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Topical Allusions on Stage.
Elizabethan Courtly Spectacles and the Antimasque.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to trace the origins of the Stuart antimasque in the Elizabethan age. The antimasque is a literary device which firstly appeared with the Jonsonian masque in the 1610s, when it took the form of an episode featuring elements of 'opposition' to the main masque. Its key aspect of generating a dialectic within a spectacle establishes a link between the Stuart period and the Elizabethan age: although there is no proper form of antimasque, during the reign of Elizabeth I, some entertainments already contain 'antimasque-like' aspects, whose presence in the text recalls that particular 'antimasque dichotomy'. This link between the two periods regards a particular form of antimasque, which is the one that makes use of topical allusions.

The first part of this thesis is an introductory section, which is very useful to collocate the topic of this thesis in the general background of the masque. It starts with a definition of *masque* as a court entertainment and, then, it explains its history and development from the Middle Ages to the Stuart period, when the form reached the peak of its success. Then, Part 1 goes on with the explanation of what the *antimasque* is, in which I have highlighted two particular points: the first stresses the fact that the antimasque, during the years, undergoes a particular development, whilst the second points out that the key feature of the antimasque is the fact that it creates a dialectic within the spectacle.

In the last section of Part 1, I have finally examined three masques by Ben Jonson, which contain the particular type of antimasque this dissertation focuses on: the one concerned with topical allusions. These masques are *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated from the*

Alchemist at Court. It might be argued that these are not the only Jonsonian masques that contain topical allusions because, as Bèhar suggests, there are other masques which could have been taken as an example of this. In his view, the first is *News from the New World*, which is about Jonson's conflicting opinion on the recent geographical discoveries; a further example is the *Masque of Augurs* (1622), which contains a mockery of Inigo Jones. Finally, the third masque he mentions is *Time Vindicated* (1623), in which the victim is the English poet and satirist George Wither (Béhar 528). However, in this dissertation, I will not analyse these last three masques because the topical allusions contained in their antimasque just hint at personal matters connected to the author, but do not refer to the tensions caused by the current socio-political situation. As a matter of fact, for the purpose of this thesis, it is this last aspect which is important to determine how 'antimasque-like' features are already present in the Elizabethan age.

Moreover, the choice of analysing *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated* stems from the fact that they are representative of a particular line of development, which connects them to the court entertainments that will be analysed in Part 2: from *Hymenaei*'s curious fractures – but no proper antimasque –, the antimasque develops into an explicit boundary in *Love Restored*, and finally returns to a more implicit form in the last stage of the evolution, represented by *Mercury Vindicated*.

Moving on, Part 2 is the key section of the whole dissertation. Its object is to demonstrate how the dichotomy that has characterized the Jonsonian antimasque is already present in the Elizabethan age, although it does not take the form of a formal boundary inserted in the text. The link between the Stuart antimasque and Elizabethan 'antimasque-like' aspects lies in their topical allusions, because both the masques by Ben Jonson and some Elizabethan courtly spectacles contain references to the

crisis which had its origins in the current socio-political situation[1].

In Part 2, I have started with the discussion of the Elizabethan masks; particular attention is given to the *Masque of Proteus*, the only Elizabethan mask that has come down to us, which has been considered as a precursor of the Stuart masque. The object of this section has been to see whether the antimasque dialectic is already present in these Elizabethan masks; the conclusion is that no 'antimasque-like' element is to be found in those entertainments, because no dichotomy recalling the one in Ben Jonson's masques is to be found. Therefore, I have suggested that, in order to detect the presence of earlier 'antimasque-like' aspects, other spectacles played at court in front of Queen Elizabeth I have to be considered.

Through a detailed historical outline, in the second section of Part 2, I have tried to establish the period in which the dichotomy typical of the antimasque appears in Elizabethan court entertainments, and I have reached the conclusion that the decades which are worth taking into account are the 1580s and the 1590s. Through the historical outline – which gives particular attention to the issues of succession and marriage, emphasizing the affairs between Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester and Elizabeth and the Duke of Alençon – I have demonstrated that these are the years in which England started feeling deep anxieties about the succession to the throne. The issue was worsened by the fact that, by the last two decades of her reign, Elizabeth I had rejected all her suitors, and, therefore, it was clear that she would not have got married and begot a legitimate heir to her country.

Furthermore, the historical context is also helpful to fully comprehend the background of the 'antimasque-like' aspects found in the

[1] It is clear that the references are not to the same crisis: different socio-political situations lead to different topical allusions.

four court entertainments I have analysed in the third and last section of Part 2: *The Lady of May*, by Sir Philip Sidney; *Sappho and Phao* and *Endymion*, by John Lyly; and, finally, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, by Thomas Nashe. The texts of these spectacles contain a particular dichotomy that is similar to the one in Ben Jonson's masques: if, on the one hand, they explicitly celebrate Queen Elizabeth I, on the other, their 'antimasque-like' aspects, by alluding to the issue of succession, clearly express the tensions of the time.

It is clear that these are not the only entertainments performed during the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign which contain this kind of topical allusions, especially among Lyly's plays. However, I have decided to analyse them because of their particular approach to the figure of the Queen, which makes it easier to find the 'antimasque-like' elements in the spectacle.

To start with, the choice of *The Lady of May* stems from the fact that, in some ways, it resembles some of the features of the English court masque, the most important of which is the centrality of the sovereign in the entertainment. In addition, this spectacle is worth considering also because of its date: it was performed in 1578, the same year of the introduction of the cult of the Virgin Queen, which contributed to 'strengthen' the celebration of Elizabeth I.

Then, I have chosen *Sappho and Phao* and *Endymion* among Lyly's court comedies because, as Sallie Bond puts it, they are Lyly's only plays in which "the queen [is approached] so closely" (S. Bond 189). Finally, *Summer's Last Will* deserves a particular attention because of its explicit reference to the issue of succession, which is the key theme of the whole plot.

A further reason for the choice of these four entertainments as examples of works which present that particular antimasque dialectic has its origins in the fact that they undergo a development which is similar to

that of *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated*. Both *The Lady of May* and *Summer's Last Will* contain a more explicit praise of the Queen – constituted by a direct address to her in the text – which makes their 'antimasque-like' aspects more 'implicit'. On the other hand, in *Sappho and Phao* and *Endymion*, Lyly makes use of a different technique to insert 'antimasque-like' aspects in the texts. Therefore, from an initial form, the way of introducing 'antimasque-like' aspects undergoes a development, but finally returns to a stage which recalls the starting point of the evolution.

To conclude, in the third and last part of this dissertation I have explained how these 'antimasque-like' elements have influenced the public stage. Generally speaking, almost every Elizabethan author might have been influenced by these tendencies, but I have decided to analyse the most significant playwright for the public stage: William Shakespeare. Masques and courtly spectacles have influenced almost every play he has written, but, for the aim of this thesis, just one is worth considering: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Apart from its style, which is linked to both John Lyly and Ben Jonson, it is a good example of this influence on the public theatre, because it contains all the key points which, related to the current socio-political situation, have constituted the already analysed 'antimasque-like' aspects in Elizabethan age.

PART 1

MASQUE AND ANTIMASQUE: RISE AND DEVELOPMENT

This chapter aims at being an introduction to the whole dissertation. Its main object is to explain what an *antimasque* is, what its origins are and how it developed over the years. In this analysis, three particular masques by Ben Jonson will be analysed: *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemist at Court*. They are worth considering because, through their topical allusions, they can be taken as spectacles which establish a sort of continuity between the antimasque in the Stuart period and aspects of this same device in the previous decades, that is to say during the Elizabethan age.

To fully comprehend the rise and the development of the antimasque, the masque as a form of entertainment has firstly to be considered.

1. Masque

1.1. A definition

The English court masque is a particular kind of courtly spectacle, centred on the physical and symbolic presence of the sovereign, whose basic structure includes a poetic induction and a formal masque (or main masque), followed by the revels[2] and a sung epilogue at the end[3] (Béhar 524). Although it can vary, the masque as an entertainment generally presents some constants. To start with, apart form the fact that the monarch is always at the centre of the spectacle (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 38), the climatic moment is similar in all masques, since "the fiction [opens] outward to include the whole court, as masquers [descend] from pageant car or stage and [take] partners from the audience" (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 39). As a consequence, a further constant is that masquers are not actors; as a matter of fact, the masque usually creates heroic roles for the members of the court – and, in some cases, for the monarch[4] – within an idealized fiction (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 38). Thus, it can be inferred that, by definition, masques are for

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[2] The moment of the revels is the moment when masquers take spectators from the audience to join in dances. As a matter of fact, one of the features of the masque as a spectacle is that, "at the end of [the] performance, the boundary between actors and spectators [collapses]" (Smuts 282).

[3] From 1610s, masques formally include an antimasque just before the main masque. This aspect will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

[4] As Smuts points out, Elizabeth I and James I never danced in a masque, whereas Queen Anne, Prince Henry, Charles I, Queen Henrietta Maria – and Henry VIII before them – were among the performers (Smuts 282).

the court and about the court (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 38), in the sense that they are essential for its life, history and events (Mosca Bonsignore 1; S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 38).

The basic aim of these spectacles is to celebrate the sovereign, who is generally presented as the person who is in charge of guaranteeing the harmony of his state (Mosca Bonsignore 25). As a matter of fact, the main masque is generally associated to order and immutability – in contrast with the chaos and mutability usually displayed in the antimasque (Mosca Bonsignore 25). Consequently, the sovereign is often presented as the person who is capable of taming the nature: for instance, he is able to accelerate the passing from one season to another, to raise storms at will or to accelerate the harvest. Even though, on a first glance, this might be related to possession of magic powers, it is important to remember that the masque has nothing to do with magic; this is rather the representation of the ability to control nature through intellect, virtues and self-knowledge (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 56).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that masques are usually important parts of celebrations at court during extraordinary events, such as royal entries, betrothal, weddings, coronations, funerals, births and baptisms (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 38). Therefore, masques – and their origins – can be set in the general background of the culture of festivals, which is highly significant in the European Renaissance (Strong *Splendour at Court* 36). To fully comprehend the position of the masque in this context, it is important to point out that "court and civic festivals [. . .] can usefully be divided into two main types of events: ceremonies and spectacles" (Watanabe-O'Kelly 15). On the one hand, ceremonies are generally identified with public outdoor celebrations, like processions during royal entries, acts of coronation or religious ceremonies for a marriage. Their efficacy stems from their characteristic of being public and, thus, witnessed by people; in other words, a ceremony usually

establishes a particular tie between the sovereign and those attending the ceremony. On the other hand, spectacles basically include the more private indoor entertainments, like banquets and theatrical events (Watanabe-O'Kelly 15). The role of the audience is here completely different: whilst, during a ceremony, the audience is there just to witness a particular event, in a spectacle it is within the entertainment, an aspect that is also due to the fact that performers and spectators often come from the same social group (Watanabe-O'Kelly 16). Hence, the English court masque clearly develops in this last context.

Yet, when does the court masque rise? Although it is now generally agreed that its golden age is the Stuart period, the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* suggests that the first use of the term goes back to 1512, and refers to a dance of masked figures. However, before this date, namely between 1427 and 1435, John Lydgate is believed to have composed seven of this kind of entertainments, called *mummings by way of disguising* or, simply, *mummings*, which are considered to be the first examples of the genre. Then, during the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I – and thanks to the influence from Italy and France –, the masque becomes a more elaborate form of entertainment. Its peak was reached with the collaboration between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, when these spectacles turn into lavish and expensive forms of entertainment, which aim at showing the sovereign's magnificence. By this time, the masque is so important that it even manages to influence popular forms of drama – the most interesting and important influence is, of course, on Shakespeare.

1.2. Origins and development

1.2.1. The inheritance from the Middle Ages

As already suggested in the previous part of the chapter, although the English court masque saw its golden age with the Stuart kings, this particular form of courtly spectacle has its origins in the Middle Ages.

As Béhar puts it, one of the precursors of the masque can be identified in the medieval *momerie*, which were primitive forms of *mumming*[5]. The most significant example is represented by the Christmas festivities at Kenilworth in 1377, when the *momerie* consisted in a procession along the streets, during which masked people entered their neighbours' houses either dancing, playing a pantomime or playing dice – the so-called *mum chance*. During the following years, however, the form started developing and, from the simple activities of dancing and playing, the *momerie* started including verses, as in the case of John Lydgate (Béhar 525).

A further medieval precursor of the English court masque is the so-called *disguising*, which has its roots in the *folk mumming* (Whitington 4). As Whitington puts it, on New Year's Eve

> "it was customary [. . .] for the young men and women to exchange their clothes, which was termed *Mumming* or

[5] According to the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*, a *mumming play* is "a primitive form of folk drama associated with funeral rites and seasonal fertility rites, especially the spring festival". The performance, performed by the so-called *mummers*, consists on a simple plot and its major themes are death and resurrection – which are connected to the themes of pagan spring festival rites.

> *Disguising*[6]; and when thus dressed in each others' garments, they would go from one neighbour's cottage to another, singing, dancing, and partaking on their good cheer" (qtd. in Whitington 8).

However, it must be pointed out that this element of disguised dancers and players did not take place only during particular occasions – like on New Year's Eve –, but it was a quite common 'activity' at the time. As a matter of fact, the arrival of aristocrats in disguise – who, after dancing before the company, joined it in the court ball – was also a basic ingredient of medieval indoor *mascarades* and entertainments[7] (Strong *Art and Power* 17).

To conclude, there is a last significant aspect of these forms of entertainment, which would have been a key point not only in the development of the masque but also in the evolution of the antimasque: this is the element of topical allusion, that is to say the fact that these spectacles often recalled historical facts, as, for instance, the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 (Strong *Art and Power* 17).

Even though an evolution can already be identified in these primitive forms, a new impetus to the genre was definitely given by Henry VIII, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

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[6] It is important to stress that, from a certain moment onwards, *mummings* and *disguisings* came to mean different things: whilst a *mumming* remained an entertainment with masked and silent dice players, a *disguising* became a more dramatic kind of spectacle (Strong *Art and Power* 17).

[7] As already pointed out, the rise of the court masque and its development can be inserted in the Renaissance culture of festivals, which clearly has its origins in the Middle Ages. Broadly speaking, medieval influences on the following period have their origin in medieval royal entries, tournaments and indoor *mascarades* and entertainments (Strong *Art and Power* 6).

1.2.2. The Tudor *maske*[8]

As Sidney Anglo puts it, "it has long been recognized that [entertainments at the early Tudor court] contained, in embryonic form, the elements of the full-fledged Stuart masque" (Anglo *Evolution of Early Tudor Disguising* 3). The most significant date of the period is Twelfth Night of 1512, when the first Tudor mask took place[9]. Henry VIII, together with eleven attendants, entered the court ball "disguised, after the manner of Italie" (Anglo *Evolution of Early Tudor Disguising* 4); when the banquet ended,

> [the] Maskers came in, with six gentlemen disguised in silke bearyng staffe torches, and desired the ladies to daunces, some were content, and some that knewe the fashion of it refused, because it was not a thyng commonly seen. And after thei daunced and commoned together, as the fashion of the Maske is, thei tooke their leaue and departed, and so did the Quene, and all the ladies (qtd. in Anglo *Evolution of Early Tudor Disguising* 4).

According to the accounts, this kind of performance, "called a maske [was] a thyng not seen afore in Englande" (qtd. in Chambers 153). In Béhar's view, Henry was here introducing the Italian *masquerie*, a particular form of spectacle already popular in both Ferrara and Modena,

[8] The use of the terms *maske* and *mask* aims at distinguishes this types of spectacle during the Tudor and Elizabethan age from the English court masque, which is generally associated to the Stuart court (Smuts 291).

[9] According to Béhar, this date is so important because this is the very first time that a courtly spectacle is called a *maske* (Béhar 525).

whose main feature was a procession of disguised dominoes, who went into private houses and involved their inhabitants to dance with them (Béhar 525).

A completely new aspect in these entertainments was finally the importance of costumes. They were initially taken from the Italian tradition, and consisted of "long broad garments with hoods, hats and vizards"; however, with the evolution of the form[10], performers started wearing mythological and allegorical dresses (Béhar 526).

1.2.3. The Elizabethan *mask*

Generally speaking, during the reign of Elizabeth I, the form of the court masque does not undergo a striking development (Béhar 526; Welsford 149): it "[continues] to feature a group of costumed figures, sometimes bizarre or exotic, [. . .] usually accompanied by torchbearers, who might be wheeled into the hall on a pageant car representing a castle, a bower or some other such device" (Béhar 526). The most significant feature of these entertainments remains the fact that, at a certain point, the performers mix with the audience, in the sense that they invite some of the spectators to join in the dances (Béhar 526)[11].

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[10] During the following years of the reign of Henry VIII, these spectacles became more and more dramatic. In addition, due to the influence of the Italian Renaissance, the subjects of these entertainments stopped recalling characters from medieval romances and started taking inspiration from some personalities that belonged to the classical antiquity (Béhar 526).

[11] In Chamber's view, it is this last aspect – which also takes for granted the fact that performers and audience come from the same social background – that differentiate the Elizabethan mask from the form of drama (Chambers 1: 149-150).

However, even though there was no considerable evolution of the form during this period, the Elizabethan mask still managed to contribute to the development of the dramatic quality of the genre: the most significant changes were the introduction of a simple plot and the expansion of the prologue, "which explained the presence of the masquers" (Béhar 526). This was probably connected to the fact that, in the Elizabethan age, forms of mask were often inserted into plays on the public stage: in short, at the time, "the mask [was] not primarily a drama [but] it [was] an episode in an indoor revel or dancing [. . .] [which took place] when masked [. . .] persons [. . .] [came] into the hall as a compliment to the hosts or the principal guest" (Chambers 1: 149).

On the other hand, at the same time, together with these forms of mask inserted in public spectacles, some court entertainments which take the name of *mask*, or *masque*, started appearing on stage. The only one which has come down to us is the *Masque of Proteus or the Adamantine Rock* (1594) by Francis Davidson (Béhar 526), which has been considered as a turning point in the history of the genre mainly because its text recalls the texts of the fully developed Stuart court masques. First of all, "with its fixed stage and its unified setting, [it was] the first English masque to conceive, in however small a way, of the masquing hall as a theatre" (S. Orgel *Jonsonian Masque* 9). Furthermore, it contained some of the features which would characterize the form of the Stuart court masque, like

> the introductory song and speeches presenting the masquers, a kind of dramatic exposition; the entry of the masquers themselves; the inclusion of the revels between the formal dances; the dialogue recalling the masquers; [. . .] the concluding song [. . .] and the graceful compliment

> paid to the Queen at the end [that] [. . .] stood at the centre of the symbolic universe of the masque (Béhar 526-527).

Hence, the *Masque of Proteus or the Adamantine Rock* can be considered as a key link between the Stuart and the Elizabethan age because, as Béhar puts it, it can be defined as “the immediate precursor of the [Stuart] masque” (Béhar 527), which will be discussed in the following part.

1.2.4. The Stuart court masque

As already stated, the Stuart period is the moment in which the court masque achieved the peak of its popularity. In Béhar’s view, by this time, it had become “a spectacle of a dazzling beauty, governed by decorum, proportions, and harmony” (Béhar 527). The central element of the entertainment was the “arrival and ‘revelation’ of noble personages, disguised and masqued, [who danced] a specially prepared dance” before inviting some spectators to join them in the performance of the *measures*, which were conventional social dances (Béhar 527). A crucial aspect was that masquers were initially used to remaining silent during the performance; songs and speeches were usually delivered by professional actors, disguised in mythological or allegorical costumes which were linked to the central theme of the spectacle (Béhar 527).

In masques, a special role was played by music and dance. According to the Renaissance belief, both of them were metaphors of order and harmony: whilst terrestrial music had to aim at reproducing the perfect sound of the music of the spheres, dances had to be as close as possible to the motion of stars and planets. In addition, dance could also have moral and political implications: on the one hand, as far as the first

is concerned, dance was believed to have an instructive force, which made people avoid dangerous passions. On the other, it helped the celebration of the king, whose power brought order to the society, trying to make it perfect (Béhar 533). The music in masques – which always tended to be lyrical – did not undergo a remarkable development over the years: it basically remained the same, consisting in

> instrumental movements played by an orchestra of lutes and violons [which] accompanied the entrance of important characters [. . .] and the change of scenes [. . .] ; songs and dialogues sung by secondary characters, choruses which often accompanied ceremonial movements such as processions; and finally a good deal of dance music (Béhar 534).

However, despite its constants, the English court masque clearly underwent an evolution during the Stuart period. To start with, one of the most interesting innovations was that “the masque came to rely more and more on spectacular effects” (Béhar 529). To fully comprehend this aspect, the two most important personalities linked to the Stuart court masque have to be introduced: Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones. Even though their collaboration is now recognized to have been extremely important for the evolution of the genre, it has been suggested that it was “uneasy from the start” (Béhar 529). Whereas, on the one hand, Jonson’s object had always been the preservation of the literary aspect of the court masque, on the other, Jones started giving enormous importance to the architecture. As a matter of fact, the latter considered architecture as an expression of harmony and order, which made the setting of the masque become a harmonious vision of the world (Béhar 529). In other words, with the help of the architecture, the main masque allegorically displayed

the power of the sovereign, whose role consisted in bringing order to the world. In his work, Jones had been influenced by the Vitruvian theory of architecture, to which he added several elements, like the scene-changes and the use of machines. As far as the use of a particular architecture is concerned, two aspects are worth considering. Firstly, in the masque of *Hymenaei* (1606), Jones experimented the so-called *machina versatilis*, "a two-side type of setting pivot, which was turned round from underneath to reveal the masquers" (Béhar 531). Later, namely in *Oberon* (1611), he introduced a new machinery, the *machina ductilis*, also called tractable scene, "which consisted of a number of flats or shutters set in grooves on the stage, which could be drawn aside to reveal another setting behind" (Béhar 531). In Béhar's view, "the use of such sophisticated scenery and machinery [. . .] [finally led to] the construction of a special hall, more appropriate for performances than the old Banqueting House at Whitehall", which was demolished and rebuilt according to the king's will (Béhar 532).

Together with architecture, a further significant innovation in the Stuart masques was finally that of costumes. Whilst, in the previous century, they just reproduced foreign costumes, during the seventeenth century, the artist became much more free in his choices. This resulted in a creation of new complex costumes, which always kept a historical and symbolical significance, intending to display moral abstractions (Béhar 532).

On the whole, from this analysis, it is clear that the English court masque was not merely a form of court entertainment which rose and developed during the Stuart period. As a matter of fact, this latter was just its golden age, during which the masque, after a long evolution throughout the centuries, finally became a lavish and expensive

spectacle, which saw the monarchs and their court at the centre of its plot.

2. Antimasque

2.1. An overview

According to the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*, the antimasque is an innovation by Ben Jonson, introduced in 1609, which "took the form of a buffonish and grotesque episode before the main masque, or an interlude, similarly farcical during it". In other words, the antimasque can be defined "as an interruption or a mockery of the rites" of the masque, the latter consisting in the acts of the celebrants who "come to pay their homage and give their thanks to their king or god, figured in the royal spectator who sits under the canopy in the center of the Banqueting House" (Todd Furniss 21). After 1609, or, in Mickel's opinion, after 1611 (Mickel 63)[12], the antimasque becomes part of the masque's fixed pattern (Lindley 2): it follows the brief poetic induction and precedes the main masque, which is then followed by the revels and the epilogue (Lindley 1). It might thus be described as a formal boundary inserted in this structure, whose main function is to contain the elements of opposition or dissent, which stem from the typical dialectic present in court entertainments (Mickel 2-7)[13].

[12] Although it is generally agreed that *The Masque of Queens* (1609) is the first appearance of Jonson's use of the antimasque in a spectacle, Mickel suggests that the very first example of antimasque is *Oberon the Fairy Prince* (1611). According to the same author, this might also gives an explanation of Jonson's omission of an antimasque in *Prince Henry's Barriers*, performed in 1610 (Mickel 4).

[13] According to Mickel, "the Jonsonian court entertainment develops into a dialectical investigation of contemporary affairs and it is far more complex than the simple act of homage that it had sometimes been assumed to be" (Mickel 1).

With this in mind, Mosca Bonsignore suggests that, from its first apparition on stage onwards, the antimasque has not always been the same, but it has undergone a development, after which it has finally returned to its more implicit form (Mosca Bonsignore 2)[14]. To fully comprehend this evolution, she considers the masques by Ben Jonson and divides them into two different groups: on the one hand, in the first group[15], the audience is presented with a main masque that symbolically represents the positive values of the court, linked to virtues and order. On the contrary, the antimasque is there to depict the negative values associated to the same court, always connected to vice and chaos (Mosca Bonsignore 3). What is worth pointing out is that, in this group of spectacles, everything works on a symbolic level: the antimasque generally introduces grotesque characters, "such as monsters, country bumpkins and the like [. . .] [in] contrast with the sumptuously attired dancers of the main masque" (Béhar 528). It thus consists of an attack carried out by the evil forces, which finally have to be defeated (Mosca Bonsignore 5).

On the other hand, the second group of masques[16] presents a different contrast between the main masque and the antimasque, because

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[14] In Mickel's opinion, an example of the return to a more implicit form is *Love's Triumphs Through Callipolis* (1631), where the change might be explained with the fact that the focus of the performance – shifting from the King to the Queen –, "expresses certain concerns about the gender and the role of the Queen and her excessive influence over royal authority" (Mickel 10).

[15] *Hymenaei, The Masque of Queenes, Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly, Mercurie Vindicated form the Alchemist at Court, The Golden age Restored, Pleasure Reconcild to Vertue, Love Triumphs Through Callipolis, Chloridia*. (Mosca Bonsignore 3)

[16] *Love Restored, The Irish Masque at Court, Christmas his Masque, For the Honour of Wales, News from the New World Discover'd in the Moone, Pans Anniversarie, The Gypsies Metamorphos'd, The Masque of Augures, Time Vindicated to*

it tends to show an opposition between the world of the court and the population: therefore, in this case, the protagonists of the antimasque are basically common people (Mosca Bonsignore 3-4). This type of antimasque also includes "the introduction of comic characters as speakers who replaced the silent dancers of the early masques" (Béhar 528).

Whatever the form, the significant aspect this analysis emphasizes is that the key feature of the antimasque is the creation of a *dialectic* within the spectacle, which, generally speaking, can be well summarized in the opposition '*order vs chaos*'[17]: in short, the forces of the antimasque have to be defeated, or, at least, contained, by the forces of the main masque, whose primary objective is to bring a certain harmony to the world the belong to.

A further important point concerning evolution, which is also linked to this essential 'antimasque dialectic'[18], is that, in Mickel's view, the antimasque does not come out of the blue with Jonson's invention, but seems to stem from the fractures present in the dominant ideology of the previous masques and entertainments: the example he takes is *The Masques of Blackness* (1605), which "features certain inconsistencies and anomalies that subtly permeates the masque as a whole" (Mickel 4). In this context, a key role is also played by the so-called *chivalric*

Himselfe and to his Honors, Neptune Triumphs for the Return of Albion, The Fortunate Island and their Union (Mosca Bonsignore 3).

[17] *Order* and *chaos* do not have to be interpreted strictly as referring to a tidy and untidy arrangement; they rather represent something considered as 'perfect', or harmonious, which is undermined by some opposite forces.

[18] In using the phrase 'antimasque dialectic', I refer to the dialectic the antimasque creates within a spectacle, which is one of its essential features. I will sometimes use this same phrase even though an entertainment does not present a proper form of antimasque, because what I do want to highlight is the fact that a spectacle contains that particular 'fracture' on which the 'antimasque dialectic' is based.

masques, because they generally represent a set of values contradicting those associated with the monarchy (Mickel 63). In this embryonic stage of the antimasque, Jonson adopts the same technique he had already applied to his Roman plays: he 'takes advantage' of their particular symbolism in order to make implicit allusions to the socio-political situation of the time (Mickel 64).

As a conclusion, this general overview of the antimasque has stressed the fact that this literary device can take many different forms, presenting either grotesque characters or comic personalities belonging to the lowest social classes. However, the aspect this dissertation takes into account for its aim of finding embryonic forms of antimasque during the Elizabethan age is the form of antimasque concerned with topical allusions, which will be extensively discussed in the following section of this chapter.

2.2. A curious line of development

As Béhar puts it, an important stage in the evolution of the antimasque is that, after 1612, "Jonson seems to have moved away from [a] symbolic framework and turned towards topical allusion" (Béhar 528).

As far as this last particular form is concerned, it is worth pointing out that, even though history – and, in particular, tensions that stem from certain socio-political situations – tends to influence the development of these court entertainments, it is also true that the genre of the masque has itself a topical nature (Mickel 116): having the sovereign at its centre, a tendency of talking about him and his court appears to be more than normal. As regards this last point, a curious question might come to one's mind: if this genre had at its centre the representation of the sovereign,

and if the antimasque contained a kind of critic about current socio-political matters, how could these spectacles be acceptable at court (Mickel 117)? In other words, how come they were not censored like many plays and entertainments which were thought to be offensive? A possible answer is that, even in case it contains some quite explicit 'subversive' material, the main masque element – generally representing the power of the sovereign – is always able to triumph against the attacks carried out by the forces of the antimasque.

In terms of topical allusions, a particular line of evolution is worth analysing. This will consider *Hymenaei* (1606), *Love Restored* (1612) and *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemist at Court* (1616), because they are all cases in which "the historical pressures [. . .] shaped the antimasque" (Mickel 101). The first of these masques, *Hymenaei*, is an example of a masque formally lacking an antimasque, but already presenting fractures which imply an opposition to the main masque. On the contrary, *Love Restored* – which has also been considered as a transitional point in the evolution of the antimasque (Mosca Bonsignore 3) – appears to be "overtly satirical on topical matters" (Mickel 105), whereas *Mercury Vindicated* is an example of the last stage in the development of the antimasque, in which this literary device finally seems to return to a form which recalls the starting point of its evolution: as a matter of fact, Mercury Vindicated does not present an explicit reference to the current matters, but just hints at certain behaviours at court in a symbolic – and, thus, more implicit – way (Mickel 105).

2.2.1. *Hymenaei*

Hymenaei was written by Ben Jonson for the celebration of the wedding of Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, and Frances Howard, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk. The masque was performed on the wedding night, on 5 January 1606 (Lindley, Introduction to *Hymenaei* 2: 659). A significant aspect is that this marriage stemmed from a political motivation, as proved by the tender age of the couple: when they got married, the bridegroom was fourteen and the bride only thirteen (Mickel 105). As a matter of fact, at the time, the Earl of Suffolk was trying to arrange several marriages for his children in order to consolidate his position and power at court. As the Venetian ambassador notes, this particular marriage was curiously strategic, since "the [king's] object [was] to reconcile the young Earl of Essex to Lord Salisbury" (qtd. in Lindley, Introduction to *Hymenaei* 2: 659). Hostilities between them had begun with the downfall of the second Earl of Essex – finally executed for rebellion in 1601 –, which had been hastened by the Howard family. Moreover, hatred between the two families had been fuelled by their religious background: whilst the second Earl of Essex "had championed a policy of militant Protestantism", the Howards were known to be Catholic supporters (Mickel 106).

However, this masque can be considered as "a celebration of Union on many levels" (Lindley, Introduction to *Hymenaei* 2: 660), because, with this marriage, the King was not simply hoping for a union of families, but he was finally aiming to unite nations: in other words, *Hymenaei* also celebrates James's aspiration to unite England and Scotland and to earn the title of King of Great Britain. Yet, his achievement was not easy to reach and provoked hostilities among both English and Scots (Mickel 106). Objections mainly stemmed from legal

and religious diversities: on the one hand, "the English Parliament resented his efforts to replace a cherished system of common law with a Scots civil law based in Roman legal practices", whereas, on the other, Scots were not ready to support the Anglican style of worship (qtd. in Mickel 106).

With this in mind, it is easy to recognize several topical allusions in the masque from its very beginning. Recalling a Roman marriage ceremony, the masque begins with the presentation of the "symbolic figure of 'Union' as 'Mistress of these rites' " (qtd. in Mickel 106) and with the mentioning of the figure of "The king and priest of peace" (*Hymenaei* 72[19]). This last line is a clear allusion to James, who aimed at a "spiritual uniformity", which was to be achieved by the introduction of Anglican models in Scotland. Together with these allusions to the religious sphere, the text of *Hymenaei* also presents several references to James's preference of the Scottish system of civil law, based on the Roman system: it is in this context that the audience understands the symbolic functions of Reason and Order "triumphing over the unruly and destructive humours and affections" (Mickel 107).

However, it may be argued that these first topical allusions have nothing to do with the creation of a dialectic recalling the antimasque, but they are just neutral references to some of the historical facts of the time; yet, as Mickel suggests, "a close reading of the text throws up subtle discrepancies that fail to accord with the main thrust" of the masque (Mickel 107), and that seems to display a kind of opposition to James's current policy. To start with, the first example of this note of criticism – which despises the idea of marriage as a mere political union,

[19] All the quotations from the primary sources are taken from the editions indicated in the bibliography.

Unless differently indicated, the numbers following the title of a work correspond to the line numbers.

because it should be the result of love – is to be found in *Hymenaei* 142-147:

> Nor is this altar but a sign
> Of one more soft and more divine –
> The genial bed, where Hymen keeps
> The solemn orgies, void of sleeps;
> And the wildest cupid, waking, hovers
> With adoration 'twixt the lovers.

This passage is clearly linked to the end of Hymen's opening speech, when the audience is invited to "view two noble maids / Of different sex, to Union sacrificed" (*Hymenaei* 85-86). According to Mickel, "these words [. . .] resonate with [. . .] contemporary implications" (Mickel 108) for several different reasons. Firstly, the bride and the groom are "sacrificed" (*Hymenaei* 86), because their union is basically a political one. Secondly, given the age of the couple and the customs of the time, it is likely that, even after the marriage, they continued living separately with their parents. In this context, the words pronounced by Reason, which allude to sexuality, thus result in being "painfully tactless" (Mickel 108).

A further example in which Jonson questions the Howard-Essex marriage can be found in the latter part of the masque, when the audience listens to the debate between Truth and Opinion; the former being in favour of the marriage, the second supporting the idea of a single life[20]. This debate can be considered as an example of a subtle criticism of King James's ideas. In brief, the main issue of the debate is whether a married

[20] What is worth pointing out is the fact that, on stage, Truth and Opinion wear exactly the same costume, so that it is impossible to tell which was which (Mickel 109).

or a single life is better – or, in other words, whether this particular marriage represents a good union. However, if the Howard-Essex marriage also stands for James's aspirations about uniting England and Scotland – and if the idea of this marriage is questioned – the discussion between Truth and Opinion might be taken as an implicit debate, or even as a criticism, about James's policy of union.

Finally, together with these aspects which recall the dialectic typical of the antimasque, *Hymenaei* also presents other types of fractures, which resemble the situation at court. One of this is associated to what Mickel defines "infant sickness and mortality" (Mickel 108):

> 'Tis so. This same is he,
> The king and priest of peace!
> And that his empress, she,
> That sits so crowned with her own increase! (*Hymenaei* 71-74)

The dramatic irony of this passage stems from the situation of sickness related to the children at court. Princess Mary was born in 1605 and she had always been a sickly baby, until she finally died in 1607. A similar tragedy happened with Princess Sophia, who died the day following her birth in 1606. The last case is finally represented by Charles, similarly slow and sickly (Mickel 108)[21]. These references to infant sickness in the passage above are important because they make the reader think about a possible implicit meaning of the already discussed line 72. If, on the one hand, titling James as "the king and priest of

[21] These cases of infant sickness and mortality would have been soon followed by Prince Henry's death: even though, at the time, he was a healthy boy – considered as the future of the nation –, he finally passed away in 1612, at the age of 18 (Mickel 108).

peace" is considered either a praise or a simple reference linked to the current political situation, on the other, it could imply the fact that "just as James's and Anne's hopes for the fruitful 'increase' of their family were disappointed, James's hopes for the spiritual and legal union of Scotland and England were thwarted" (Mickel 108).

As a conclusion, albeit all these implicit fractures which creates a sort of 'antimasque dialectic', it is important to remember that *Hymenaei* does not present a proper antimasque. However, in spite of this, it is a useful point in this analysis because it can be considered as one of Jonson's first attempts to introduce a structure which opposes an antimasque to the main masque (Lindley, Introduction to *Hymenaei* 2: 660).

2.2.2. *Love Restored*

Broadly speaking, *Love Restored*, the first masque written for King James[22], performed at Whitehall in 1612, clearly represents a significant step in the evolution of the antimasque. Firstly, the antimasque plays such an important part in the spectacle that it even seems to "[dominate] the entertainment, [. . .] [with the result that] the masque appears to be tackled on, almost as an after thought" (Mickel 111). Secondly, "Jonson transforms the generally symbolic figure of vice, excess, or misrule into a spokesman for topical political criticism of court profligacy"; in this masque, Plutus – the god of money – is trying to "prevent the revels from taking place" (Fischer 231).

[22] At the time, Prince Henry had already passed away and Queen Anne was not participating in masques anymore (Mickel 111).

In *Love Restored*, the topical allusion is to the financial crisis of 1612, which also gives an explanation of the modest expenses covered to stage this masque[23]. 1612 was "a year of crippling dearth for the Crown" (Mickel 110), which was worsened by the death of the king's supremely competent administrator, Robert Cecil. With Cecil's death "died all the hope for the Great Contract which would have ensured regular subsidies to James from Parliament in return for his surrendering of certain feudal rights" (Mickel 110); as a matter of fact, Cecil had tried to solve the problem with the introduction of the so called Privy Seals – which were nothing but forced loans –, but this resulted in a climate of resentment across the country, due to the fact that many refused to pay or were slow in doing so. This economic situation, related to the Crown, was finally dramatically in contrast with the considerable wealth of the City of London (Mickel 110).

In this atmosphere, court entertainments were often criticized because of their costliness; this attack tended to merge with the Puritan criticism of masques, based on the fact that they were considered immoral forms of entertainment (Mickel 110). In this case, the Puritan attacks were worsened by the fact that everyone started thinking that the court should have been more engaged with its serious duties, rather than just being concerned with showing off its magnificence (Fischer 235). In this context, Plutus's assertions against extravagance acquire a considerable significance: firstly, he questions the behaviour of the courtiers, who [busied] themselves with card games" instead of thinking about their state duties; then, a similar 'criticism' is addressed to the

[23] Masquerados himself, the presenter, claims that "circumstances have prevented the performance" (*Love Restored* 2-7), which is a clear allusion to the financial crisis, in contrast with the usual magnificence of courtly spectacles (Mickel 112).

ladies, who should think about their domestic duties instead of spending money on lavish entertainments and dresses (Fischer 235-236).

Nonetheless, this criticism of courtly spectacles as distractions from courtiers' duties is not the only criticism recalled through the lines of *Love Restored*. As a matter of fact, the bitterest attack contained in this court entertainment concerns the 'opposition' to the extravagance of the royal family, against which the sovereign had a powerful ideological defence, which stated that "magnificence was necessary for the dignity of the king" (Fisher 237). This idea had its origins in a Renaissance tradition according to which the expenses made by a person were associated with their virtue and dignity. In 1609, the issue had even been discussed with the Parliament, in front of which James spoke these words: "it is trew I haue spent much: but yet if I had spared any of those things, which caused a great part of my expenses, I should haue dishonoured the kingdome, my selfe, and the late Queene" (qtd. in Fischer 237). Therefore, broadly speaking, not only is the attack against expenditures at court, but there is also a criticism to the expenses made by the king himself, which is based on the idea that "the court has become what it is under his leadership" (Mickel 113).

Furthermore, apart from all those hints at the financial crisis and the lavish lifestyle at court, *Love Restored* also alludes to other historical accidents, namely the hostilities between English and Scottish courtiers. As a matter of fact, 1612 was also the year that saw the worst moment of this crisis, which consisted in a series of incidents, like "the infamous and violent quarrel between the Earl of Montgomery and Patrick Ramsay at Croydon races", or the murder of Turner – the English fencing master – by the Scottish Lord Sanquhar (Mickel 111)[24].

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[24] According to Mickel's account, at a certain point, "events reached such a pitch that a Scottish court usher was forced to apologise to a lawyer whom he had injured

This historical background is clearly recalled by the end of *Love Restored*, which finally proposes a peaceful solution to this hostile climate[25]. As Mickel puts it, this solution is a *via media*, represented by love and a vision of harmony: "peace and prosperity will only be brought about when this harmony dispels the rivalling court factions" (Mickel 113).

> See, here are ten
> The spirits of court and flower of men,
> Led on by me, with famed intents,
> To figure the ten ornaments
> That do each courtly presence grace.
> Now will they rudely strive for place,
> One to precede the other, but,
> As music them in form shall put,
> So will they keep their measure true" (*Love Restored* 204-212)

In conclusion, it is clear *Love Restored* represents some further forwards with the development of the antimasque in terms of both its general evolution and its form concerning topical allusions: what was just an implicit fracture in *Hymenaei* is here contained in a proper formal boundary, which is now part of the structure of the masque as a court entertainment. Topical allusions are, of course, linked to the current historical and political situation: whilst, in *Hymenaei*, the audience is

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when expelling him form the court at Whitehall, and the Scottish Murray family went as far as to murder a sergeant sent to arrest one of their number" (Mickel 111).

[25] It is worth mentioning that, even though, if compared with the economic crises, these incidents do not seem to represent the main problem for the king, they definitely contributed to create a hostile climate.

likely to grasp allusions to James's policy of union of England and Scotland, or to the situation of infant sickness at court, in *Love Restored* – or, more precisely, in the antimasque in this spectacle –, "Plutus's attack on masquing and its expense [definitely] represents those inside and outside Parliament who criticized the King for its extravagances" (Lindley, Introduction to *Love Restored* 4: 199).

2.2.3. *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*

The date of the performance of *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemist at Court* is not certain, because, unlike in the other masques, this information is not clearly provided. However, given the fact that it appears in the 1616 folio, Martin Butler suggests that it might be identified with the masque "danced at the Whitehall Banqueting House on 6 January 1615, and repeated two days later" (Butler, Introduction to *Mercury Vindicated* 4: 432). Although this performance was staged just three years after that of *Love Restored*, it is clear that this is the moment when the form of the antimasque starts going back to its final form, which recalls the more implicit form of the starting point of its evolution: if compared to *Love Restored*, the antimasque in *Mercury Vindicated* – and the dialectic it creates in the text – is definitely less explicit in its topical allusions. As a matter of fact, on a superficial level, the plot does not seem to be related to the situation of the time: as Butler puts it, "its central conceit is [basically] a contrast between the King and the alchemists"[26] (Butler, Introduction to *Mercury Vindicated* 4: 431).

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[26] It is worth remembering that the major concern of the alchemists was that of improving the creations of nature. They are well known for their studies and attempts of converting metals into gold.

However, some topical allusions are hidden behind this symbolic plot. To fully comprehend them, the historical background to which *Mercury Vindicated* refers to is worth considering. The first significant fact regards the scandal about the Somersets. To start with, it is important to remember that, at the time, Frances Howard had already divorced from the Earl of Essex and married the Earl of Somerset, Robert Carr. Objections about the marriage where voiced by Thomas Overbury, a friend of Somerset, who, for this reason, was imprisoned in the Tower, where he finally died. At first, the cause of death was a mystery but, then, it came out and, as a consequence, Somerset was accused of poisoning him. The King wanted the Somersets to plead guilty because he wanted both to avoid rumours about them and to avoid his favourite to be dragged at court. However, Somerset did not agree; thus, in the end, the accusation was brought against Mrs. Turner, a confidante of Frances Howard.

In the meantime, there was another matter going on, which regarded George Villier's rise as court favourite, a fact that soon made clear that aspiring courtiers needed Buckingham's support; as a matter of fact, at the time, those under his patronage were likely to occupy important positions. This has obviously nothing to do with the scandal linked to the Somersets but the point is that Buckingham importance, combined with Somerset's fall, was taken as a sign that, at the time, the ancient nobility was losing respect (Mickel 114).

It is definitely this last concept that is at the centre of the topical allusions in *Mercury Vindicated*: the antimasque implicitly attacks James's "pacific [. . .] policy, [which] meant that the aristocracy no longer distinguished itself in combat, but now achieved its position

through court intrigue"[27] (Mickel 115). The antimasque points this out, revealing "one court creature that thrived under the influence of Buckingham and his ilk" (Mickel 115).

> A master of the duel, a carrier of the differences. To him went spirit of ale, a good quantity, with the amalgama of sugar and nutmegs, oil of oaths, sulphur of quarrel, strong waters, valour precipitate, vapoured o'er the helm with tobacco, and the rosin of Mars with a dram o'the business, for that's the word of tincture, the 'business' (*Mercury Vindicated* 111-115)

What is worth noticing in this passage is the insistence on the word 'business', which is here used as a cant word associated with quarrelling and arguments over honour (Butler, Introduction to *Mercury Vindicated* 4: 439). In Mickel's opinion, it can be considered as "an allusion to the skill in intrigue and scheming that would be necessary for this 'master of duels' " (Mickel 115).

Furthermore, what is worse is that the "unscrupulous ambition" *Mercury Vindicated* refers to was so catching that "even the below-stairs staff become involved in alchemy in the hope of future reward" (Mickel 115):

> A child o'the scullery steals all their coals for'em too, and he is bid sleep secure [. . .]. For the pantry, they are at certainty with me, and keep a tally: an ingot, a loaf, or a

[27] This became a serious problem because it resulted in hostility and duels among the courtiers.

> wedge of some five-pound weight (*Mercury Vindicated* 58-64)

These lines symbolically stand for an accusation of the fact that "the corruption of the court encourages corruption below stairs" (Mickel 115). In addition, this is also a reference to the pilfering of servants that occurred during the years of the famous financial crisis (Mickel 115).

Nevertheless, the most negative implication of this kind of corruption is that it even questions the position of the sovereign. Emblematic is Mercury's declaration that the alchemists "profess to outwork the sun in virtue and contend to the great act of generation, nay, almost creation" (*Mercury Vindicated* 99-100). Like in the other masques, the sun here stands for the sovereign and his power, which now seems to be undermined by personages like Buckingham, who, by giving courtiers titles and offices, challenges the king's position (Mickel 116). In this masque, "Mercury condemns the creation of Vulcan as 'against the excellence of the sun and Nature' " (Mickel 116). The object of the antimasque is, therefore, a kind of appeal for a strengthening of hierarchies at court, so that James could maintain his predominant position above all his courtiers (Mickel 116).

To conclude, for the purpose of this thesis, *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated* are worth considering for two main reasons. First of all, they are important because of their topical allusions in their antimasques; then, they are highly significant because, through the analysis of these three masques, the development of the form of the antimasque can be traced: from *Hymenaei*'s implicit fractures, the antimasque becomes more explicit with the clear topical allusions in *Love Restored*. After this apex, it goes back to its more implicit form,

which makes use of symbolism in order to talk about the socio-political situation of the time.

Furthermore, an essential aspect for the object of this dissertation is the fact that *Hymenaei*, despite its lack of a proper antimasque, already presents a dichotomy between the subjects it celebrates and the 'opposition' to this praise. In this sense, this masque can be taken as a kind of 'bridge' between Ben Jonson's antimasques and what is found in the Elizabethan court theatre. Even though Elizabethan embryonic forms of masque have been extensively discussed, books and journals do not analyse any forms of antimasque before the Stuart period. However, as will be demonstrated in the following part of this dissertation, some courtly spectacles performed in the last two decades of Queen Elizabeth's reign already display a dialectic which resembles the one created by the literary device of the antimasque.

PART 2

'ANTIMASQUE-LIKE' ASPECTS IN ELIZABETHAN COURTLY SPECTACLES

The object of this second part is to demonstrate that the dichotomy characterizing the antimasque in Ben Jonson's works was already present in the Elizabethan age. The link between the Stuart antimasque and the Elizabethan 'antimasque-like'[28] aspects lies in the form of topical allusions: just as Ben Jonson's masques 'attack' James's policies, the financial crisis and the intrigues at court, some late Elizabethan courtly spectacles, together with celebrating the image of the Queen, make implicit reference to the current socio-political situation, namely to the anxieties concerning the succession to the throne and the lack of a legitimate heir.

After establishing the kind of works where this 'antimasque dialectic' is to be found and the period in which it develops, this chapter will analyse four courtly spectacles which present this curious

[28] In using the adjective 'antimasque-like', I was inspired by the terminology used by Ewbank, who speaks about 'masque-like' aspects (or 'masque-elements') in plays (Ewbank "These Pretty Devices" 408). The use of the phrase 'antimasque-like' intends to stress the fact that, in the Elizabethan age, there is no proper – and fully developed – form of antimasque; there is just something in the text that creates a dialectic which is similar to the one generated by the antimasque. Therefore, this is the reason why I think it would have been a mistake to talk about 'Elizabethan antimasque'.

dichotomy: *The Lady of May*, *Sappho and Phao*, *Endymion* and *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*. If, on the one hand, their aim is to celebrate Elizabeth I, on the other, by alluding to marriage and heritage, they reflect the tensions of the age.

1. Where?

The previous chapter has pointed out the fact that, during the reign of Elizabeth I, even though the form of the court masque did not undergo a remarkable development, there are some spectacles that can be connected to the genre, which take the name of *masques*, or *masks*. Therefore, if the object of this chapter is to detect the presence of Elizabethan 'antimasque-like' elements, the first thought goes to this type of spectacles; in other words, the expectation of the reader might be to find the 'antimasque dialectic' within the Elizabethan masks. However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, 'antimasque-like' aspects are not to be found in the Elizabethan masks, but rather in other types of entertainment.

1.1. The *Masque of Proteus or the Adamantine Rock*

To start with, the *Masque of Proteus or the Adamantine Rock* deserves a particular attention. As already stated in Part 1, it is highly significant both because it is the only mask whose text has survived from the sixteenth century, and because it has been considered as a turning point in the history of the Elizabethan mask: as Welsford puts it, "in 1594 the gentlemen of the Inns of Court produced as part of their Christmas merrymaking a piece which had almost all the characteristics of the developed Stuart masque" (Welsford 160). According to the data contained in the text, the *Masque of Proteus* was performed in front of Queen Elizabeth I at Court at Shrovetide 1594-95. The exact date remains obscure: it has been suggested that it was performed on the 3rd of

March, because the text refers to the barriers of the following day ("Introduction to *Gesta Grayorum*" vi).

The idea of this performance dates back to 1594, when the gentlemen of Gray's Inn decided to re-establish their traditional king-game. The first entertainment of the occasion was an "elaborate mock ceremonial [that] accompanied the 'honourable Inthronization' of the 'Prince of Purpoole' " (qtd. in Welsford 160), which was to be followed by the events of Innocents' Day, when "a notable performance was expected" (Welsford 160). Unfortunately, no entertainment took place because of the presence of some "whose rank or sex forbade violence" (Welsford 160). Therefore, on that night – which was then called 'The Night of Errors' – the audience was just presented with the performance of a comedy and dances (Welsford 160).

The following part of the entertainment was offered on Twelfth Night, when "a shew which concerned his Highness's State and Governement" took place (qtd. in Welsford 161). This is interesting because, in this case, the show ended with a quite elaborate mask, with introductory speeches and presenters[29]. The following morning, the Prince of Purpoole left for Russia, from which he promised to make a triumphant return. Since he knew the Queen could not wait to welcome him, he sent a letter to her, saying that he hoped to plan his return at Shrovetide. This is the context in which the *Masque of Proteus* is inserted: at Shrovetide, the Prince of Purpoole finally made his return at Court, where he was welcomed with a "mask [. . .] and some speeches that were as introductions to it" (qtd. in Welsford 162).

The accounts affirm that

[29] In Elizabethan masks, the presenter who delivered the introductory speeches was usually called *trucheman* (Welsford 151).

first entered five musicians representing 'an Esquire of the Prince's company, attended by a Tartarian Page. Proteus the Sea-god, attended by two Tritons. Thamesis and Amphitrite, who likewise were attended by their Sea-nymphs.' The nymphs and Tritons sang a song in praise of Neptune [. . .] Then, from a conversation between the Esquire, Proteus, Amphitrite and Thamesis, we learn that the Prince of Purpoole had caught Proteus, and refused to let him go, until he promised to bring to an appointed place the 'Adamantine Rock', the magnetic cliff that brought with it the Empire of the sea. But Proteus would only agree to do this on condition 'That first the Prince should bring him to a Power, which in attractive virtue should surpass The wondrous force of his Iron-drawing rocks.' The Prince of Purpoole and seven of his knights have allowed themselves to be shut into the rock as hostages, for the performance of this covenant, and now the moment of trial has come. Proteus descants on the magnetic virtue of the adamantine rock, but the squire points out that the rock may drawn iron, but the Queen attracts to herself the hearts of men, and the human heart moves the arm that can wield iron. Proteus acknowledges himself defeated.

When these Speeches were thus delivered, Proteus, with his bident striking of adamant, which was mentioned in the Speeches, made utterance for the Prince, and his seven Knights, who had given themselves as hostages for the performance of the Covenants between the Prince and Proteus, as is declared in the Speeches. Hereat Proteus, Amphitrite and Thamesis, with their attendants, the

Nymphs and Tritons, went unto the rock, and then the Prince and the Seven Knights issued forth the rock, in a very stately mask, very richly attired, and gallantly provided of all things meet for the performance of do great an enterprise. They came forth of the rock in couples, and before every couple came two pigmies with torches. At their first coming on the Stage, they danced a new devised measure, etc. After which, they took unto them Ladies; and with them they danced their galliards, courants, etc. And they danced another new measure; after the end whereof, the pigmies brought eight escutcheons, with the maskers devices thereupon, and delivered them to the Esquire, who offered them to her Majesty; which being done, they took their order again, and with a new strain, went all into the rock; at which time there was sung another new Hymn within the rock
For the present her Majesty graced every one; particularly, she thanked his Highness [. . .] and wished that their sports had continued longer, for the pleasure she took therein; which may well appear from her answer to the Courtiers, who danced a measure immediately after the mask was ended, saying, "What! shall we have bread and cheese after a banquet?" [. . .] her Majesty gave them her hand to kiss, with more gracious words of commendations to them particularly, and in general of Gray's-Inn, as an House she was much beholden unto, for that it did always study some sports to present unto her (qtd. in Welsford 162-163).

From this description of the entertainment, the reason why the *Masque of Proteus* is considered as a forerunner of the Stuart court masque is pretty clear. First of all – apart from its stage, setting, songs, speeches and the compliment paid to the Queen, already mentioned in Part 1 –, the key aspect is that Queen Elizabeth I is at the centre of the spectacle. In other words, as S. Orgel puts it, “her actual presence is a prerequisite of the production”, in the sense that it is her physical presence which gives a meaning to the spectacle: the compliment cannot be paid to anyone except her and, in addition, her presence is necessary for the triumph of the Prince over Proteus (S. Orgel *Jonsonian Masque* 18). This centrality of the sovereign is clearly exemplified by the following lines, which directly address the Queen:

> Excellent Queen, true Adamant of Hearts;
> Out of that sacred Garland ever grew
> Garland of Vertues, Beauties and Perfections,
> That crowns your Crown, and dims your Fortune’s Beams,
> Vouchsafe dome Branch, some precious flower, or Leaf,
> Which, though it wither in my barren Verse,
> May yet suffice to over-shade and drown
> The Rocks admired of this Demy-God (*Gesta Grayorum* 221-228)[30].

[30] This passage is linked to the mentioning of “Cynthia” (*Gesta Grayorum* 247; 250), the goddess of the moon, who has often been associated to the figure of Elizabeth I. It also recalls the final praise, where Proteus claims that “No Earthly things compare with greatest Queen” (*Gesta Grayorum* 286).

Furthermore, the importance of the physical presence of Queen Elizabeth I is pointed out by the offering of gifts to her, which was a common practice at the time, especially during the royal progresses and processions. As witnessed by the account of the occasion, after the dances – which involved some ladies from the audience – “the Pigmies brought eight Escutcheons, with the Maskers Devices thereupon, and delivered them to the Esquire, who offered them to Her Majesty” (*Gesta Grayorum* 305-307), who, at the end, thanked everyone.

On the other hand, as far as the antimasque is concerned, S. Orgel suggests that Proteus can be considered as “an embryonic antimasque character” (S. Orgel *Jonsonian Masque* 14). Bèhar agrees with him, suggesting that, in the *Masque of Proteus*, the audience attends “the triumph of the royal power over the forces of evil”, which is typical of the antimasque (Béhar 527). First of all, to fully comprehend their view, the *Masque of Proteus*’s simple plot is worth considering: after defeating Proteus in a combat, the Prince of Purpoole is offered the possession of the Adamantine Rock, which would have guaranteed him full control of the Ocean, “on the one condition that he produced a power superior to the Rock” (Béhar 527). This power is clearly the power of the Queen, given the fact that the function of the text is “to provide a suitable fiction for honouring [her]” (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 12).

Furthermore, it is important to point out that Proteus might be considered as an embryonic antimasque character because, according to the Elizabethans, he was “the representative of two central themes of the literature of the age: the dangers of inconstancy and the deceptiveness of appearances” (S. Orgel *Illusion of Power* 9). This view is based on the ancient tradition, which Lucian clearly explains in his dialogue:

> The Egyptian Proteus of ancient legend is no other than a dancer whose mimetic skill enables him to adapt himself

> to every character: in the activity of his movements, he is liquid as water, rapid as fire; he is the raging lion, the savage panther, the trembling bought; he is what he will. The legend takes these data, and gives them a supernatural turn, – for mimicry substituting metamorphosis (qtd. in S. Orgel *Jonsonian Masque* 10).

To conclude, from this description, Proteus is one of the greatest enemies of the Elizabethan world, Mutability[31] (S. Orgel *Jonsonian Masque* 10). Therefore, in the *Masque of Proteus*, the triumph of the Prince over Proteus has been interpreted as the triumph of order over chaos. This is something typical of the Jacobean antimasque, where the two different figures embody the opposite worlds of the masque and the antimasque (S. Orgel *Jonsonian Masque* 14). Yet, albeit the presence of this contrast, the *Masque of Proteus* does not seem to present the clear dichotomy which will be the essential feature of the future antimasque; in short, there is no figure in the entertainment that can be opposed to the allegorical image of Proteus. In conclusion, a dialectic of ideas is not present, so this is the reason why it would be inaccurate to say that the *Masque of Proteus* does contain some early 'antimasque-like' aspects.

[31] "If Elizabethan believed in an ideal order animating earthly order, they were terrified lest it should be upset, and appalled by the visible tokens of disorder that suggested its upsetting. They were obsessed by the fear of chaos and the fact of mutability; the obsession was powerful in proportion as their faith in the cosmic order was strong" (Mosca Bonsignore 5).

1.2. Other Elizabethan masks

The *Masque of Proteus* is not the only Elizabethan mask; even though no text has survived from the sixteenth century, it is now well known that some entertainments called *mask*, or *masque*, appear from the very beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Therefore, the focus of this section – which is the next logical step to detect the presence of ‘antimasque-like’ aspects in Elizabethan entertainments – is to look for the existence of an ‘antimasque dialectic’ in the other Elizabethan masks, of which some news have survived from the accounts.

Thanks to the analysis of some Revels documents[32], the succession of the masks performed between 1558 and 1600 is now traceable: they were spectacles played by masked performers, which dealt with various themes, raging from historical allusions to religious references, allegorical motifs and the life of common people (Chambers 1: 156-158). In Chamber’s view, the very first mask of the reign, whose elements recall the Kennington *mumming* of 1377, was performed on Twelfth Night, in 1559 (Chambers 1: 155). Four other masks then followed it, and two of them were part of the spectacles for the coronation.

However, from Shrovetide of 1560 to Christmas 1571, there are no *Revels Accounts* which permit to produce a complete catalogue of the masks that took place at the time; what remains is just some notes, which only suggest that masks continued to be performed every year. Yet, despite the lack of information, two particular masks performed during this decade appear to be significant: the *Mask of the Wise and Foolish*

[32] The Revels documents that help tracing the history of the masks in these two years are: “the accounts from 26 March 1555 to 29 September 1559; an estimate of the costs of the 1559-60 masks; a ‘rere-account’ of the uses [. . .]; an inventory of [. . .] May 1560.” (Chambers 1: 158).

Virgins (1561) and the *Masque of Peace* (1562). As far as the first one is concerned, it is remarkable because it was "performed by Elizabeth's maids of honour, who did the Frenchmen the courtesy of taking them out to dance" (Chambers 1: 159). Even more important than this is the *Masque of Peace*, which was to be performed for the "projected meeting between Elizabeth and Mary of Scots at Nottingham Castle" in May 1562 (Chambers 1: 159). In the end, the meeting did not take place, but what is important for the topic of this thesis is that a detailed plan – recounting the entertainments for three successive nights – survived, and was found among the papers of Sir William Cecil (Chambers 1: 159; Welsford 153). According to this plan, the spectacles, which were entitled *Devices to be shewed before the Queenes Majestie by waye of masking at Nottingham Castell, after the meetinge of the Quene of Scots*, were thus organized:

> On the first night a prison, called 'Extreme Oblivion', was to be set up in the hall and guarded by Argus or circumspection and 'then a maske of Ladyes to come in after this sorte': first come Pallas, then two ladies, Prudence and Temperance, riding upon lions, then six or eight lady masquers leading Discord and False Report in chains. They all march round the hall, and then Pallas declares that Prudence and Temperance have obtained Jupiter's permission to imprison Discord and False Report and to give to their jailor Argus a lock labelled *In Eternum* and a key labelled *Nunquam*. When this has been done then are 'th' inglishe Ladies to take nobilite of the straungers, and daunce.' On the second night an addition pageant, the Court of Plenty, was to be erected, with Ardent Desire and Perpetuity as its Porters, and the order

of the proceedings to be as follows: Enter Peace in a chariot drawn by an elephant with Friendship riding upon its back, followed by six or eight masquers. They march round, Friendship declares that the gods are pleased with the doings of Prudence and Temperance and have sent Peace to keep them company in the Court of Plenty. Then the Conduits of that building run with wine, ‘duringe whc. tyme th’inglishe Lords shall maske wth. the Scottishe Ladyes.’

On the third night, Disdain, riding a wild boar and Prepencyd Malyce, in the likeness of a serpent, were drawn in an orchard with six or eight lady masquers sitting in it. Disdain declares that his master Pluto, highly indignant at the proceeding of the last two nights, has sent Malice to require the freeing of Discord and False Report or the yielding up of Peace. But at this point Discretion enters leading a horse on which rides Hercules or Valiant Courage, and he explains that they have been sent to confound Pluto’s devices, but that Hercules needs words of encouragement form Prudence and Temperance if his Efforts are to be crowned with success. Discretion then approaches the Court of Plenty and asks Prudence how long she wishes Peace to dwell with herself and Temperance, and she replies by lowering a ‘grandgarde’ inscribed with the word *Ever*. Then he asks Temperance when Peace shall depart from herself and Prudence, and she lets down a sword inscribed with the word *Never*. Discretion arms Hercules with the grandgarde and sword, and a fight takes place, in which Disdain escapes with his life but Prepencyd is killed. ‘after this shall come out of

> the garden, the vj or viij Ladies maskers, wth a songe, [. . .] as full of armony as maye be devised.' (qtd. in Welsford 153-154).

Welsford stresses that, even though, on a superficial level, this spectacle appears to be a morality or an interlude, and not a mask, it is, in the end, "a collection of ordinary [masks]"[33], with its typical allegorical and mythological figures, presenters and a prologue (Welsford 154).

After this gap, during which the lack of *Revels Accounts* does not permit to produce a catalogue of the masks performed between 1560 and 1571, *Revels Accounts* re-appear in 1571[34]; however, as Welsford suggests, they "give but scanty information as to the form of the masque in the reign of Elizabeth", because the majority of the indications basically regards what happened during a particular occasion. To start with, at Shrovetide, in 1571, a mask

> had going before it A Childe gorgevsly decked for Mercury, who vttered A speeche: & presented iij fflowers (wroughte in silke and golde) to the Queenes Majesties, signefieng victory, peace, & plenty, to ensue. he had also

[33] Although Welsford associates these entertainments with the masque, she points out that there are still some differences: "the action described by the various presenters are not included in the masque proper; and, moreover, the various speeches and dumb shows are related to each other, and each contributes to the main action or plot—if such it can be called" (Welsford 154).

[34] In 1570s, together with these entertainments at court, the so-called 'provincial shows' took place as well. They consisted on several entertainments for the Queen on progress, and some of them have been accounted as absolutely spectacular, like the Kenilworth festivities of 1575 and the Norwich entertainments of 1578 (Chambers 1: 166).

> ij torchebearers in Long gownes of changeable Taffata with him (qtd. in Welford 150-151).

Then, a momentous event following this festivity is the mask "composed by George Gascoigne for Viscount Montacute, in celebration of the double marriage between his son and daughter and the daughter and son of Sir William Dormer" (Welsford 152). It has its origins in the idea of eight gentlemen linked to the Montacute family, who initially planned a performance of a Masque of Venetians; however, since the entertainment finally resulted in being pointless, they asked Gascoigne to provide them with an introduction explaining the arrival of the Venetians, which would have been recited by an actor. Gascoigne took the Montacutes' family tree, and discovered that the English family was connected to a noble house of Montacute in Italy. As a consequence, he decided to invent the character of a twelve-year-old boy who, having been taken as a prisoner during a battle against the Turks, was finally released by the Venetians. While he was on his way back home, he shipwrecked on the coast of England, where he heard about the Montacutes' double marriage. In Welsford's view, this particular mask is highly significant because of its introduction, spoken by a presenter, which represents a new stage in the evolution of this kind of spectacles (Welsford 152).

After this occasion, further examples of Elizabethan masks occurred both in 1577 and 1579. At Shrovetide in 1577, there was

> A long Maske of murrey satten [. . .] prepared for Twelf night, with a device of 7: speeches framed correspondent to the daie. Their Torchbearers vj: had gownes of crymsen Damask, and and headepeeches new furnished, showen on

> Shrovetuysdaie night, without anie speeche (qtd. in Welsford 151);

whereas, in 1579, there was

> *A Maske of Amasones* in all Armoure compleate [. . .] one with A speech to the Quenes maiestie delivering A Table with writinges vnto her highness coming in with musitions playing on Cornettes apparelled in longe white taffeta sarcenett garments torch bearers with the troocheman wearing longe gownes of white taffeta [. . .] and after the Amasons had dawnced with Lordes in her maiesties presence in came.
> *Another Maske of knightes* all likewise in Armoure compleate [. . .] and commyng in with one before them. with A speach vnto her highness and delievering A table written their torch bearers being Rutters apparelled. in greene satten Ierkines [. . .] the Amasons and the Knightes after the Knightes had dawnced A while with Ladies before her maiestie did then in her maiestie presence fight at Barriers (qtd. in Welsford 151).

Finally, an equally important entertainment belongs to the end of Elizabeth's reign, and it is testified in a piece of writing written by Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney on 16 May 1600. This recounts that

> 'There is to be a memorable maske of eight ladies. They have a staunge dawnce newly invented. [. . .] Those eight dawnce to the musiq Apollo bringes; and ther is a fine speach that makes mention of a ninth, much to her honor

> and praise. [. . .] After supper the masks came in, as I writ in my last; and delicate it was to see eight ladies so prettily and richly attired, Mrs Fetton leade; and after they had donne all their own ceremonies, these eight ladies maskers chose eight ladies more to dawnce the measures. Mrs Fetton went to the Queen, and woed her to dawnce. Her Majestie asked what she was? *Affection*, she said. *Affection*, said the Queen, is false. Yet her Majestie rose and dawnced.' (qtd. in Welsford 156-157)

The spectacle described is highly significant mainly because of the role played by the Queen: not only is she at the centre of the whole performance, but she even participates in the dances. An explanation for this fact – which seems to be an exception because Elizabeth (differently from Henry VIII, Queen Anne, Prince Henry, Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria) would not disguise herself and take part in the spectacle – might be that, differently from other entertainments, this is a more private kind of spectacle; in other words, since it was performed in a private house, the audience might have been of a different kind and of a different number (Welsford 156).

As a conclusion, although these entertainments represent some important developments in the history of the masque, all these written accounts demonstrate that no 'antimasque-like' aspect is to be found in Elizabethan masks. In other words, these spectacles featuring disguised performers that embody allegorical or mythological characters are highly significant for the evolution of the genre over the centuries – because they present certain elements that will become the key aspects in the future Stuart court masque –, but they do not contain a dialectic recalling the opposition 'main masque-antimasque'. Therefore, in order to find this

dichotomy, it is necessary to look at another type of Elizabethan entertainments, namely at some plays and spectacles performed at court. The reason why the 'antimasque dichotomy' is more likely to be found in court drama is that it is different from the masks, or masques. As a matter of fact, in the latter, the key feature is the fact that the sovereign is at the centre of the entertainment, in the sense that their physical presence gives meaning to the spectacle itself. Queen Elizabeth was even an indirect participants in the performance: she was offered gifts, speeches were delivered to her, she was clearly mentioned and celebrated and, in the spectacle recounted by Robert Whyte, she even rose and started dancing. On the contrary, as far as court drama is concerned, the Queen just watched the spectacle with the rest of the audience, but she was not part of it. As a consequence, in this last context, it was far easier for an author to insert a dialectic which recalls the one created by Ben Jonson's introduction of the antimasque within his works[35].

[35] This concept must not be applied to the Jacobean period. Firstly, the conditions under which the antimasque is inserted in Ben Jonson's masques are completely different: Ben Jonson, in the introduction to the *Masque of Queens* (1609), declares that it was the Queen herself who commanded him to "thinke on some Daunce, or shew, that it might precede hers, and have the place of a foyle, or false-*Masque*" (qtd. in Todd Furniss 21). Therefore, since the introduction of an antimasque was explicitly asked by the Queen, the sovereign could not have got offended. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Jacobean spectacles were more private than Elizabethan entertainments; this clearly included a different type of audience and, as a consequence, a form of opposition to the power of the monarchy might have been more acceptable.

2. When? The last decades of Elizabeth's reign, the Virgin Queen and the issue of succession

After identifying the type of spectacles where the 'antimasque dichotomy' is to be found, this section aims to establish the period in which this dialectic starts being inserted in courtly spectacles, which corresponds to the last two decades of the reign of Elizabeth I.

2.1. Why the 1580s and 1590s?

2.1.1. The issue of succession

To start with, the 1580s and the early 1590s have been crucial decades of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I: these years were preceded by long discussions and intrigues related to a possible marriage of the Queen, and finally resulted in the tensions of the 1590s, which were linked to the succession to the throne.

To fully comprehend all the anxieties which developed in those years, it is necessary to go back in time. To start with, as Taylor puts it, "the succession of Henry VIII was changed by act of Parliament three times" (Taylor 32): after the marriages with Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn were both declared void, the laws concerning the succession to the throne were changed again because both Elizabeth – daughter of Anne Boleyn – and Mary – daughter of Katherine – were declared as legitimate heirs after Edward – son of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour. In addition, an act of the Parliament stated that, in case Henry VIII's children had no heir, he had the right to decide the person who

was going to ascend the throne; this person could have been anyone, no matter if they belonged to the royal family. As a result, Henry claimed that, in case of the lack of a legitimate heir, he would have left the crown to the children of Mary, his younger sister, and, after them, to the descendants of Margaret, his elder sister, Queen of Scots (Taylor 32).

Therefore, Henry's decision about the succession was initially not favourable for Queen Elizabeth. In addition, although her claims to the throne were based on "the wish of her father, the will of the Parliament, and the fact of her actual, untroubled succession" (Taylor 32), Catholics, who were aiming at a sovereign of their own religion, were in favour of the Queen of Scots – "grand-daughter of Henry VIII's elder sister Margaret" (Taylor 33). This is probably the reason why "in the first year after Elizabeth came to the throne, Parliament enacted the law that, 'if any person should affirm that the Queen could not with the assent of Parliament make laws to settle the descent of the crown, he should be deemed a traitor' " (Taylor 32).

A further problem Elizabeth had to face during the first years of her reign stemmed from the fact that Henry VIII had always preferred the Suffolk line of succession. Tensions started when, in 1560, Edward Seymour secretly married Lady Katherine Grey; Elizabeth was furious about this secret marriage because her maids of honour had been forbidden to get married without the permission of the Queen herself. Yet, the real problem was succession, because Lady Katherine was a descendant to Mary, Henry's VIII younger sister, who had been the Duchess of Suffolk: as a consequence, according to the will of Henry VIII and two acts of Parliament, "any legitimate child of Lady Katherine Grey stood next in succession to the throne" (Taylor 33): in other words, the baby Katherine was about to have would have succeeded Elizabeth, in the event she finally never married. Elizabeth thus imprisoned both Katherine and her husband; in 1562, their marriage was declared null and

void by an ecclesiastical commission, and the child considered illegitimate. In 1568, Lady Katherine finally died because of the harsh treatment she suffered (Taylor 33).

On the whole, Elizabeth's behaviour contributed to discredit the Protestant succession in favour of Mary of Scotland[36]. Intrigues to put her on the throne began very early, as it is exemplified by the case of Edmund and Arthur Pole who, in 1563, were accused of high treason for trying to set Mary on the English throne. During the following years, hopes about re-establishing the Catholic Church in England continued rising until, in 1567, Mary was toppled from her throne and went to England, where she was imprisoned and, finally, executed. During the imprisonment, intrigues started in order to liberate her. In 1569, the Duke of Norfolk joined a conspiracy which aimed at deposing Elizabeth; then, he would have married Mary and let the Duke of Alva invade England. On the same year, the Earl of Northumberland and the Earls of Westmoreland aimed at restoring Catholicism by taking up arms in the north. Finally, in 1570, Pope Pius V "published his celebrated Bull excommunicating and deposing Elizabeth and absolving all her subjects from her oaths of fidelity and allegiance" (Taylor 34).

On the other hand, Elizabeth and her adherents in the government where quick in reacting against these attacks: in 1571, two statutes defying both the Pope and Mary's supporters were enacted by the Parliament. According to them,

> treason was attached to compassing the Queen's death, wounding, or deposition, levying war against her, moving foreigners to invade her realm, writing or speaking words

[36] At the time, Roman Catholics had the idea of restoring Catholicism, and they were in favour of Mary, the Queen of Scots (Taylor 34).

> denying her title, maintaining the rights of another claimant, affirming her to be a heretic, schismatic, or usurper, asserting the right of any person to succeed her, or questioning the authority of statute to settle the succession (qtd. in Taylor 34-35).

In addition, a third statute was finally enacted, prohibiting to import the Papal bulls into England (Taylor 35).

All those events, accompanied by the Queen's numerous refusals to get married, created the climate of anxieties and tensions that finally brought to the critical situation of the 1590s, which have been considered as the worst years of the reign of Elizabeth I. At the time, England had an old Queen, who finally did not get married, did not beget an heir and, in addition, had not even named an heir to the throne yet. Many desired Elizabeth's throne and, by the time, there were several contenders, among whom the most significant were the Infanta of Spain, Lady Arabella Stuart and, finally, James VI of Scotland (Taylor 167).

To start with, Philip II could have claimed the throne of England because of his right of descend from Edward III and John of Gaunt. However, one of his greatest dreams had always been that of putting on that same throne Isabel Clara Eugenia, the Infanta of Spain, his eldest daughter (Taylor 167). Although she is generally thought to be the least strong claim, she was actively supported by the powerfully Catholic allies of his father, involving even the Scottish and the French Catholics (Taylor 168).

Two major incidents promoting the Infanta as a contender for the English throne are worth considering. The first is the conspiracy of Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, which took place in 1594 and involved both the Earl of Essex and Queen Elizabeth (Taylor 168). At the beginning, Lopez was the physician of both the Queen and of the Earl of Leicester; however,

since he was extremely skilled in languages and had several contacts in Spain, he became an interesting person to the Earl of Essex as well. As a matter of fact, Essex wanted to obtain political contacts with Philip II, so he asked Lopez for help in his enterprise. Lopez refused and told the Queen about Essex’s plans.

Yet, in the meantime, he decided to help Don Antonio Perez – the pretender to the throne of Portugal –, serving him as an interpreter. Perez had already had problems with Philip II, who had opposed to his claim to the throne and victimized him. Therefore, in order to stir up the English hatred towards Spain, Don Antonio was brought to England in 1590 (Taylor 168). Spanish spies were thus sent to London with the aim of corrupting the servants of Don Antonio; the object of the plot consisted not only in the murder of their master but also in the aspiration to killing Queen Elizabeth. Once Elizabeth had been killed, they could have put the Infanta of Spain on the throne of England. Therefore, Lopez was contacted – and offered fifty thousand crowns – because, with his position, he could have been a considerable help. His answer remains a mystery: some have affirmed that he accepted because of what he was offered, whilst some others have attested that his answer was ambiguous. Lopez himself declared that he had listened to the conspirators with the aim of knowing their plans and being thus able to save the Queen.

However, Elizabeth’s Council learned of the conspiracy and one of Don Antonio’s servants was arrested in Lopez’s house. Even though no proof was found about Lopez’s implication with the plotters, Essex insisted in the latter’s guilt. When the second of Don Antonio’s attendants was arrested, Lopez was finally accused of being implied in the conspiracy. As a consequence, he was brought to the Tower, where he was sentenced to death, and finally hanged and quartered at Tyburn (Taylor 169).

The second attempt to put the Infanta of Spain on the throne of England occurred "just as the Lopez affair started to die down" (Taylor 171). As Taylor puts it, "this time the object of the plot was the Earl of Essex and the plotter was Robert Parsons, that wily Jesuit who [. . .] had applied his poisoned pen to defaming the Earl of Leicester in his famous *Leter*" (Taylor 171). In 1595, Parsons supported the Infanta as a claimant to the throne in his *Conference on the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, "which he dedicated to the Earl of Essex by proclaiming on the title page" (Taylor 171):

> I thought no man more fit than your honour to dedicate these two books unto, which treate of succession to the crowne of Ingland, for that no man is in more high and eminent place of dignitie at this day in our realme, then your selfe, whether we respect your nobilitie, or calling, or favor with your prince, or high liking of the people, and consequently no man like to have greater part or sway in deciding of this great affaire (when tyme shall come for that determination) then your honour, and those that will assist you and are likest to follow your fame and fortune (qtd. in Taylor 172).

Father Parsons's words contributed to heighten the already considerable tensions about the succession to the throne. Many were even shocked about what he ha written: the general idea was that this was "a verye vile Booke [which touched] the Succession of this Crowne, diffaminge her Majestie" (qtd. in Taylor 172). However, even though his situation was initially quite distressing, and despite the fact that Parsons's work was not quickly forgot, the Earl of Essex finally did not get in trouble (Taylor 173). The result was the appearance of several pamphlets

and pieces of writing that discussed the issue of succession, signalling that the matter was serious. Two significant examples are Peter Wentworth and Sir John Harington: the first wrote *A Pithie Exhortation to Her Majestie for Establishing Her Successor to the Crowne*, whereas the second – who was also the Queen’s godson – wrote *A Tract on the Succession to the Crown*, which has been considered as an answer to Parsons’s book, supporting James VI of Scotland as a possible successor to the throne of England. However, albeit the situation, Queen Elizabeth I still refused to name a successor (Taylor 174-175).

The second claimant to the English throne was Arabella Stuart, first cousin to James VI[37]. Her claim was stronger than the Infanta’s, mainly because there was a blood line connecting her to the English throne (Taylor 175). As Taylor puts it, Arabella had already bothered Queen Elizabeth “by her pride, her seemingly irrational behaviour, and her tendency to become the center of intrigues of nobles who refused to accept James as Elizabeth’s successor” (Taylor 176); as a matter of fact, differently from James, she was born in England and, therefore, she was not considered as a foreigner (Taylor 176). To the eyes of the Queen, the most dangerous plot was the one hatched to have her got married with William Seymour, which could have brought Arabella to the English throne[38]. As soon as the Queen heard about this intrigue, she made Arabella get arrested (Taylor 177).

Finally, the last significant contender to the throne of England was James VI of Scotland, whose claim, like Arabella’s, was enforced by a

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[37] Arabella Stuart was “the daughter of Darnley’s younger brother, Charles, Earl of Lennox”. She is thus a first cousin of James IV (Taylor 176).

[38] As already pointed out, the Suffolk line of succession was preferred (Taylor 33).

blood line[39]. Although he was a Protestant, he came into contacts with Spain and, during the 1580s and the 1590s, he started planning his escape from Scotland and the consequent claim to the throne of England. However, this goal was not easy to achieve. Firstly, at the time, he was worried about both the Infanta's and Arabella's claim to the same throne. Then, he was disturbed by Parsons's *Conference on the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, which stated that, since James was Protestant, Catholics would not have eagerly accepted him as their king (Taylor 178). As a result, James replied with a proclamation, which was finally published in 1596; in his writing, he was inciting his subjects towards a union with England, which would have been against any invasion by the Spaniards. However, if, on the one hand, James was pleasing Elizabeth, on the other, he was secretly keeping contacts with the Catholics who, possibly, would have helped him to take the throne of England (Taylor 179).

In the winter of 1592-1593, James was involved in a plot which aimed at putting him on the throne of England. This conspiracy is known as the Spanish Blanks and took place after the Parliament established the Presbyterian Church Government, an act that led to a general discontent in Scotland. The plot was uncovered when a Scottish Catholic, Ker, was arrested; he was found with some "sheets of blank paper signed by the powerful Catholic Earls Huntly, Errol, Angus and and Sir Patrick Gordon at Auchindoun" (Taylor 180), which were to be filled in as soon as Ker would have been far from being reached by the Protestants. As Martin Hume claimed,

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[39] "James' title came down through Lady Margaret Douglas, older sister of Henry VIII, by way of the Darnleys, his father, the second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. While James' mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was still alive, she was the leading claimant [. . .], but after her death James took her place" (Taylor 178).

> He [Ker] was to ask for a body of 30,000 Spanish troops to be landed in Scotland, to join with 15,000 men provided by the Catholic nobles; the avowed purpose being the seizure of James and the establishment of the Catholics in Scotland and subsequently in England (qtd, in Taylor 180).

Among the Spanish Blanks, a memorandum directly involving James was also found: this piece of writing discussed "the pros and cons of a Scottish invasion of England in the summer of 1592 with the help of Spain" (Taylor 180). Even though the conclusion was that such an invasion would not have been possible, it was clear that James was seeking help from the Spanish Catholics, and that he did not despise an armed invasion to gain the throne of England (Taylor 180-181). Furthermore, as David H. Wilson puts it,

> the document [. . .] [was] a clue to the thinking of the Catholic Earls. Their enemy was the Queen of England, not the King of Scots, who might well profit from their plottings, a point which James fully appreciated (qtd. in Taylor 181).

When all this was uncovered, Elizabeth sent a letter to James, in which she strongly suggested that he harshly dealt with the Catholic Earls. Since, after leaving for Aberdeen in February 1593, James seemed to be indulgent towards them, Elizabeth and the Presbyterian Church decided to ask for the help of the Earl of Bothwell, "hoping to construct a party in Scotland that would crash the Catholic Earls" (qtd. in Taylor 181-182).

After the Spanish Blanks conspiracy, "subversive plots and counter-plots involving James and the Spanish and Continental Catholics kept surfacing in London around 1594-1595" (Taylor 184). Among all contenders, the strongest claim was definitely that of James VI: first of all, he was Protestant and, therefore, although he was Scottish – and the English did generally not like the Scots –, he was more acceptable than someone linked to Catholicism. In addition, as Taylor puts it, "James was [. . .] a descendant of the royal house of England and spoke English of a sort" (Taylor 186).

As a conclusion, even though the issue of succession had progressively become a serious matter, it was not the only problem Elizabeth I had to face during her reign; a further grave problem, which was strictly related to the lack of an heir, was the issue of marriage: albeit the several suitors, Queen Elizabeth I finally decided not to choose a husband.

2.1.2. The issue of marriage

As already hinted, the issue of marriage was one of the two major problems that Elizabeth had during the whole period she reigned over England. Generally speaking, at the time, royal marriages were made either to continue a certain line of succession and guarantee an heir or to unite nations (Orr 1: 20). From the very beginning of her reign, Elizabeth's councillors had always urged her to get married and give an heir to the country (Taylor 35). As far as this is concerned, it must be remembered that Elizabeth was a Queen who gave herself to England, and, therefore, pretenders were often part of her diplomacy: during her reign, she played with both the foreign suitors and the Englishmen who aspired to become her husbands (Orr 1: 26). As for this last group, there

have been many whom she cared for – like Sir Walter Raleigh or the Earl of Essex –; yet, her deepest affection were clearly given to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, who had always been her favourite. In short, Elizabeth is thought to have loved him as she had loved nobody else (Orr 1: 27)[40].

The affair with the Earl of Leicester. Everything started in the very first year of Elizabeth’s reign, when, in 1560, Robert Dudley’s wife died, letting him free to get married again. His wish was to marry Elizabeth and, therefore, he soon started courting her. However, he was supported only by few minor figures at court, because the most important – Cecil, Lord Keeper Bacon, the Earl of Arundel and the Marquis of Northampton – strongly disliked the idea of Leicester (Doran 258). Leicester thus came into contact with Philip II of Spain, asking him for his political backing; “in return for Spanish help he offered to arrange for an English representative to be sent to the Council of Trent and a papal nuncio to be received in England” (Doran 259). Although, in 1561, Elizabeth announced she was not going to marry Leicester, he decided to continue his courtship; his hopes to succeed lied in the fact that, at the time, the Queen had progressively rejected other candidates (Doran 259).

Two entertainments performed in the early 1560s, which supported Leicester’s union with the Queen, seem to be part of the Earl’s campaign to conquer Elizabeth: they are the *Play of Patient Grisell* by John Phillip and *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex* by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton. As Doran puts it, “little is known about the first work” (Doran 259), which is thought to have been written between 1560 and 1561. Its plot recalls a story previously written by Chaucer and Boccaccio, but with more political hints: the protagonist is Prince Gautier, who has

[40] According to Orr, proof of this is that she did not give important missions or high command to him – like she did with both Raleigh and Essex (Orr 1: 27).

finally decided to abandon the single life he initially preferred in order to get married with a girl from a peasant family. The first connection with Elizabeth's situation is to be found at the beginning of the text, when Prince Gautier's words recall Elizabeth's speech in favour of a single life:

> My frendes full friendly, I replie, with protestacyon due
> That sigle life prefered is, in sacred scripture true
> But happie are the married sort which live in perfit love
> Twice happier are the single ones, S. Paull doth plainly prove
> For such a leade a virgin's life, and sinfull lust expel
> In heaven above the ethrall skies with Christ ther Lord shal dwell
> [. . .]
> That after you sead of rule, might have the dignite,
> For wher ther is no ishue left the wise man saieth plaine
> That every man on Lordlie state, doth covit for to raigne
> [. . .]
> Content your myndes if case I graunt, your state for to redresse:
> Ye shall permit your worthie lord, in choice to use his skill
> And eke permit as reason is, to marrye whom I will (qtd. in Doran 259-260).

A further reference to the current situation is Gautier's choice of Grisell, a girl from a peasant family, which clearly indicates the difference in rank between Elizabeth and Leicester. Recalling what happened to Leicester, some characters of the play – Vice, Persuasion

and Politic – did not agree with the idea of the match, but the Prince answered that his union with Grisell “shal no wit abase [his] state, nor minishe [his] renowne” (qtd. in Doran 260). Therefore, on the whole, the play clearly supports Leicester’s plan of marrying the Queen. The message it conveys is very clear: Elizabeth should get married and beget a legitimate heir; in addition, her husband should come from a lower status, like Robert Dudley.

More is known about *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, which was performed at the Inner Temple in 1562, as part of the Christmas celebrations (Doran 260). It is important to stress that this tragedy must not be interpreted as a play on its own, but it must be though in relation to the two masques that were part of the whole revels: *The Prince of Pallaphilos* and *Beauty and Desire*. In Doran’s view, the play “followed the precepts laid down in the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), [according to which] [. . .] all the monarchs should look into the mirrors held up through poetry and drama to learn how to behave wisely and morally” (Doran 261). With this in mind, it is clear that the main aim of the entertainment was that of showing the consequences of Elizabeth’s rejection of Leicester[41]: “just as Gorboduc had acted against the natural order in dividing his kingdom between his two sons, so Elizabeth would be acting against nature if she refused to marry” and beget an heir,

[41] Doran recognizes this is not the only interpretation which has been given to *Gorboduc*: as a matter of fact, the tragedy has usually been considered as a work which mainly promotes the Gray line of succession to the throne and “[recommends] that it should be legitimized by the parliament” (Doran 260). This is because, in 1561, the issue of succession had become a crucial fact due to Katherine Grey’s marriage with the earl of Hertford and the birth of their child. Furthermore, Lady Katherine, before being imprisoned in the Tower, had asked Leicester for protection, “so it is possible that he would have been prepared to take to court a play which supported her claims” (Doran 261). However, Doran argues that both the context and the text of *Gorboduc* clearly make references to the Leicester’s courtship towards Queen Elizabeth (Doran 261).

because this would probably have negative consequences (Doran 261; Taylor 13).

In doing so, *Gorboduc*'s purpose was also that of promoting the Earl of Leicester as a possible husband for Elizabeth. Although there is no clear mention of him in the text, the allusion is pretty clear in more than one passage. I. ii. 7-12

> The strength that, knit by faste accorde in one
> Against all foreign power of mightie foes
> Could of it-selfe defende it-selfe alone,
> Disioined once, the former force doth lose.
> The stickes that, sondred, brake so soone in twaine,
> In faggot bounde attempted were in vain

can thus be connected to the last act of the play, when Eubulus, a secretary to the king, declares himself in favour of a native line of succession, guaranteed by an English husband, instead of a foreign suitor (Doran 262):

> Such one, my lordes let be your chosen king,
> Such one, so borne within your natiue land;
> Such one preferred, and in no wise admitte
> The heauie yoke of forreine gouernaunce (V. ii. 169-172)

As a matter of fact, the fear was that a suitor coming from a foreign country would have brought to England his own laws and habits, which he would have passed to his child, the future heir of England.

Together with all the evidence inside the text, a message coming from an anonymous chronicler, who was probably a member of the audience, also agrees with the view that states that *Gorboduc* aimed at

promoting the union between Robert Dudley and Queen Elizabeth I (Doran 262). It says:

> The shadowes were declared by the Chore firste to signyfie unytie, the 2 howe that men refused the certen and tooke the uncerten, wherby was ment that yt was better for the Quene to marye with the L[ord] R[obert] knowen then with the K[ing] of Sweden[42] [. . .] Many thinges handled of marriage (qtd. in Doran 262-263).

A final proof of the fact that *Gorboduc* supports Leicester's plan is that, soon after the play was performed before the Queen, the Earl secretly got into contact with the Spanish ambassador, hoping that Philip II would have supported his union with Elizabeth (Doran 263).

However, the following year, the Queen still refused to choose a suitor, so that, in January 1563,

> the House of Commons petitioned [her] 'to take [her] self some honorable husband whom it shall pleace [her] to ioyne to [her] in mariag; whomsoever it be that your Majestie shall choose', and a few days afterwards the house of lords beseeched her 'to dispose [her] self to mary, where it shal please [her]' (qtd. in Doran 263).

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[42] The allusion to the King of Sweden derives from the second dumb show, when the king was offered both an extraordinary glass of wine and a golden cup with poison. Whilst the golden chalice refers to the King of Sweden – because his agent entered England distributing gold to the poor and gifts at court –, the glass symbolizes Leicester and highlights his modest wealth (Doran 263).

To this petition, Elizabeth answered that she would seriously think about the choice of a suitor, in order to solve all the problems. Thus, during the following years, since it was clear that the Queen would not have married Leicester, foreign pretenders started being considered. For instance, William Cecil started the negotiations to marry Elizabeth to Charles, Archduke of Austria and younger son of the Emperor. Once again, courtiers were divided: whilst the Habsburg pretender gained firm support by the Howard clan, the Earl of Leicester did not agree to the match and started a secret negotiation with the French ambassador to promote both “the adolescent king of France, Charles IX”, and himself as alternative candidates (Doran 264). By 1565, tension at court was so high that it even resulted in some episodes of violence. In June 1567, the Queen finally seemed to have decided for the Archduke Charles: the Earl of Sussex was sent to Austria to negotiate a provisional marriage-treaty, but this negotiation finally failed at the end of the same year (Doran 266).

It is exactly at this point that the marriage of the Queen became a political matter; this is the reason why, in 1570s, Elizabeth started her contacts with Catherine De Medici of France, as will be fully discussed in the following section of this chapter. In this context, the two allegorical entertainments at Kenilworth and Woodstock in 1575 can be viewed as Leicester’s last request to the Queen: he wanted “either to marry the queen and have power as her consort, or else to be given the freedom to marry another and pursue a military role abroad” (Doran 266). In the summer 1575, Queen Elizabeth spent two weeks at Leicester’s castle in Kenilworth: as Axton puts it, “Kenilworth entertainment was a furtherance of Leicester’s marriage suit, and a criticism of the queen’s service of Diana (or choice of chastity)” (qtd. in Berry 99). In other words, all the entertainments performed during those

two weeks contained clear topical allusions, and hinted at a possible marriage with Dudley[43] (Doran 267).

From Elizabeth’s behaviour, Leicester finally understood she was not going to accept him as his husband; therefore, during the same year, he prepared another entertainment at Woodstock[44], in which his message to the Queen was that he was ready to accept her refusal and that he wished to embark on a military career (Doran 268). However, Philippa Berry argues that, even though the message seems to be different from the one at Kenilworth, the hermit’s romance-like tale still remains an allusion to the relation between Elizabeth and Leicester; this can be linked to all the hints at marriage and sexuality, which are preferred to a life of chastity (Berry 100).

Leicester’s courtship of Elizabeth finally ended in 1578. At the time, he thought Elizabeth would have soon married the Duke of Alençon, so “he secretly married Lettice Knollyes, the widowed countess of the Earl of Essex” (Taylor 45). When, in 1579, the Queen learned about Leicester’s marriage, she confined him in the Castle of Greenwich and was even thinking about sending him to the Tower. However, in the end, Leicester was released and given permission to go back to court thanks to the intervention of the Earl of Sussex (Taylor 45).

[43] It is worth pointing out that the entertainments at Kenilworth castle made use of the image of courtly love tradition, thus alluding at the relation between the Queen and Leicester. Among them, the most significant have been the Lady of the Lake’s and the Savage Man’s speeches and the masque of the nymph Zabeta, finally cancelled because of the rain (Doran 266-267).

[44] As Goldring puts it, “the revels staged at Woodstock [. . .] functioned as a coda to those performed at Kenilworth [. . .]. The knight Contarenus, who appears in the accounts of the Woodstock entertainments as both a suitor and a soldier, seems to have been intended as a Leicester figure, while Princes Gaudina, who rejects her lover Contarenus for reasons of state, appears to have been a thinly veiled allusion to Elizabeth herself” (Goldring 185-186).

The negotiations of a marriage with the Duke of Alençon. A further significant relation is the one the Queen had with the Duke of Alençon. At a certain point of her reign, despite the tensions with the Catholics, Elizabeth began getting in touch with France, and considering a French suitor. She firstly got in contact with Catherine De Medici, who was concerned about the succession as well: together with aiming to maintain a balance between the European powers, her dream was to marry one of her sons to Elizabeth I (Taylor 35). At first, she considered Charles, but then she decided to begin negotiations in favour of Henry – the future Henry III (Taylor 36). In Catherine's view, Elizabeth's marriage with this latter could have been a good political match because, whilst Elizabeth needed an heir, Henry needed a throne. However, such negotiations did not have a happy ending, because both Elizabeth and Henry disliked the idea of this marriage; moreover, the events of St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572 and the fact that Elizabeth was looking at other possible foreign suitors[45] worsened the situation.

Nonetheless, after the clamour about St. Bartholomew's massacre disappeared, Catherine De Medici reopened the negotiations; this time, she chose his youngest son Françoise, Duke of Alençon, who, according to Catherine, needed a throne (Taylor 37). Thus, in March 1573, La Mothe de Fénélon was sent to England to start the negotiation for the Duke's marriage (Taylor 39). At first, Elizabeth did not like the idea of this union and, therefore, she rejected the proposal taking the excuse that the Duke was too young and short to be her husband (Taylor 40)[46]. However, in spite of this reply, in July 1578, two of the Duke's retainers

[45] As Taylor puts it, at the time, "Elizabeth had overtures from foreign suitors – Philip of Spain, The Earl of Arran in Scotland, Eric XIV of Sweden and Archduke Charles of Austria" (Taylor 37).

[46] Françoise was 21 years younger than Elizabeth; he was far from being handsome, a short and thin man who had suffered from tuberculosis (Taylor 38).

– De Quincé and De Bacqueville – were sent to London in order to consult Elizabeth: after making them wait till September, the Queen finally answered the she wished the Duke to go and see her in England (Taylor 41).

In January 1579, D'Alençon finally decided to send Jean Simier[47] to England, in order to court Elizabeth on his behalf; at the beginning, the Queen treated Simier with a cold indifference but, in the end, she finally melted (Taylor 41). In the meantime, the Duke was also sending his love letters from France, with the result that Elizabeth finally "fell under the spell of both" men (Taylor 43). The turning point occurred when a scandal rose, because there were rumours about Elizabeth's love affair with Simier; Alençon thus decided to go to England in disguise to see the Queen and continue his own courting (Taylor 43). This time, Queen Elizabeth appeared to be infatuated with the Duke and, moreover, she finally found a man who was royal enough to marry her (Taylor 44). Elizabeth was clearly about to marry him: in 1581, she entertained him with lavish festivities and she even kissed him in the presence of the French ambassador, Walsingham and the Earl of Leicester (Taylor 45). Later, during the same year, she claimed that she would have married him, and she even gave him a ring as a demonstration of her faith (Taylor 46). However, at court, there were those who started protesting against this union: one of them was the Earl of Leicester, Elizabeth's former suitor, who had never abandoned the hopes of marrying her (Taylor 44). In 1579, Leicester even tried to derail the marriage plans between Elizabeth and the Duke. Yet, on the other hand, this was also an act of revenge after Simier told Elizabeth about Leicester's secret marriage with Lettice Knollyes; rumours said that Leicester even attempted both to

[47] Jean Simier was the Duke of Alençon's Master of the Wardrobe and one of his best friends (Taylor 41).

poison and to shoot Simier (Taylor 45). Among the other influential people who were against Elizabeth's marriage with the Duke, there were the Puritan John Stubbes and Sir Philip Sidney. The first wrote a treatise – *The Discovery of a Gaping Gull whereinto England is like to be swallowed by another French marriage, if the Lord forbid not the banns by letting her Majestie see the sin and punishment thereof* – in which he warned the Queen against getting married with Alençon, while Sidney wrote her a letter. The Queen got so angry that she decided to punish both of them: Stubbes had his right hand cut off for writing his treatise, while Sidney was banished from the court. Nevertheless, on the other hand, she could not pretend not to hear, and this is probably the reason why she finally decided to break off the negotiations for the marriage (Taylor 46).

At this point, Elizabeth was a woman in her fifties, so it was clear that she would not have got married and given an heir to England (Taylor 48). Furthermore, on a political level, she did not need a husband: she had now reached a point where pretenders and courtship were no longer necessary, because she was certain that her land was secure and safe (Orr 25). Therefore, it is in this context that a particular celebration of the Queen started; this praise also included the famous cult of the Virgin Queen, whose primary object was the idealization of the Queen's chastity, purity and constancy through symbols and allegories (Doran 274). Even though associations between the figure of Elizabeth and virginity had been present from the very beginning of her reign (King 30)[48], the very first time the Virgin Queen was celebrated was during the

[48] As John N. King puts it, "works of literature and art [had always] [. . .] flattered her as a new Judith or Deborah, Eliza Triumphans, Astrea, Cynthia, or even Venus-Virgo" (King 30).

Norwich entertainments of 1578, where it emerged as a result of the opposition to Elizabeth’s union with the Duke of Alençon (Doran 272).

Even though a detailed analysis of the cult of the Virgin Queen will not be included in this dissertation, it is significant to name the ideas on which it is based. The representation of Elizabeth as a Virgin Queen essentially implies the celebration of her refusal of a union with a suitor in order to enter into a marriage with England; yet, it might be argued that, during the last decades of her reign, this image of the Queen was in contrast with the climate of anxieties about the succession to the throne. However, it is definitely this opposition which attributes a particular meaning to the cult of the Virgin Queen: broadly speaking, it is in a moment of crisis that a positive representation of a sovereign is needed to gain consensus among the subjects. In this case, as King puts it, “[Elizabeth] was able to convert her unprecedented weakness as a celibate queen into a powerful propagandistic claim that she sacrificed personal interests in the name of public service” (King 30), so that her chastity became a symbol of power, rather than a deficiency.

To conclude, this is also the reason why Elizabethan ‘antimasque-like’ aspects concerning topical allusions are to be found in the last two decades of Elizabeth’s reign: they stem from the contrast between the cult which celebrated the Queen and the hints at the anxieties regarding the succession to the throne of England.

2.2. Why not before the 1580s? The example of *Gorboduc*

The analysis of the socio-political situation has shown that it is very unlikely to find ‘antimasque-like’ elements in courtly spectacles performed before the 1580s because, at the time, there was no celebration of the Queen in contrast with the anxieties of the age. An excellent

example which supports this view is the already mentioned *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex* by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton.

As already pointed out, the tragedy was performed as part of the entertainment during the Christmas festivities of 1562, and it aimed at showing that succession in England would have become a real problem in the event Queen Elizabeth I did not get married and beget a legitimate heir. The issue of succession is intrinsic in the plot of *Gorboduc*, which is clearly described before the play begins:

> Gorboduc, king of Brittaine, diuided his realme in his lifetime to his sonnes, Ferrex and Porrex; the sonnes fell to discention; the younger killed the elder; the mother, that more dearely loued the elder, for reuenge killed the younger; the people, moued with the crueltie of the fact, rose in rebellion and slew both father and mother; the nobilitie assembled and mostly terribly destroyed the rebels; and afterwards, for want of issue of the prince, whereby the succession of the crowne became vncertaine, they fell to ciuill warre, in which both they and many of their issues were slaine, and the land for a long time almost desolate and miserably wasted (*Gorboduc* 214[49]).

As these lines demonstrate, the question of the importance of a legitimate heir for a country is a key element in this tragedy. Just as troubles arose in Gorboduc's Britain – when he did not give clear indications about the person who was to take the crown after him –,

[49] In this case, the number 214 refers to the page number, because, in the edition I have used, there was no indication of the line numbers. As far as the other quotations from *Gorboduc* are concerned, the numbers after the title always refer to the line numbers.

Elizabeth's choice of not getting married and begetting an heir would cause trouble after her death (Doran 261). The concept is clearly illustrated in V. ii. 246-250, which also recall the words of a parliamentary petition dated January 1563, when the Queen was explicitly asked to get married and have the "most undowted and best heires of your crowne"[50] (qtd. in Doran 261):

> When, loe vnto the prince
> Whom death or sodeine happe of life bereaues,
> No certaine heire remaines, such certaine heir
> As not all-onely is the rightfull heire,
> But to the realme is so made knowen to be.

As will be seen in the following session of this chapter, this kind of topical allusions in *Gorboduc* would characterize the presence of early 'antimasque-like' elements in the Elizabethan age. However, the tragedy of *Gorboduc* cannot be considered as a play containing 'antimasque-like' aspects, because it just hints at the historical and socio-political situation of the time, without presenting a dichotomy between the celebration of the sovereign and his policy, and the expression of the anxieties that have their roots in this same policy.

To conclude, this is definitely the reason why the dialectic that would characterize early 'antimasque-like' aspects – which recalls the future 'antimasque dialectic'– is found in courtly spectacles written and performed from the 1580s onwards: as already stressed, these latter are decades that saw the rising of many different tensions, basically

[50] Thomas Norton, one of the authors of *Gorboduc*, is believed to have participated in the writing of the petition (Doran 261).

involving the problem of succession. On the one hand, anxieties stemmed from the first decades of Elizabeth's reign, which both still felt the climate of Henry VIII's decisions, and were characterized by several attempts to make the Queen choose a husband. On the other hand, anxieties were heightened by the political situation of the 1590s, which saw several contenders aspiring at the throne of England. At the same time, albeit this climate of tensions, the late Elizabethan period is also characterized by an enormous celebration of the Queen, of her decisions and of her policy, through which she managed to rule her country in an effective way.

Therefore, in the 1580s and the 1590s, the dichotomy which would have characterized the future antimasque has its origins in these two contrary tendencies. In terms of structure, the only difference between these early 'antimasque-like' aspects and the Jonsonian antimasque is that, whilst Elizabethan courtly spectacles still hide the dialectic inside the text, the future antimasque will be a formal boundary inserted within the work, which will clearly present the forms of opposition to the main masque. In other words, whilst Elizabethan 'antimasque-like' aspects consist of hidden references to the tensions of the age, the Jonsonian antimasque explicitly displays the forces that will be finally defeated by the main masque.

3. Elizabethan courtly spectacles and the antimasque

This last session of Part 2 will analyse four court entertainments written and performed during the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign: *The Lady of May* (1578) by Philip Sidney; *Sappho and Phao* (1584) and *Endymion* (1588) by John Lyly; and, finally, *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592) by Thomas Nashe. They are highly significant for the topic of this dissertation because they all contain earlier 'antimasque-like' forms: if, on the one hand, they praise the figure of Elizabeth I – sometimes referring to the cult of the Virgin Queen –, on the other, they contain some topical allusions connected to the Elizabethans' anxieties about succession. They can thus be related to the forms of antimasque already analysed in Part 1, which were also concerned with topical allusions.

3.1. *The Lady of May* (1578)

The Lady of May is an entertainment written by Philip Sidney, presented before the Queen at Leicester's house in Wanstead in May 1578[51]. The title is a modern invention, which does not appear the in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions (S. K. Orgel 198). Although the entertainment was commissioned for the Queen by the Earl of Leicester, Doran believes that its relevance to the current socio-political situation still remains uncertain: some have seen the performance of *The*

[51] This spectacle is generally associated to the future English court masque; both Doran and S. K. Orgel refer to *The Lady of May* as a masque.

Lady of May as the final attempt of Leicester's courtship, whilst some others believe that this spectacle urged the Queen to adopt "a more interventionist foreign policy on the Continent" (Doran 269).

The plot is quite simple: everything starts when a woman approaches Elizabeth while she is walking in the garden of Wanstead House. She starts telling the story of her daughter, the Lady of May – or May Lady –, who has to choose between two suitors – Espilus and Therion –, and then asks the Queen to judge which of the two men should marry her daughter. When she finally leaves, other characters appear in front of Elizabeth: six foresters, two shepherds, the Lady of May herself and Rombus, a schoolmaster. In the end, the two suitors enter and begin their singing competition, until Queen Elizabeth finally chooses Espilus.

According to the first allegorical interpretation of the spectacle – which is the significant one for the aim of this thesis[52] –, the character who represents the Earl of Leicester is "the virile forester Therion" (Doran 269). Firstly, this type of figure recalls the wild man of Kenilworth entertainments of 1575. Then, the name of the character (Therion) derives from the Greek work meaning 'wild beast'; this is significant because, as Berry puts it, "Leicester heraldic badge was of the bear and the ragged staff" (Berry 102). A further reference to Therion representing the Earl of Leicester is when his rival Espilus warns the Lady against taking a husband with no wealth (S. K. Orgel 201), which is a clear allusion to Leicester's state in comparison to the Queen. On the

[52] The second allegorical interpretation of *The Lady of May* has nothing to do with the problem of succession. "The figure of Espilus and Therion stand for different approaches to politics": whilst the first of these characters represents a peaceful foreign policy, the latter stand for an active military approach. In addition, Rombus's action in the epilogue is interpreted in another way: in this case, the beads stand for the triumph of Catholicism in England (Doran 270).

other hand, Espilus, “the poetic shepherd who was content to make no sexual demands on his beloved” (Doran 269), has been generally associated to another of Elizabeth’s suitors, who, considering the situation of the time, might have been the Duke of Alençon.

A key aspect of *The Lady of May* is the particular role played by the Queen in the spectacle. On a superficial level, “Sidney used the monarch in a functional way in the action of his drama” (S. K. Orgel 198)[53]: Elizabeth is a physical presence in the entertainment, a supreme judge, whose role is to choose the right suitor for the Lady of May. In the text, there are plenty of references to this physical presence of the Queen, both in descriptions and stage directions, and in the characters’ speeches – which primarily intend to celebrate “her Majestie”:

> she was brought to the presence of her Majestie, to whom upon her knees she offred a supplication, and used this speech.
>
> *The Suiter*
>
> Most fairie Lady, for as for other your titles of state statelier persons shall give you, and thus much mine owne eies are witnesses of, take here the complaint of my poore wretch, as deeplie plunged in miserie, as I wish to you the highest point of happinesse.
>
> [. . .]
>
> SUPPLICATION.
>
> *Most gracious Soveraigne,*
>
> *To one whose state is raised over all,*

[53] This device of having the monarch at the centre of the spectacle – and even participating in the spectacle – is typical of the masque, since 1513 (S. K. Orgel 198).

Whose face doth oft the bravest sort enchaunt,
Whose mind is such, as wisest minds appall,
who in one selfe these diverse gifts can plante;
How dare I wretch seeke there my woes to rest,
Where eares be burnt, eyes dazled, harts opprest?

Your state is great, your greatness is our shield,
Your face hurts oft, but still it doth delight,
Your mind is wise, your wisedome makes you mild,
Such planted gifts enrich even beggers sight:
So dare I wretch, my bashfull feare subdue,
And feede mine eares, mine eyes, my hart in you.

[. . .]

But the Queen coming to the place where she was seene of them [. . .] till old father Lalus [. . .] said these few words.

LALUS THE OLD SHEPHEARD. May it please your benignity to give a little superfluous intelligence to that [. . .].

[. . .]

Espilus kneeling to the Queene.

Judge you to whom all beauties force is lent. (*The Lady of May* 329-334[54]).

On the other hand, on a deeper level, the physical presence of the Queen is not the only way in which she participates in the spectacle. As a matter of fact, allegorically speaking, Elizabeth is at the centre of the

[54] In all the quotations taken from *The Lady of May*, the numbers indicate the page numbers, because the edition I have used do not include the line numbers.

spectacle also because the character of the Lady of May, in her position of choosing a suitor, subtly displays the Queen's current situation. This association is stressed by the Lady of May herself, when she warns Elizabeth about the fact that "in judging [her], [she judges] more than [her]" (Doran 269), thus pushing the Queen into choosing a suitor.

As already mentioned, at the end of the entertainment, Elizabeth finally chooses Espilus as the best suitor of the Lady of May; however, it is important to point out that, allegorically speaking, her choice does not mean that she finally chooses a suitor for herself, but this is rather the umpteenth rejection of Leicester as a husband. In the epilogue of *The Lady of May*, the Earl shows to the Queen that he accepts her decision. The allegorical passage which alludes to this is the one in which Rombus gives Elizabeth some beads, which recall a rosary she had taken from Leicester. In handing this to her, he implies that Leicester's worship and courtship of Elizabeth is over (Doran 269-270).

Therefore, in conclusion, *The Lady of May* can be considered as the first court entertainment containing Elizabethan 'antimasque-like' aspects; as a matter of fact, the allegory it presents creates a dichotomy which is similar to the one of the future antimasque. If, one the one hand, "the Queen is [. . .] exalted beyond the reach of ordinary people" (S. K. Orgel 199), on the other, the allegorical level of the spectacle clearly puts a stress on the current anxieties about the Queen's marriage. Furthermore, *The Lady of May*'s significant role as an embryonic stage of Elizabethan 'antimasque-like' aspects is even clearer in comparison to *Gorboduc*: whilst this latter is a kind of exaltation of the idea of the Queen's marriage – in the hope that she will get married in the near future –, *The Lady of May*'s allusions about the choice of a suitor are the expression of some of tensions which started arising in England: since, at the time, the Queen had already rejected several suitors, hopes about her marriage and the birth of an heir began vanishing.

3.2. *Sappho and Phao* (1584)

Sappho and Phao is a play written by John Lyly, first performed at Court in front of Queen Elizabeth I in 1584[55]. It tells the story of Venus who, on her journey towards Syracuse to lessen the pride of Queen Sappho, gives Phao – a young ferryman – a breathtaking beauty. When Queen Sappho sees him for the first time, she suddenly falls in love; but, although Phao returns her love, he knows his social position is too low to have a relation with her. Meanwhile, due to Cupid's mistake with his arrow, Venus falls in love with Phao as well. She thus goes to Vulcan, her husband, and asks him six arrows to break this spell. Then, she asks her son Cupid to help her but, after breaking the spell which made Sappho fall in love with Phao at the beginning of the story, he betrays his mother in order to fulfil the will of the Queen: instead of making Phao love Venus, he makes him repel her. The play thus ends with Cupid taking Sappho as his new mother and with Phao leaving Syracuse. Lyly took the plot his work from Ovid's classical legend – which focuses on the passion between Sappho and Phao – and combined it with a fable written by Aelian, which tells the story of Venus endowing Phao with stunning beauty "on the occasion he is ferrying her across a strait at Mytilene in Lesbos" (Warwick Bond, Introduction to *Sapho and Phao* 2: 364).

Like *Endymion* – which will be analysed in the following part – *Sappho and Phao* has been defined as an allegory of love concerned with the historical situation (Huppé 93). As a matter of fact, the play is

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[55] The exact date of the first performance of the play still remains a matter of debate (Hunter and Bevington, Introduction to *Sappho and Phao* 150).

generally believed to be an allegory of some facts which have occurred in the previous years, regarding the much debated relation between Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Alençon (Hunter and Bevington, Introduction to *Sappho and Phao* 151; 165). To start with, it is clear that Queen Sappho is the character who represents Queen Elizabeth. Firstly, Lyly changes the legend and makes Sappho a queen (Hunter and Bevington, Introduction to *Sappho and Phao* 156); secondly, the name of this character must have been reminiscent of the original character of Sappho, who was a poetess: the allusion is to Elizabeth I because, like her father, she loved arts, literature and poetry (Hunter and Bevington, Introduction to *Sappho and Phao* 153).

Sappho’s particular relation with Phao makes this latter represent the Duke of Alençon. There are several elements in the text that confirm this: first of all, II. iv. 6-7 might be taken as a reference to the physical aspect of the Duke, whose

> greatness of [. . .] mind is far above the beauty of [his] face.[56]

Then, there are some specific episodes that are further references to the relation between the Queen and the Duke, such as those recalling Elizabeth’s behaviour towards him:

> But were you as wise as you would be thought fair, or as fair as you think yourself wise, you would be as ready to please men as you are coy to prank yourself, and as

[56] As a matter of fact, the Duke was said to be a thin and short man, who had also suffered from tuberculosis (Taylor 38).

> careful to be accounted amorous as you are willing to be thought discrete (I. iv. 19-23);

the passage which refers to the exchange of letters between them:

> Write, and persist in writing; they read more than is written to them, and write less than they think (II. iv. 96-97);

and the lines which might allude to the episode involving Simier and the Earl of Leicester, when the former told the Queen about the latter's secret marriage with Lettice Knollyes:

> not the excellency of Sappho the occasion, but the iniquity of flatterers, who always whisper in princes' ears suspicion and sourness (I. ii. 49-51).

Finally, a clear reference to the affair is the end of the story, when Phao leaves Syracuse, which has been interpreted as the Duke's departure from England in 1582 (Hunter and Bevington, Introduction to *Sappho and Phao* 151).

Broadly speaking, apart from the allegorical characters of Sappho and Phao, there is no need to identify a correspondence between the other characters of the play and historical figures of the time. However, according to an interpretation given by Mr. Fleay, Pandion – the university student who has just arrived at Court – can be identified with the author of the play, John Lyly; Sibylla – an aged soothsayer – might represent Catherine de' Medici; and, finally, Mileta – one of the ladies at Sappho's court – might be one of the ladies at the court of Elizabeth (Warwick Bond, Introdution to *Sapho and Phao* 2: 367).

To fully comprehend the 'antimasque-like' aspects contained in *Sappho and Phao*, it is worth beginning by saying that, on a first glance, the hints at the classical myth and the already discussed allegorical representation mainly serve to flatter the Queen. To start with, in order to achieve his goal – and in order to link the figure of Sappho with Elizabeth –, the author turns the poetess of the myth into a queen, who is much celebrated during the whole entertainment. The most significant examples are I. ii. 7-11:

> Sappho, fair by nature, by birth royal, learned by education, by government politic, rich by peace, insomuch as it is hard to judge weather she be more beautiful or wise, virtuous or fortunate;

II. ii. 6-8:

> PHAO. [TO CRITICUS] I never saw one more brave. Be all ladies of such majestie?
> CRITICUS. No, this is he that all wonder at and worship. ;

and, finally, II. iv. 22-43:

> O Sappho, fair Sappho! [. . .] But ah, thy Beauty, Sappho, thy beauty! Beginnest thou to blab? Ay, blab it, Phao, as long as thou blabbest her beauty. Bees that die with honey are buried with harmony. Swans that end their lives with songs are covered when they are dead with flowers, and that they till their latter gasp commend beauty shall be ever honoured with benefits [. . .] Oh Sappho, sweet Sappho, Sappho!

According to the allegorical interpretation of the characters in the play, it is clear that Lyly's dramatic compliment to Sappho is intended to be a compliment to Queen Elizabeth (Hunter and Bevington, Introduction to *Sappho and Phao* 164). In addition, *Sappho and Phao* presents a hidden celebration of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen. Even though it can be argued that the play does not contain a specific praise of her chastity, the celebration of the Virgin Queen is implicitly present in the text: first of all, it is clear from the plot that Sappho is a maid; then, since Sappho finally becomes a sort of 'new' queen of love by adopting Cupid as her child, she rejects a human lover in order to choose a divine love.

With this in mind, the 'antimasque-like' aspect contained in *Sappho and Phao* is easy to determine. To start with, as far as this is concerned, an important point is the issue of ageing, which will be well developed in *Endymion*. To fully comprehend this as an element of opposition to the exaltation of the Queen, it must be remembered that the play was performed in 1584; at the time, Elizabeth was in her fifties and, after the rejection of the Duke of Alençon – and the latter's consequent departure from England in 1582 –, it was clear that she would not have chosen a suitor and given birth to a legitimate heir for her country. In addition, the question of ageing is relevant to the issue of marriage and succession because, according to the Medieval and Renaissance vision of life, to grow old meant to become truly capable of love (Knapp 363): in this sense, the discussions about ageing appear to be a further allusion to the fact that the Queen should have chosen a husband. Therefore, ageing can be taken as an 'antimasque-like' aspect because it is a way to express the anxieties of the age, which appear to be in contrast with the celebration of the Queen. In the play, the passage which clearly refers to ageing is the story Sibylla tells to Phao:

When I was young as you now are [. . .] I was beautiful; for Phoebus in his godhead sought to get my maidenhood. But I, fond wench, receiving a benefit from above, began to wax squeamish beneath, not unlike to asolis, which being made green by heavenly drops shrinketh into the ground when there fall showers, or the Syrian mud, which being made white chalk by the sun never ceaseth rolling till it lie in the shadow. He to sweet prayers added great promises; I, desirous to make trial of his power or willing to prolong mine own life, caught up my handful of sand, consenting to his suit if I might live as many years as there were grains. Phoebus [. . .] granted my petition. And then [. . .] I recalled my promise.
[. . .]
Having received long life by Phoebus and rare beauty by nature, I thought all the year would have been May, that fresh colours would always continue, and time and fortune could not wear out what gods and nature had wrought up – not once imagining that white and red should return to black and yellow; that the juniper, the longer it grew, the crookeder it waxed; or that in a face without blemish there should come wrinkles without number. [. . .] there was none that heard of my fault but shunned my favour, insomuch as I stooped for age before I tasted youth – sure to be long lived, uncertain to be beloved. Gentlemen that used to sigh from their hearts for my sweet love began to point with their fingers at my withered face, and laughed to see the eyes out of which fire seemed to sparkle to succoured, being old, with spectacles. This causeth me to withdraw myself to a solitary cave, where I must lead six

> hundred years in no less pensiveness of crabbled age than grief of remembered youth. Only this comfort: that, being ceased to be fair, I study to be wise, wishing to be thought a grave matron since I cannot return to be a young maid (II. i. 43-89).

A key aspect of these lines is that ageing is not directly associated to the character representing Queen Elizabeth, but it is rather linked to another figure – Sibylla, who begs for a long life but forgets to ask for an enduring beauty.

A further ‘antimasque-like’ aspect in *Sappho and Phao* is still related to the character of Sybilla, in the passage when she gives some advice to Phao:

> Lose not the pleasant time of your youth, than the which there is nothing swifter, nothing sweeter. Beauty is a slippery good which decreaseth whilst it is increasing, resembling the medlar, which in the moment of his full ripeness is known to be in a rottenness. [. . .] Be not coy when you are courted. [. . .] Be affable and courteous in youth, that you may be honoured in age (II. i. 110-122).

These lines, which are also connected to the already discussed question of ageing, basically express the idea of being courted, choosing a suitor and getting married while a person is still young. Once again, the reference is to the situation of the Queen, but, in the play, these lines are addressed to a character other than Sappho, so that the reference remains quite implicit and indirect.

To conclude, *Sappho and Phao* presents some clear ‘antimasque-like’ aspects because of the clear dichotomy inserted within the text,

which recalls the dialectic created by the future antimasque. On the one hand, the element that resembles the main masque is the celebration of Queen Elizabeth, who, through the association with one of the characters, is presented as a virtuous Queen endowed with great beauty. In addition, her representation is related to the cult of the Virgin Queen: Sappho is a ‘new’ type of Virgin Queen, who rejects a human love in order to devote herself to a divine love. However, on the other hand, along with this praise, the ‘antimasque-like’ elements stress the current anxieties about succession, and they do so in an indirect but critical way.

3.3. *Endymion* (1588)

Endymion (or *Endimion*) is another comedy written by John Lyly. It was performed by the Children of Paul’s for the first time in 1588, probably on Candlemas. The play tells the story of Endymion, who confesses his friend Eumenides that he has fallen in love with Cynthia, the goddess of the moon, who, however, seems cool to Endymion’s passion. Tellus – Endymion’s former lover –, offended by Endymion’s affection towards Cynthia, asks the sorcerer Dipsas to make Endymion fall in a long and deep sleep, from which he would not wake up unless he received a kiss from his beloved Cynthia. Meanwhile, Corsites falls in love with Tellus and Eumenides falls in love with Semele, who, however, rejects him. Finally, after a long sleep, Cynthia kisses Endymion, and he wakes up; Tellus is forgiven and the play ends with the three marriages of Eumenides, Tellus and Dipsas. Even though she kissed him, Endymion cannot marry Cynthia: she is a goddess and, therefore, they are not on the same level.

It is now generally agreed that, in spite of being an allegory of love representing the opposition between chastity and passion – which is

typical of Lyly's comedies –, *Endymion* is a clear allegory of life at court, regarding the socio-political situation of the time. The first and most important theory about this allegorical view of the play was advanced nearly sixty years ago by the Rev. N. J. Halpin, who claimed that the play's allegory "[was centred] round the passion entertained by Queen Elizabeth for Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester" (Warwick Bond "On the Allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 81)[57]. In Halpin's opinion, there is a "general correspondence [. . .] between the main facts of the drama and the main facts of the history" (Warwick Bond "On the Allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 86). His view can be summarize with the following table (Warwick Bond "On the Allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 86-87):

Highly probable	
Endymion	Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester
Cynthia	Queen Elizabeth I
Tellus	Lay Douglas Howard, Countess of Sheffield
Floscula	Lady Lettice Knollys, Countess of Essex

[57] Halpin's view is not the only theory about the allegory in *Endymion*. For instance, Mr. Baker and Bond offer different interpretations as far as some characters are concerned (Warwick Bond "On the Allegory in *Endimion*"). The most important one is given by Baker, who argues that Halpin "[confused] Leicester's two marriages, that with Lady Sheffield in 1573, and that with Lettice Countess of Essex in 1578" (Warwick Bond "On the Allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 87). As a matter of fact, he argues that Tellus is not the representation of Lady Sheffield, but rather of Lady Lettice (Warwick Bond "On the Allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 87). His view is supported by several critics, such as Tucker Brooke, who even suggests that Tellus is an anagram of the name of Leicester's wife – Lettice/Lletus (Tucker Brooke 15).

Corsites	Sir Edward Stafford
Eumenides	The Earl of Sussex
Probable	
Semele	Lady Frances Sidney
Dipsas	The Countess of Shewsbury
Geron	The Earl of Shewsbury
Not improbable	
Sir Tophas	Stephen Gosson, author of *The School of Abuse*

As already pointed out, the correspondence between the characters of the play and real persons is related to the historical facts of the period: at the time, the situation had come to a critical point because Simier had revealed to the Queen that the Earl of Leicester had secretly married Lady Lettice Knollys. As already shown by the historical outline, Simier's revelation offended Elizabeth and Leicester even ran the risk of being imprisoned in the Tower. Leicester's marriage also had an effect on Lady Sheffield – his previous wife –, who started "to claim her own marital rights on him" (Warwick Bond "On the allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 87). Therefore, this is the reason why Halpin identifies Tellus with Lady Sheffield: jealous of Endymion's love for another woman, she decides to seek revenge. A further allusion to the incidents of the period is the fact that Elizabeth finally released Leicester thanks to the Earl of Sussex, who, in *Endymion*, is the character of Eumenides. Finally, Corsites is believed to represent the figure of Sir Edward Stafford, "on whom Leicester finally persuaded Lady Sheffield to bestow her hand" (Warwick Bond "On the allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 87). Halpin excludes from the allegory the minor characters because, according to him, they

do not affect the plot and, therefore, they are not highly significant for his theory (Warwick Bond "On the allegory in *Endimion*" 3: 86).

The key point of the allegory – which hides in itself some 'antimasque-like' aspects – is the affair between Queen Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester, represented by the characters of Cynthia and Endymion. To start with, as already stressed, Cynthia is the character who represents Queen Elizabeth I. The association is pretty clear, firstly because, according to the cult of the Virgin Queen, the celebration of Elizabeth has often used the figure of the goddess of the moon to praise her and her chastity. The text of *Endymion* contains several examples of this. The first is II. i. 79-89, when Tellus and Endymion are talking about Cynthia:

> TELLUS. Why, she is but a woman.
> END. No more was *Venus*.
> TELLUS. Shee is but a virgin.
> END. No more was *Vesta*.
> TELLUS. Shee shall haue an ende.
> END. So shall the world.
> TELLUS. Is not her beautie subiect to time?
> END. No more than time is to standing still.
> TELLUS. Wilt thou make her immortall?
> END. No, but incomparable.

Further examples are II. iii. 47-49:

> BAGOA. [. . .] how it grieueth me that that fairie face must be turned to a withered skinne, & taste the paines of death before it feele the reward of loue;

and VI. i. 65-68:

> COR. [. . .] but I pray thee goe at your best leisure, for Cynthia beginneth to rise, and if she discouer our loue we both perish, for nothing pleaseth her but the faireness of virginity.

Like in *Sappho and Phao*, all these passages, through the celebration of Cynthia’s chastity, aim at praising Elizabeth, by making reference to her decision of not getting married.

A further celebration of Queen Elizabeth is related to another tendency that was developing in sixteenth-century England: Petrarchanism[58]. One of the features of this tradition, which is linked to chivalry and courtly love, is the fact that the lover is inferior to the woman he desires; this latter, put in a superior position, is thus able to lead the whole game (Huppé 103; S. Bond 190). An example is the second act of the play, where Endymion is presented as a melancholy lover; before falling asleep, he speaks these words:

> END. No rest *Endimion*? still vncertaine how to settle thy steps by day, or thy thoughts by night? thy treuth is measured by thy fortune, and thou art iudged vnfaithfull because thou art vnhappy. I will see if I can beguile my selfe with sleep, & if no slumber will take

[58] The Petrarchan tradition and symbolism has been a big trend in England; Petrarch was first brought to England in the 1520s, with the translations of his sonnets into English by Thomas Wyatt. Petrarchanism (or Petrarchism) has been extremely important for the representation of Queen Elizabeth I: a good example of this is portraiture, where the representations of Elizabeth’s imperial aspirations have been combined with Petrarchan emblems to celebrate her chastity.

> hold in my eyes, yet will I imbrace the golden thoughts in my head, and wish to melt my musing: that as Ebone, which no fire can scorch, is yet cosumed with sweet sauours; so my heart which cannot bee bent by the hardnes of fortune, may be brused by amorous desires. On yonder banke neuer grewe any thing but Lunary, and hereafter I will neuer haue any bed but that [. . .] thy Maiestie *Cynthia* al the world knoweth and wondereth at, but not one in the world that can imitate it, or comprehend it. No more *Endimion*! sleepe or dye; nay die, for to sleepe, it is impossible; and yet I knowe not how it commeth to passé, I feele such a heauines both in mine eyes and hart, y^{t} I am sodainly benummed, yea in euery ioint: it may be wearinesse, for when did I rest? it may bee deeple melancholy, for when did I not sigh? *Cynthia*! I so; I say *Cynthia*! (*Endymion* II. iii. 1-23)

However, albeit this clear celebration of Queen Elizabeth, *Endymion* also displays an opposite tendency, which is the 'antimasque-like' aspect this dissertation aims to explore. First of all, as already pointed out, the association between Cynthia and Elizabeth aims at praising the latter's chastity; yet, in the play, the celebration of Cynthia's chastity always goes together with the celebration of two other characteristics of hers: immutability and immortality. An example is the already quoted II. i. 79-89, which recalls I. i. 51-57:

> What is hee that hauing a mistris of ripe yeeres, & infinite virtues, great honors, and vnspeakable beauty, but woulde wish that shee might grow tender againe? getting youth by

> yeeres, and neuer decaying beauty by time, whose fayre face, neyther the numbring of yeeres breede altering of colours. Such is my sweete *Cynthia*, whom time cannot touch (I. i. 51-57).

If the Queen is associated to the character of Cynthia, the allusion to immutability and immortality illustrated by these passages does not seem to be a celebrative one. As a matter of fact, it must be remembered that, at the time *Endymion* was performed, Elizabeth was 55 and she had already rejected all her potential husbands; in other words, it was now clear that the Queen would not have got married and begot a legitimate heir to her country. Therefore, it is clear that Cynthia's characteristic of being untouched by time is opposed to Elizabeth's ageing (S. Bond 196).

Furthermore, immutability is connected to immortality, a further opposition to the concept of ageing, which endangers youth and beauty and leads to death (Tucker Brooke 14). Like in *Sappho and Phao*, the question of ageing seems to be a significant one, and, therefore, is recalled in several passages in the text. Significant examples are II. iii. 29-36:

> Thou that laist downe with golden rocks, shalt not awakw vntill they bee turned to siluer haires; and that chin, on which scarcely appeareth soft downe, shalbe filled with brissels as hard as broome: thou shalt sleep out thy youth and flowring time, and become dry hay before thou knowest thy selfe greene grasse, & ready by age to step into the graue whê thou wakest, that was youthfull in the Courte when thou laidst thee downe to sleepe;

III. iv. 131-132:

> Desire dyes in the same moment that Beautie sickens, and Beautie fadeth in the same instant that it flourisheth;

and, finally, V. iii. 36-38:

> *Endimion*, the flower of my Courte, and the hope of succeeding time, hast thou bewitched by Arte, before thou wouldest suffer him to flourish by nature.

As shown by these passages, ageing is generally associated to the character of Endymion. His long sleep is emblematic of the passing of time and of the change of people's aspect: when people loose their youth, they also loose their beauty and, as a consequence, they are not desirable anymore. The play thus seem to allude to the situation the Queen is living, but it does so in a subtle way: in brief, Lyly could not have associated the Queen to a character that becomes old and looses its beauty, otherwise he could have run the risk of being censored and getting into troubles (Huppé 106). This is the reason why, in the play, all the characters are affected by ageing except Cynthia, who is associated to the Queen (S. Bond 197)[59].

Finally, *Endymion* presents a further 'antimasque-like' aspect, which is connected to what Knapp presents as a hierarchy of love. Its top clearly sees the love of Endymion for Cynthia; then, there are the affairs

[59] The fact that Cynthia – and, thus, Elizabeth – remains young might be linked to a particular tendency which would have developed in the following years. During the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign, no portrait seemed to show her real age, because she was depicted as ever young. This type of representation of the Queen was based on a face pattern 'invented' by Nicholas Hilliard in the 1590s, which was then called Mask of Youth (Strong *Gloriana* 147).

between Eumenides and Semele, and between Corsites and Tellus. The bottom of the hierarchy is finally represented by the relationship between Sir Tophas and Dipsas. Since this grossest stage of the love affair – which S. Bond defines as a parody of courtly love (S. Bond 94) – and the other two relations finally end with a marriage, they might be taken as ‘antimasque-like’ elements, because they create a dialectic with the fact that, in the end, Cynthia and Endymion do not get married. In other words, the fact that the character who represents Elizabeth does not get married can be considered as a further expression of the current anxieties about succession.

As a conclusion, in *Endymion*, like in *Sappho and Phao*, the ‘antimasque-like’ aspects stem from the ‘antimasque-like’ dialectic the text displays: whilst one of the purposes of the work is the flattery of Queen Elizabeth I – like many other court entertainments of the time – (Tucker Brooke 13), the topical allusions contained in the text function as an opposition to this, their aim being to express the anxieties of the age.

3.4. *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (1592[60])

The last work this dissertation analyses in order to discuss the issue of ‘antimasque-like’ aspects in the Elizabethan period is *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*. Written by Thomas Nashe, it was probably performed in front of the Queen at Croydon palace, on the occasion of

[60] As Best suggests, there are internal evidence about the date of *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*. Firstly, there are references to the Queen’s progress; secondly, it is believed that the year when the Thames was empty of water was 1592; and, thirdly, the reference to “the horses lately sworne to be stolne” might allude to an incident occurred during the same year (Best 10).

the royal visit to the Archbishop of Whitgift's palace (Cook 19)[61]. The plot is fairly simple, and basically tells the story of Summer, the King of the World, who, having become old, has to make a decision about his successor to the throne. "One by one, Solstitium, Sol, Orion, Harvest and Bacchus are summoned to the presence [of the king]. Each enters with music and pageantry and is then submitted to an examination in which he is usually found wanting" (Hibbard 92). After the King had appointed Autumn as his heir, which resulted in a dispute between Autumn and Winter, "Summer makes his will [. . .] and bids farewell to the world" (Hibbard 92).

Apparently, unlike the other entertainments, *Summer's Last Will* has never gained attention as an allegorical play referring to the historical situation of the time[62]; however, both external and internal evidence seem to suggest this possible interpretation of the play. On the one hand, as far as the first type of evidence is concerned, a proof is that one of the influences on the writings of Thomas Nashe comes from John Lyly: as Best puts it, "[this latter] and his works are mentioned several times in the pamphlets of Thomas Nashe" (Best 1), and it is important to remember that Lyly, as has been seen, wrote some allegorical plays. Secondly, Thomas Nashe is also believed to have written something which referred to the current socio-political situation: *The Isle of Dogs*. This has been defined as a satirical comedy, apparently written in collaboration with Ben Jonson, and first performed in 1597 (Donaldson 1: 101). No copy of the text has survived today because it had been

[61] In Hibbard's view, the phrases "My Lord" and "your Grace" are addressed to the Archbishop (Hibbard 88).

[62] The only historical reference regards the character of Will Summers, which has generally been associated to Henry VIII's jester, who bore the same name (Hibbard 92). Elizabeth Cook also hints at the allegorical figure of Summer, but she does not discuss this aspect in details (Cook 19).

censored with the accusation of "containing very seditious and slanderous [matters]" (Donaldson 1: 103). Therefore, it is now generally agreed that the reaction to *The Isle of Dogs* was so strong probably because it contained something offensive which directly referred to Queen Elizabeth[63] and to the historical situation of the time (Donaldson 1: 106-107).

On the other hand, internal proofs supporting the allegorical interpretation of the comedy involves the role played by Vertumnus, who recalls the figure of Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (Mickel 22). In addition, further internal evidence which suggests the presence of topical allusions are the several direct and clear references to palaces and places: as a matter of fact, the texts mentions London, the river Thames, the Croydon palace, Whitgift's place and their neighbourhoods (Best 9).

In case an allegorical interpretation of *Summer's Last Will* is taken into account, it is clear that the character who represents Queen Elizabeth I is the King Summer. Apart from the fact that this character plays the role of the sovereign, Summer can also be thought of as a season, and therefore, it recalls the reign of Elizabeth, or, in other words, the so-called Golden Age: this definition derives from the fact that, during that period, England saw a renaissance[64], characterized by an increase in its

[63] It has been suggested that the connection with the Queen was evident from the title itself: as a matter of fact, "the Isle of Dogs [was] a narrow strip of land on the north bank of the Thames downriver from the city, which now forms part of the London Docklands area in the Borough of Tower Hamlets". Its name derived from the fact that, at the beginning, Henry VIII used to keep his hounds there; it then became a refuge for criminals and debtors. The offensive allusion might have stemmed from the fact that the old palace had been both Henry VIII's and Elizabeth I's birthplace (Donaldson 1: 105).

[64] It is not by chance that this is the period called 'the Renaissance', which, in England, occurred later than in the other European countries (such as Italy).

power as a nation and by an incredible flourishing of arts. A reference to this particular period is also contained in the text itself:

> What king or queen advanced scholars most,
> And in their times what writers flourished (*Summer's Last Will* 124[65]).

Finally, a further association between the character of Summer and the figure of Queen Elizabeth is the fact that, at the time, Elizabeth herself was often associated to "the emerging energies of Summer, and with natural grow leading to harvest" (Berry 102).

Therefore, if a parallelism between Summer and Queen Elizabeth is established, a big celebration of Summer – and, as a consequence, of Elizabeth – is expected. Yet, *Summer's Last Will* does not present the same scheme as *Sappho and Phao* and *Endymion*. Here, there is no praise of Summer – even though he is the king, and, thus, he is respected –, and no celebration of the chastity of this sovereign. The praise of the Queen is rather a direct praise, which explicitly mentions Elizabeth:

> Unto Eliza, that most sacred dame,
> Whom none but saints and angels ought to name,
> All my fair days remaining I bequeathe
> To wait upon her till she be returned.
> Autumn I charge thee, when that I am dead,
> To be prest and serviceable at her beck;
> Present her with thy goodliest ripen'd fruits;

[65] In all the quotations taken from *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, the numbers indicate the page numbers, because the edition I have used do not include the line numbers.

> Unclothe no arbours where she ever sat;
> Touch not a tree thou think'st she may pass by.
> And, Winter, why thy writhen frosty face,
> Smoothe up thy visage when thou look'st on her:
> Thou never look'st on such bright majesty.
> A charmed circle draw about her court
> Wherein warm days may dance, and no cold come.
> On seas let winds make war, not wex her rest;
> Quiet enclose her bed, thought fly thy her breast.
> Ah, Gracious Queen, though summer pine away[66],
> Yet let thy flourishing stand at stay.
> First droop this universal's aged frame
> Ere any malady thy strength should tame.
> Heaven rise up pillars to uphold thy hand,
> Peace may have still his temple in thy land (*Summer's Last Will* 136-137).

This final celebration of Queen Elizabeth recalls the one at the very beginning of play, when Summer explains he has to choose a successor to the throne:

> This month have I lain languishing a-bed,
> Looking each hour to yield my life and throne;
> And died I had indeed unto the earth
> But that Eliza, England's beauteous Queen –
> On whom all seasons prosperously attend –,
> Forbade the execution of my fate

[66] It is worth noticing that this line can also be proof that Summer can be taken as a season, namely as the Golden Age.

> Until her joyful progress was expired.
> For her doth Summer live and linger here,
> And wisheth long to leave to her content (*Summer's Last Will* 94)

In this sense, *Summer's Last Will* resembles the structure of *The Lady of May*: in both cases, on the one hand, there is a character who represents the figure of Queen Elizabeth whilst, on the other hand, the Queen is directly praised as the person who stands above the world of the play.

A further similarity between the two entertainments regards their 'antimasque-like' elements. Like in *The Lady of May*, the 'antimasque-like' aspects in *Summer's Last Will* are strictly linked to the character who, in the spectacle, mirrors the figure of the sovereign. However, in this last play, the 'antimasque-like' aspect appears to be stronger than in the spectacle of 1578. As a matter of fact, in *Summer's Last Will*, the issue of succession is a theme which runs throughout the whole plot; at the very beginning, Summer clearly introduces the key point of the story, declaring:

> I must depart: my deathday is set down;
> To these two must I leave my wheaten crown (*Summer's Last Will* 94).

Further passages in the text express the tensions which were spreading at the time: as already seen in the historical outline, England feared succession because, since Elizabeth had not begot a legitimate heir to her country, several pretenders started putting forward their claims to the throne of England. These anxieties about the pretenders to the crown

are clearly expressed in the scene which occurrs soon after Summer has declared he would leave the throne to Autumn:

> SUMMER. Enough of this: let me go make my will.
> Ah, it is made, although I hold my peace –
> These two will share betwixt them what I have.
> The surest way to get my will performed
> Is to make my executor my heir;
> [. . .]
> Autumn, be thou successor of my seat:
> Hold, take my crown . . .
> [. . .]
> WINTER. Then, duty laid aside, you do me wrong.
> I am more worthy of it far than he (*Summer’s Last Will* 121);

> SUMMER. For thou gainst Autumn such exceptions tak’st
> I grant his overseer thou shalt be –
> His treasurer, protector, and his staff.
> He shalt do nothing without thy consent;
> Provide thou for his weal and his content.
> [. . .]
> AUTUMN. On such conditions no crown will I take.
> I challenge Winter for my enemy (*Summer’s Last Will* 127).

As can be noticed, these lines clearly resemble *Gorboduc*: the fear was that, with the lack of a legitimate heir, the reign would be thrown

into chaos after the death of the sovereign. However, there is a clear difference between *Summer's Last Will* and *Gorboduc*: whilst the socio-political background of the latter was the England of the 1560s – when hopes about the Queen's marriage and the birth of an heir were still alive –, the background of Nashe's play is the England of the 1590s, when the issue of succession would become a concrete and serious problem, unless the Queen did not choose an "adopted heir" (*Summer's Last Will* 136). Summer himself summarizes this situation, when he declares that "this world uncertain is" (*Summer's Last Will* 129).

Along with succession, a further 'antimasque-like' aspect contained in *Summer's Last Will* is the question of ageing, already discussed in the previous plays. However, unlike in Lyly's plays, in Nashe's work, this issue is not discussed with reference to a character other than the one representing Elizabeth, but it is analysed in relation to Summer itself. At the very beginning, Summer, describing its current situation, states:

> Summer I was – I am not as I was.
> Harvest and age have whiten'd my green head (*Summer's Last Will* 94).

The same concept is highlighted in the repeated contrast between "youth" and "white hair" (*Summer's Last Will* 99), until the consequence of ageing is pointed out, when Summer declares that "death waiteth at the door for [Solstitium] and [himself]" (*Summer's Last Will* 101). Then, Nashe's comedy also recalls the already seen connection between beauty and ageing:

> Beauty is but a flower,
> Which wrinkles will devour.

> Brightness falls from the air;
> Queens have died young and fair[67] (*Summer’s Last Will* 130).

Finally, the question of ageing is presented in a symbolic way through the character of Summer: summer, as a season, has always been associated to fertility and, therefore, it has an erotic connotation (Berry 102). With this in mind, if Summer represents Elizabeth, and if his life is almost over, it might be an allegory of the fact that, since Elizabeth is now old, she is no more fertile and, therefore, it is no more possible for her to give birth to an heir.

To conclude, like the other entertainments, *Summer’s last Will* presents the typical ‘antimasque-like’ dialectic[68], which has its origins in the contrast between the celebration of the Queen and the expression of the anxieties regarding her current situation. However, this analysis of the play has pointed out that its ‘antimasque-like’ aspects, and the consequent dichotomy, differ from the dialectic in Lyly’s plays. As a matter of fact, although the ‘antimasque-like’ elements stem from the same issues – in brief, ageing and succession –, the way the dichotomy is displayed is different: in *Summer’s Last Will*, the Queen is not celebrated through a particular character of the play, but the praise is directly addressed to her. Then, unlike Lyly’s plays, the ‘antimasque-like’ elements are directly associated to the character who represents the sovereign. There can be several possible explanations for this, among

[67] This last line might be considered as a further reference to the Mask of Youth: Queen Elizabeth would not die young, but, until her death, she was represented as young and beautiful.

[68] Cook associates *Summer’s Last Will* to a masque (Cook 21), and she suggests that it is not properly a masque containing a main masque and an antimasque, but that it already combines the idealizing and anti-idealizing elements of both (Cook 23).

which the most convincing one is based on the date of the performance: *Summer's Last Will* was performed in the 1590s, when England was very close to facing the problem of the succession to the throne.

4. Some conclusions

To conclude, this second part of this thesis has shown that ‘antimasque-like’ aspects – which will evolve in the form of the antimasque in the Stuart period – are already present in the Elizabethan age. Even though there are some Elizabethan courtly spectacles that take the name of *masks*, or *masques*, it has been demonstrated that it is not within these spectacles that early ‘antimasque-like’ elements appear. As a matter of fact, they are to be found in the court entertainments of the late Elizabethan period which – like *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemist at Court* – present some topical allusions to the current situation. As explained by the long historical outline, in the case of Elizabethan ‘antimasque-like’ aspects, the topical allusions make reference to the issue of succession: since the Queen had rejected all her possible husbands, England was living in a climate of tensions and anxieties, because the country did not have a legitimate heir.

Before drawing some conclusions, a question comes to mind: if these spectacles point out the problem of succession, why were not they censored because they displayed an opposite tendency to the cult of the Queen? In order to answer to this question, it is worth distinguishing between Lyly’s plays, on the one hand, and *The Lady of May* and *Summer’s Last Will*, on the other.

To start with, Lyly’s plays are different from Sidney’s and Nashe’s works because, to avoid censorship, they contain a sentence or a passage which sets the reality of the entertainment in a world other than Elizabethan England. In *Sappho and Phao*, the Prologue at Court explicitly asks the Queen “to imagine [herself] to be in a deep dream”: this statement suggests the fact that what occurs in the play is like a

dream and, therefore, is not real and not connected to this world – or, in other words, to sixteenth-century England. Similarly, in *Endymion*, Lyly inserts a passage which allegorically declares that his comedy does not talk about the affairs related to the Queen:

> END. You know, *Tellus*, that of the Gods we are forbidden to dispute because theyr deities come not within the compasse of our reasons; and of *Cynthia* we are allowed not to talke but to wonder because her vertues are not within the reach of our capacities (*Endymion* II. i. 75-78).

On the other hand, both *The Lady of May* and *Summer's Last Will* do not clearly state they are not discussing current matters by inserting a particular line in the text, but they use a direct praise of Queen Elizabeth I as a mean to avoid censorship: even though the characters of the May Lady an Summer resemble Elizabeth and allude to the anxieties regarding her current situation, at the end, what prevails is the celebration of the Queen: she is a figure who resides above the world of the spectacle, and, thus, she is not involved in its problematic matters.

A further possible answer to the question of censorship involves the structure of each play, namely the introduction of the 'antimasque-like' aspects. Again, the four works this chapter has analysed can be divided into two different groups, the first consisting in *The Lady of May* and *Summer's Last Will*, and the second including Lyly's plays. As already stressed, in the first two entertainments, there is a direct praise of the Queen, which explicitly mentions her figure. The 'antimasque-like' aspect is thus associated to the characters who, in the world of the play, are representative of the figure of the sovereign: whilst the May Lady presents the Queen's problem of choosing a suitor, the figure of King

Summer displays the anxieties about succession. However, this does not result in something offensive to the monarch because, as already stressed, she is directly celebrated both at the beginning and at the end of the play.

On the other hand, Lyly’s plays adopt a different strategy. As already noted, both *Sappho and Phao* and *Endymion* present a character who is representative of the figure of Elizabeth I; this is the character who is usually praised according to the cult of the Queen, which was extremely popular at the time. The ‘antimasque-like’ elements are thus displayed through other characters of the play, so that the power of the sovereign is not directly undermined.

This distinction between these two groups finally helps to draw a conclusion, which connects these Elizabethan courtly spectacles – and their ‘antimasque-like aspects – to the three masques by Ben Jonson analysed in Part 1. As already discussed, *Hymenaei*, *Love Restored* and *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemist at Court* were representative of a particular line of development in the form of the antimasque: from a structure which contained no antimasque but just its typical dichotomy (*Hymenaei*), there was an evolution to a type of structure in which the antimasque appeared to be even more important than the main masque (*Love Restored*). Finally, albeit some changes, the form seemed to go back to its original structure (*Mercury Vindicated*). The same pattern emerges with the four entertainments analysed in Part 2. As already stressed, *The Lady of May* can be considered as a spectacle which contains just an embryonic form of dialectic: if, on the one hand, it is true that it contains an element of critique to the current situation, on the other, it is also true that, at the time, the problems about succession are not yet perceived as particularly serious – and, therefore, tensions and anxieties have not yet developed. It is with Lyly’s plays that there is a full development of the dialectic which will be typical of the future antimasque: as already seen, both of his plays display a celebrated

character, who represents the Queen of England, but, on the other hand, they express the anxieties of the age through other characters. Finally, *Summer's Last Will*, like *Mercury Vindicated*, seems to go back to the original structure, not in the sense that its critique returns to a more implicit form, but in the sense that, although it directly and overtly celebrates the figure of the Queen, it 'criticizes' the current situation by associating its negative aspects to the character who, in the play, represents Elizabeth I.

Therefore, because of the dialectic they create – and the evolution of the structure through which this dialectic is presented –, the 'antimasque-like' aspects contained in these spectacles can be considered as embryonic forms of the future Ben Jonson's antimansque, namely of the one concerned with topical allusions, which will take a proper form during the following years.

PART 3

THE INFLUENCE ON THE PUBLIC THEATRE

As suggested by the title, the third and last part of this dissertation aims to demonstrate that all the elements which have constituted the 'antimasque-like' aspects in the courtly spectacles analysed in Part 2 are present not only in entertainments at court, but they have also influenced the public theatre. It is clear that there are several ways in which this happens and, therefore, there are plenty of examples as far as this is concerned. However, I have chosen to consider just one play: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. As will be seen in the following analysis, it is a good example because it contains all the key features which were responsible of that particular 'antimasque-like' dialectic in *The Lady of May*, *Sappho and Phao*, *Endymion* and *Summer's Last Will and Testament*.

1. A general introduction

To start with, it is important to point out that a direct communication between the court theatre and the public theatre has always existed (Astington 109), and this is definitely true for William Shakespeare. Masques and other courtly spectacles have always had a great influence on him and his works (Yates); generally speaking, in Ewbank's view, masques were inserted in the middle of a play as forms of entertainment and, in several case, they functioned as means of moral allegory (Ewbank 407-408). In other words, they were like *plays-within-plays*, which resembled the main features of the English court masque[69] (Ewbank 409).

It is now generally agreed that the most significant example of a masque inserted in a Shakespearean play is *The Tempest*. Yet, I will not consider this work, because it belongs to the Stuart period, and this thesis focuses on the Elizabethan age. There are many examples of Elizabethan plays by Shakespeare containing some forms of *plays-within-plays*, or some disguised dances, which can be related to the masque: among them, apart from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – which contains a masque represented by the *play-within-the-play* that tells the story of Pyramus and Thisbe[70] –, a masque is definitely inserted in *Love's Labours Lost*,

[69] As Ewbank puts it, "by essential features, I mean a ritual in which masked dancers, with or without a presenter, arrive to perform a dance, sometimes to sing, and nearly always to 'take out' members of the stage audience". However, it is important to stress that these characteristics are less elaborate than in the court masque which will develop in the Stuart period (Ewbank 409).

[70] III. i. mentions the fact that the "tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* V. i. 56-57) will be performed indoor. This indicates that the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe is a private

when a mysterious dance in disguise is put on stage (Yates 4). A similar dance in disguise is found in *Romeo and Juliet*, and, in addition, a masque is present in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, namely in V. v., when it "resolves the secondary plot concerning Anne Page and her several suitors" (Long 39).

However, the case of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is extremely significant not only because of its 'internal masque', but also because it contains one of the 'antimasque-like' elements presented in Part 2: the theme of the choice of a suitor, already discussed in *The Lady of May*. In short, this last aspect is a key point because it demonstrates that the 'antimasque-like' aspects found in *The Lady of May*, *Sappho and Phao*, *Endymion* and *Summer's Last Will* are very likely to be encountered in almost every single Shakespearean and Elizabethan play.

Therefore: what is the reason why I have chosen to analyse *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a unique example of the influence of 'antimasque-like' aspects in public theatre? First of all, my choice stems from the fact that its style can be considered as a kind of bridge connecting Lyly's court comedies of the previous decade[71] and Ben Jonson's masques (Olson 96). Furthermore, as already mentioned, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* clearly exemplifies the fact that courtly spectacles have influenced the public stage in terms of the so called 'antimasque-like' dichotomy: if, one the one hand, it contains a celebration of Queen Elizabeth, on the other, it also includes all the key

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kind of spectacle, which thus resembles the court masque: "BOT. Why, then you may live a casement of the great / chamber window, where we play, open; and the / moon may shine in at the casement" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* III. i. 52-54).

[71] As Brooks points out, John Lyly is know to have deeply influenced the works of William Shakespeare, among which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Brooks, Introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1viii).

points which had characterized the 'antimasque-like' aspects of the court entertainments analysed in Part 2.

1.1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: a curious analysis

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play by Shakespeare, performed in 1596; in Brooks's view, the likelier occasion for the performance of this play was "the marriage [between] Elizabeth Carey and Thomas, son of Henry, Lord Berkeley, on 19 February 1596", which took place in Blackfriars, the mansion of the bride's father, Sir George Carey (Brooks, Introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1vi).

The central theme of the play is love, as demonstrated by the four subplots that constitute the whole story, which basically distinguish a rational type of love – represented by marriage – from an irrational love, governed by passions (Olson 95). The first is the story of Hippolyta and Theseus; the second involves the characters of Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius; the third is characterized by the play-within-the-play, telling the love story of Pyramus and Thisbe; and, finally, the fourth subplot is the one which involves Oberon and Titania.

Furthermore, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has always been considered an important play because of its historical references: much has been debated about its topical allusions, and it has now been demonstrated that it is an allegory of the relationship between Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Alençon (Taylor 131-135). As Taylor suggests, the character who represents Elizabeth is Titania, the Queen of the Fairies – as much as Elizabeth is the Queen of England (Taylor 132). This allusion is very clear in Oberon's speech in II. i. 155-164:

OBERON. That very time I saw (but thou couldst not)

> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal, throned by the west,
> And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon;
> And the imperial votress passed on,
> In maiden meditation, fancy-free.

A convincing explanation of this association between Elizabeth and Titania is given by Edith Rickert; in her view,

> Titania is certainly Oberon's wife [. . .]; but she is also head of an "order" to which the "votaress" belongs. What it was clear from the name Titania, which every educated Elizabethan knew was an epithet used by Ovid of Diana [*Metamorphoses*, iii, 173]. Moreover, the order itself had been referred to earlier in the play [. . .] [I, 1, 89-90]. So Oberon's wife [. . .] is here patroness of the order to which Elizabeth herself belonged ("imperial votaress" [. . .]; "fair vestal" [. . .]) (qtd. in Taylor 132-133).

Rickert stresses that this correspondence between Elizabeth and Titania derives from the fact that, at the time, according to the apparatus which celebrated her, the Queen was often called with the different names of Diana (Taylor 133): this aspect cannot be but reminiscent of the typical praise of the Queen found in the courtly spectacles presented in Part 2.

If Elizabeth had been associated to Titania, Shakespeare's audience would have clearly recognized that the character who represents the Duke of Alençon is Bottom the Weaver (Taylor 135). According to the plot, Titania falls in love with him because of Oberon, who, with the help of Puck, puts the juice of the so-called "love-in-idleness" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* II. i. 168) on Titania's eyelids while she is asleep, so that when she wakes up, she falls in love with the "next living creature that it sees" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* II. i. 172).

To start with, a striking evidence of the association between Bottom and the Duke is IV. i. 7-26:

> BOT. Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Mounsieur Cobweb?
>
> COB. Ready.
>
> BOT. Mounsieur Cobweb, good mounsieur, get you your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and good mounsieur, bring me the honey-bag. Do not free yourself too much in the action, mounsieur; and good mounsieur, have a care the honey-bag break not; I would be loath to have you overflowen with a honey-bag, signior. Where's Mounsieur Mustardseed?
>
> MUS. Ready.
>
> BOT. Give me your neaf, Mounsieur Mustardseed. Pray you, leave your courtesy, good mounsieur.
>
> MUS. What's your will?
>
> BOT. Nothing, good mounsieur, but to help Cavalery Cobweb to scratch. I must to the barber's, mounsieur, for methinks I am marvellous hairy about the face; and

> I am such a tender ass, if my hair do but tickle me, I must scratch.

In this passage, the reference to Alençon is the French word "mounsieur", which has been intentionally misspelled. As a matter of fact, other Shakespearean works demonstrated that Elizabethans kew how to correctly spell the word *monsieur*, in the French manner. People tended to misspell this word when they were particularly referring to the Duke; the Queen herself did so, referring to him as to *mounzeur* (Taylor 137).

Further references to the Duke of Alençon in the play make use of irony (Taylor 143). The first passage which ironically refers to him is I. ii. 79-82:

> QUIN. You can play no part but Pyramus: for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely, gentleman-like man: therefore, you must needs play Pyramus.

In these lines, the reference is ironical for two reasons: firstly, it makes fun of the Duke's physical aspect, and, secondly, it ironically refers to the exaggerate gentle manner of the French (Taylor 143), which is also mocked in the passage when Bottom says he would have played Pyramus like he was never played before (Taylor 141):

> QUIN. You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.
> BOT. what is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?
> QUIN. A lover, that kills himself most gallantly for love.
> BOT. That I will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes: I will

> move storms, I will condole in some measure (I. ii. 18-23).

The second passage that makes use of irony to refer to Alençon is the one in which Bottom offers himself to play the part of Thisbe too:

> BOT. And I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: 'Thisne, Thisne!' – 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!' (I. ii. 47-50).

Firstly, these lines refer to the Duke's 'tender age' in the period during which he was courting the Queen, who was much older than he was: the fact that a man plays a woman's part on stage recalls the Elizabethan usage according to which women were not allowed to act, and, therefore, female characters were usually played by the youngest boys of a company. Furthermore, the passage is an ironical reference to the Duke's physical aspect, whose "slender of body and dainty of hands" contributed to make him a quite effeminate figure (Taylor 144).

To conclude, in the play, there are many other minor references to the fact that Bottom is the character who represents the Duke of Alençon, like I. ii. 83-91 (Taylor 138):

> BOT. [. . .] What beard were I best to play it in?
> QUIN. Why, what you will.
> BOT. I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow.

> QUIN. Some of your French crowns have no hair at all,
> and then you will play bare-faced;

Bottom's ass head (Taylor 151) and, finally, the references to the special treatment – and attention – Elizabeth seems to have given to Alençon before she finally rejected him:

> TITA. Be kind and courteous to this gentleman;
> Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes;
> Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
> With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
> The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
> And for the noght-tapers crop their waxen thights,
> And light them at the fiery glow-worms' eyes,
> To have my love to bed, and to arise;
> And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
> To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
> Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies (III. i. 157-167).

As far as its topical allusion is concerned, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* clearly resembles the courtly spectacles analysed in Part 2, mainly because, through its allegory, the play praises the figure of Queen Elizabeth[72]. However, on the other hand, the *Dream* recalls *The Lady of May*, *Sappho and Phao*, *Endymion* and *Summer's Last Will* also because it includes some features which resemble their 'antimasque-like' aspects.

[72] This would have become even more significant in the event the Queen was present during the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Brooks, Introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1v).

To start with, it is worth considering that, even though, according to Ewbank, "the inserted masque often utilizes the anti-masque/masque contrast" (Ewbank 409), in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, no 'antimasque-like' elements is to be found in the Pyramus and Thisbe *play-within-the-play*. Like the entertainments considered in Part 2, the 'antimasque-like' aspects are just little hints inserted in the play, not explicit references contained within a specific formal boundary.

The first of these elements is the initial allusion to chastity, which is opposed to the idea of marriage. I. i. clearly discusses the idea of getting married, stressing the aspect of the forced marriage (Melchiori 201): the first scene of the play opens with a dialogue about the forthcoming wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, which is a forced one, because Theseus had taken Hippolyta by force. A further episode recalling this idea of the forced marriage occurs soon after, and involves the characters of Hermia, her father Egeus, and her two suitors, Lysander and Demetrius. Whilst Hermia's father wants her to marry Demetrius, she is in love with Lysander and, therefore, refuses to marry the first suitor. Egeus thus goes to Theseus and invokes the laws of Athens, in order to force his daughter to marry Demetrius.

Both episodes recall Queen Elizabeth's condition and the fact that she should have got married – and given a legitimate heir to her country. In the first case, her situation is associated to Hippolyta's, who was an Amazon, before Theseus 'conquered' her. According to the Medieval and Renaissance ideology, these female warriors were considered as 'dangerous women' because, with their position against the traditional order, they were usurping the traditional male role (Olson 102). Albeit with a different shade, the same goes for Queen Elizabeth: rejecting all her suitors, refusing to get married and, thus, eliminating all the possibilities of begetting a legitimate heir to England, she definitely went against the traditional order.

On the other hand, in the second episode Elizabeth found herself in Hermia's shoes. According to the ideas of the time, parents were encouraged not to force unpleasant marriages, but children had to marry only with the approval of their parents (Olson 101). In Elizabeth's case, the role of parents was played by her councillors, who continually insisted on the fact that she should marry – and tried to propose the candidate they liked the most.

Furthermore, the idea that a woman should prefer a married life, rather than "on Diana's altar to protest" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* I. i. 89) is explicitly expressed in I. i. 74-78:

> THE. [. . .] Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
> To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
> But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd
> Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
> Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness.

This passage clearly recalls *Sappho and Phao*, in the already quoted episode in which Sybilla advises Phao to take advantage of his youth, thus implying that a single life is not a good choice:

> Lose not the pleasant time of your youth, then the which there is nothing swifter, nothing sweeter. Beauty is a slippery good which decreaseth whilst it is increasing, resembling the medlar, which in the moment of his full ripeness is known to be in a rottenness. [. . .] Be not coy when you are courted. [. . .] Be affable and courteous in youth, that you may be honoured in age (*Sappho and Phao* II. ii. 110-122).

All these allusions to marriage lead to the discussion of two further 'antimasque-like' aspects, previously analysed in Part 2: the choice of a suitor and the issue of succession. As far as the first of these is concerned, it is presented by two of the subplots in the play: the first involves Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius, whilst the other involves the characters of Titania and Oberon.

As already explained, the first subplot concentrates on the character of Hermia, who has to make a choice: either she marries Demetrius, or she remains faithful to Lysander; in case she opts for the latter, she will be sentenced according the laws of Athens, because her father does not approve her union with Lysander. However, as the story unfolds, Puck's mistake with the magic juice puts Helena in the condition of choosing between Demetrius and Lysander. For the purpose of this analysis, no matter which is the character who has to make the choice: the important aspect is the choice itself, which recalls the topical allusion to Queen Elizabeth I in *The Lady of May*, or, in other words, its 'antimasque-like' aspect. A further association between Sidney's spectacle and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the fact that Lysander and Demetrius recall the characters of Espilus and Therion: whilst Lysander (like Espilus) is the 'poetic lover', Demetrius (like Therion) is a more aggressive character.

On the other hand, in the Oberon-Titania subplot, the 'antimasque-like' aspect is linked to the previously described allegory, according to which Titania represents Elizabeth and Bottom represents the Duke of Alençon. Like Elizabeth – who fell under the spell of the Duke –, at a certain point, due to Oberon's spell, Titania falls in love with Bottom and gives him all her attentions. In the end, when the spell is finally broken, Oberon says:

> Be as thou wast wont to be;

> See as thou wast want to see:
> Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower
> Hath such force and blessed power (IV. i. 70-73).

In these lines, the reference to the Queen of England is pretty clear: Elizabeth finally rejected a union with the Duke and, therefore, she 'returned' a Virgin Queen. In the passage, "Diana's bud" (IV. i. 73) is a clear reference to this aspect, because the phrase stands for chastity[73].

The second 'antimasque-like' aspect that stems from the play's allusions to marriage is the reference to the issue of succession, which has been deeply discussed in Part 2. As far as this issue is concerned, it is worth considering that, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this theme is much more hidden than in Lyly's and Nashe's works. The most plausible explanation for this regards the period in which Shakespeare's play was performed: at the time, Elizabeth was an old queen and anxieties about succession were so acute that, for an author, it was really dangerous to point this issue out[74]. Therefore, the play presents just a little hint at the matter; the most striking example is to be found at the very end of the play, in Oberon's last speech:

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[73] In his edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Harold F. Brooks notes that "Diana's bud" could have been either Artemisia or the Agnus castus, the chaste tree. On the one hand, the first interpretation derives from the name of the herb, which recall another name for Diana; on the other, the second interpretation comes from *The Flower and the Leaf*, printed in Shakespeare's days, which mentions the fact that Diana, the goddess of chastity, usually holds a branch of "that *agnus castus* men call properly".

[74] It might be argued that *A Midsummer night's Dream* was performed only four years after the performance of *Summer's Last Will*, and, therefore, the date of the performance of the play cannot be considered as a convincing explanation. However, it must be remembered that Nashe's comedy, with its allegorical characters, was very subtle in his topical allusions concerning the Queen.

OBE. Now, until the break of the day,
Through this house each fairy stray.
To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessed be;
And the issue there create
Ever shall be fortunate.
[. . .]
And the blots of Nature's hand
Shall not in their issue stand:
Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despised in nativity,
Shall upon their children be.
With this field-dew consecrate,
Every fairy take his gait,
And each several chamber bless
Through this palace with sweet peace;
And the owner of it blest,
Ever shall in safety rest (V. i. 387-406).

In this passage, the issue of succession is highlighted through some words such as "nativity" (V. i. 399) and "children" (V. i. 400), whose meaning is reinforced by the "mark prodigious" (V. i. 398), which indicates a portentous birthmark. Moreover, these last lines of the play also recall a line of its opening scene, pronounced by Hippolyta during her first speech:

HIP. Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And the moon, like to a silver bow

> New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
> Of our solemnities (I. i. 7-11).

The allusion to children and, therefore, to succession is contained in lines 9-10, namely in the phrase “bow [. . .] bent”. In a footnote, Brooks explains that

> a bow bent is ready either to be strung, or to let fly the arrow. In a context like the present, it is an archetype of fruitful union: the woman draws the man but follows him [and] together they project the child.

A final hint at the issue of succession recalls *Summer’s Last Will* and it involves Titania, the character who represents Elizabeth. As Olson suggests, Titania is the queen of summer and, therefore, she is linked to the concept of fertility (Olson 111). Like in Nashe’s comedy, the ‘antimasque-like’ aspect stems from the topical allusion involving Queen Elizabeth: at the time, Elizabeth was old, and it was pretty clear that she would have not begot an heir to England.

To conclude, after this curious analysis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – which highlights the parallelisms between Shakespeare, Sidney, Nashe and Lyly in terms of the ‘antimasque-like’ elements within their works –, the question of censorship comes to mind: at the time, was it not dangerous for Shakespeare to write a play about love and marriage – which, being in contrast to chastity, could lead to think about the problem of succession? The answer to this question is always the same: firstly, as suggested at the beginning of the analysis, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* presents a clear celebration of Elizabeth, according to the convention of the time. Then – and this resembles Lyly’s use of the same device in *Sappho and Phao* – there is something in the text which puts the events

of the play in a world other than reality. This particular reference coincides with Puck's last speech, which constitutes the very last lines of the whole play:

> PUCK [*to the audience*]. If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumber'd here
> While these visions did appear.
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding but a dream,
> Gentles, do not reprehend:
> If you pardon, we will mend (V. i. 409-416).

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate that the Stuart antimasque is not a device that comes out of the blue with Ben Jonson's masques, because some of its roots go back to the Elizabethan age. In this period, however, the 'antimasque' does not acquire a proper form, but is rather an implicit 'contrast', or 'fracture', within the texts: if, on the one hand, Queen Elizabeth I is explicitly celebrated as the sovereign who has been capable of bringing unity and peace to the nation (Bergeron 17), on the other, there are some elements that hint at the crisis which stemmed from the current socio-political situation, namely the problem of succession. This ambivalence about the current situation in England generates that particular dialectic which will be one of the essential features of Ben Jonson's future antimasque.

The 'bridge' that connects the Stuart antimasque to the Elizabethan 'antimasque-like' aspects is *Hymenaei*. As already stressed in Part 1, this masque by Ben Jonson does not contain a proper form of antimasque but, like the Elizabethan court entertainments, it already contains that particular 'antimasque dialectic': if, one the one hand, it celebrates the power of the sovereign, on the other, it expresses the anxieties about his current policy[75].

As a conclusion to the whole thesis, a final point is worth making. As already stated, this dissertation aimed at exploring the 'antimasque-like' aspects in the Elizabethan period, in terms of their topical allusions.

[75] It is clear that, even though *Hymenaei* and the Elizabethan entertainments contain the same kind of fracture, their topical allusion is different because the socio-political situation to which they refer is different.

However, it is well known that the device of the antimasque is not just about topical allusions, but it also takes the form of unruly behaviours; wild dances opposed to the image of kingship; elements recalling that world of mutability Elizabethans so greatly feared; oppositions between good and evil; and, finally, the presence of grotesque figures and characters (Béhar 528).

Therefore, as far as the Elizabethan age is concerned, it might be argued that there are several plays and spectacles at court presenting elements that resemble these last forms of antimasque[76]. However, although it is true that these elements recall some of the forms of antimasque, they cannot be considered as 'antimasque-like' aspects. As a matter of fact, Part 1 has stressed that one of the key features of the antimasque is that it creates a particular dialectic within a spectacle, which, in order to exist, obviously needs a counterpart. Since this counterpart – or, in other words, a force which contrasts the world of chaos, which is generally represented by grotesque figures or comic characters – is not present, the conclusion that can be drawn is that, in the Elizabethan age, some of the origins of the Stuart antimasque can be traced just in case they take the form of topical allusions, which will then fully develop in one of the several forms the antimasque acquire.

[76] This dissertation gives the example of the *Masque of Proteus*: even though it has been suggested that Proteus is an embryonic form of antimasque characters, the entertainment does not give the sense of a dichotomy opposing Proteus to another character.

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