup>. Thus, time is 'sluttish' since it is unfaithful to everybody because it cannot be controlled. This idea can be connected to Hermione, who is imprisoned for being supposedly unfaithful to Leontes. Later in the play, she is represented as a statue, evidencing that women were objects that could be possessed. Regarding the image of Hermione as a whore, Leontes calls her 'hobby horse' (Shakespeare, 1966, 1.2.276-278), and "the term 'hobby-horse' was then commonly used to designate a prostitute or woman of ill fame" (Laroque, 2011, p. 32). Leontes possesses Hermione by imprisoning her, as we have commented in the previous analysis. At the end of the play, and even though Shakespeare gives it a happy ending, Hermione is still a statue, albeit a living one. Therefore, she is still meant to be

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<sup>13</sup> In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione becomes a statue, and with the pass of time, her memory still persists, and she is remembered for what happened at earlier acts of the play.

treated as a mere object that belongs to a man and, in this case, she seems to belong to both Leontes and Polixenes. In the following lines of the sonnet, the speaker expresses that the addressee will be remembered and will survive, whereas monuments will not: “When wasteful war shall statues overturn, / And broils root out the work of masonry, / Nor Mars his sword, nor war’s quick fire shall burn / The living record of your memory”. In the play, Hermione’s remembrance survives, and the public trial to which she is submitted is enough for her to be remembered as unfaithful<sup>14</sup>. When she appears in the form of a statue, it is evident that the statue will not survive fate, but the happy ending will not dissipate the slander that has been created around her. The last lines of the sonnet can be interpreted as a direct allusion to Polixenes’s love for her: “So, till the judgment that yourself arise, / You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes”. Through this final couplet, the speaker expresses that the addressee will survive by living in the memory of the admirers. Although Leontes has rebuilt his life in the play, he is happy when he and his daughter see Hermione again alive.

As discussed, the image of Hermione in the form of a statue is a metaphor for the patriarchal society that ruled during Providentialism. Women were like statues, and they were not allowed to move within society statements, and they were relegated to care for the family and the husband. Plus, when women had to intervene, they needed the approval of men, just as Hermione experiences in the play. Indeed, she can only talk again when the statue can speak and move, which gives the play a happy ending and seems to wash Leontes’ image. Admittedly, one of the possible interpretations of the ending could be that Leontes is turned into a hero for his having allowed a sone to come back to life, thereby obviating the conditions in which Hermione must live, and the fact that patriarchy severely restricts women as human beings, to the point of putting their lives at risk.

### **3.2. *The Tempest***

*The Tempest* (1610-11) is considered Shakespeare’s last play. The play starts with a raging storm at sea that threatens Alonso. Prospero, Duke of Milan, and Miranda, his daughter, watch the shipwrecking from an island. Miranda suspects that her father has created the storm and asks him to bring it to an end. Then, Prospero reveals his past to spectators, as well as what brought him to this island, and explains that when he was twelve years old, he had a brother called Antonio who betrayed him. Alonso kidnapped

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<sup>14</sup> Hermione is humiliated publicly in the play simply because of Leontes’s suspicions of her unfaithfulness.

Prospero and Miranda and left them in the middle of the sea. Prospero now says he can use his magical powers to take revenge. Then, Prospero uses his magical powers against Miranda, who wanted him to stop using his magic against Alonso and the ones who were with him in the ship, making her fall asleep. Then, he invokes Ariel, his servant and the native of the island who created the storm. Ariel states that the people from the ship will survive but will arrive dispersed on the island. With his task, Ariel asks Prospero that he may give him back his freedom, but he denies his request. Then, Ariel captures Ferdinand and delivers him to Prospero. Miranda and Ferdinand fall immediately in love, but Prospero's magic prevents this love from developing.

Meanwhile, offensive conspirations by many characters start to develop against Prospero and Alonso with the aim to murder them. Later in the play, Prospero accepts that Miranda and Ferdinand get married, thus accepting his daughter's wishes. In the play, Prospero uses a masque in the ceremony to entertain the newly married lovers. Finally, at the end of the play, Prospero accepts to give up his magical powers and forgive his enemies and asks Ariel to guarantee a safe comeback to the shipwrecked people and decides to liberate him. Hence, Ariel is not Prospero's servant anymore. The play ends with Prospero's soliloquy, asking spectators to applaud and release him from *the tempest* that invades him.

It must be said that many critics have claimed that Prospero is Shakespeare himself, just like the widely speculated 'Mr. W.H.' to whom the sonnets are dedicated: "it is tempting to associate the figure of Prospero, the masterful wizard, with Shakespeare himself, straddling the threshold between art and life in order to carve out space, within his own work, to bid farewell to the stage, so that he might ease his own transition from a successful dramatic career into retirement" (Edmondson, 2010, p. 253).

One of the sonnets that can be connected to the play is sonnet 116, *Let me not to the marriage of true minds* (2016):

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments: love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
Oh, no, it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
    If this be error and upon me proved,  
    I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

(p. 120)

In the first two quatrains of the sonnet, the speaker compares love to the cosmos. He states that love is like a bright star: never changing, permanent, and trustful. Although the speaker admits that love changes as time passes, he is adamant that his love will not. In the third quatrain, the speaker emphasises the first eight verses, and in the couplet, Shakespeare restates that love is the most powerful feeling when true. In the first quatrain, Shakespeare uses a metaphor to compare marriage to true love. He compares true love and the ideal relationship to a “marriage of true minds”, of two lovers who love one another chastely and wisely. In the following lines of the quatrain, the speaker expresses that true love is stronger than tempests and more constant than guiding stars to lost ships. This idea of true love can be related to Ferdinand and Miranda, two characters that express their love mutually through truth and evidence, as the sonnet defends. Moreover, in the play, they express the idea of true love in the same way as the sonnet does through the image of the “marriage of true minds”; that is, as a love that is no longer driven only by passion (“Full many a lady / I have eyed with best regard”), as this was considered sin, even in marriage, but that is chaste (“but by my modesty / [...] I would not wish / Any companion in the world but you”) and faithful:

**FERDINAND:** Admired Miranda!

Indeed the top of admiration, worth  
 What’s dearest to the world! Full many a lady  
 I have eyed with best regard, and many a time  
 Th’ harmony of their tongues hath into bondage  
 Brought my too diligent ear.

(Shakespeare, 1999, 3.1.37-42)

**MIRANDA:** I do not know

One of my sex, no woman’s face remember –  
*Save*, from my glass, mine own. Nor have I seen  
 More that I may call men than you, good friend,  
 And my dear father. How features are abroad  
 I am skillless of, but by my modesty  
 (The jewel in my dower), I would not wish  
 Any companion in the world but you

(Shakespeare, 1999, 3.1.48-55)

In the second quatrain, there is a direct allusion to the natural phenomenon that gives name to the play: “Oh, no, it is an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never

shaken; / It is the star to every wandering bark, / Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken". Here, the speaker emphasises the previous quatrain's idea that true love does not shift or change and can survive the most violent tempests and storms and is not even shaken or damaged. For Shakespeare, love is a star that guides individuals, boats, or ships, preventing them from wrecking. This can be connected to *The Tempest*. Ferdinand and Miranda's love survives despite the storms they suffer when Prospero imprisons him. This is because their love is pure. They experience true love, like the one in the sonnet. Then, the last two verses of the quatrain reference a star that guides a boat. This can be related to the play in terms of love as well. Ferdinand and Miranda's love is like the star that drives them to a safe place, preventing love from failing. In the play, love succeeds in the end, and Prospero resigns from his powerful position as a magician and approves of their engagement. In this sense, the lover's true love guides the characters to a happy ending, culminating with applause for Prospero and an indirect farewell to Shakespeare from playwrighting.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Tempest*, the belief of love as true and pure is again represented, this time through Ferdinand and Miranda's love. As discussed, the sonnets depict love through the same characteristics as in the play: it is a chaste, wise love, full of dedication for the other, and faithfulness. Thus, the dialogue between both literary genres is present. However, we must again consider the contradictions inherent to Providentialism, which was still the ruling ideology determining individuals in Early Modern England. By imprisoning Ferdinand, Prospero is controlling Miranda because Ferdinand accepts to be enslaved as he dreams of Miranda's love (Shakespeare, 1990, 1.2.487-494). In this sense, it can be said that Prospero controls Miranda as he has enslaved the man that loves her wholeheartedly.

As seen in other plays by Shakespeare such as the above-analysed *Romeo and Juliet*, or even *Othello*, free, reciprocal love was still an emergent concept, and many marriages were still arranged, despite the Protestant emphasis on the companionate marriage. Still, Shakespeare always defended the modern, emergent view of love as the only form of true love. In what could be Shakespeare's veiled critique to Providentialism's strong control over love and emotions, in this play, however, free and

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<sup>15</sup> It can be said that both the play and the sonnet are Shakespeare's farewell from playwrighting.

reciprocal love succeeds when Prospero decides to stop manipulating his magical powers and allows the young lovers to marry.



#### 4. Conclusions

Shakespeare is probably an author who will never be discussed enough. From readers to researchers, there will always appear an interesting and different approach to his works, making the debate more intense and engaging. His plays have been widely studied and interpreted, and many academic papers and articles on them can be found in digital libraries. As argued in the introduction, Shakespeare's plays have been connected to many different theoretical frameworks, and especially to two main literary theories: liberal humanism and cultural materialism. They have also been connected, and many researchers have devoted their papers, for instance, on how women are represented in *The Winter's Tale* in comparison with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or how Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* relates to Miranda in *The Tempest*. The queer aspects of Shakespeare's plays have also been widely discussed, and many theorists have claimed that Shakespeare was ahead of his time since he introduced queer elements in his plays and poetry, as has been seen above.

At this point of the research, I can assert that there is a dialogue between the sonnets and the plays. For instance, the approach to love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Romeo and Juliet* is very similar, and very close to the sonnets 141 and 102 respectively in the way they represent true love and its contradictions. Their representation of young lovers who experience such love is also related, just as it is related to sonnet 138, which also portrays the inconsistency of love. In contrast to this, the love that we can perceive in *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest* seems to be more mature, just as in sonnet 116, where the type of love described is based on chastity and wisdom. Finally, the representation of women in these plays gives us an idea of the serious limitations of Providentialism. It is very likely that Shakespeare had his own works in mind when he was writing new plays or expressing his inner thoughts in a sonnet. The sonnets that have been analysed present connections that allow us to believe that both literary genres are purposefully connected. It is impossible to ask the author if a dialogue existed between his sonnets and plays, but the connections found allow us to infer that a conversation existed and that they are related. In this paper, context, theoretical framework and analysis have converged with the aim to shed some new light on the chosen plays and sonnets. This paper has considered the cultural materialist theory in order to analyse Shakespeare's veiled critique of the contradictions of Providentialism, his emergent and new view of love, and how he was conditioned by his context and engaged in dialogue with it. What makes Shakespeare's sonnets especially unique is that, as they were published

unauthorisedly, researchers have based their claims about them mostly on speculation. This is intrinsically an invitation to readers and researchers to speculate. Moreover, this paper has also sought to contribute to unveil the mysteries surrounding Shakespeare's life and the addressees of the sonnets through the plays.

As regards suggestions for further research, it is obvious that much remains to be analysed. There are one hundred fifty-four sonnets, the long poem *A Lover's Complaint*, and over thirty-nine plays. This paper has only analysed a dozen sonnets and four plays, but many more of his works could still be considered. For example, the long poem *A Lover's Complaint* might relate to Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and to almost all the female characters in Shakespeare's plays, so it could be interesting to compare this long poem and its representation of women to that of other female characters in Shakespearean plays.

Finally, the possibilities in Shakespeare are infinite, and literature is an excellent path to analyse the past through texts. The fact that the sonnets have not been as analysed as the plays and were an unauthorised publication makes the research more interesting than any other, as it was not revised by the author when they were published, leaving us with what may be Shakespeare's most personal work.

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